



IOC Policy on the Protection of the Female (Women's) Category in Olympic Sport and Guiding Considerations for International Federations and Sports Governing Bodies

PREAMBLE

Eligibility for the female (women's) category has been a longstanding topic within the Olympic Movement. Most recently, in November 2021, the International Olympic Committee (the “**IOC**”) issued the *IOC Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity and Sex Variations* (the “**Framework**”), which provided guidance for International Federations (“**IFs**”) to develop sport-specific eligibility criteria for the female (women's) category (the “**Female Category**”). The Framework provided for periodic review of that guidance to reflect relevant ethical, human rights, legal, scientific and medical developments, including stakeholder feedback on their application. This *Policy on the Protection of the Female (Women's) Category in Olympic Sport and Guiding Considerations for International Federations and Sports Governing Bodies* (the “**Policy**”) reflects such review and developments.

BACKGROUND TO THE POLICY

From September 2024 to March 2026, the IOC Administration (the “**Administration**”) conducted a broad-based review of the Framework's approach to eligibility for the Female Category at IOC Events (the “**Review**”). The Review included consideration of the IOC's policy goals for the Female Category, consultations with a range of experts in relevant fields and lessons learned, and feedback from Olympic Movement constituents, among whom were IFs whose sports have been on the sports programme of an Olympic Games and athletes from around the world potentially impacted by a revision of the Framework.

As part of the Review, in September 2025 the IOC established a working group specifically to examine scientific, medical and legal developments since 2021 (the “**Working Group**”). The Working Group members came from five continents and included specialists in sports science, endocrinology, transgender medicine, sports medicine, women's health, ethics and law. In addition, as a separate part of the Working Group, IF Chief Medical Officers representing individual and team sports were included.

Following an update to the IOC membership in November 2025 on the status of the Working Group's work to date, the Administration was tasked with drafting a policy on the protection of the Female Category in an Olympic context that would reflect the Working Group's work, the various IOC consultations and consideration of recent developments, including in international human rights law.



REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENTS

Review of and Developments in Science

The Working Group reviewed the state of the science, including developments since 2021, and reached consensus that:

- i. Male sex (as defined in Schedule 1) confers performance advantage in all sports and events that rely on strength, power, and/or endurance;
- ii. To protect fairness in such sports and events, as well as safety particularly in contact sports (e.g. combat, collision, projectile sports), it is necessary and adequate to base eligibility for competition on biological sex; and
- iii. The most accurate and least intrusive way currently available to screen for biological sex is by screening for the SRY Gene, which is a segment of DNA that is almost always on the Y-chromosome, initiates Male sex development in utero, and signals the presence of testes/testicles.

In reaching this consensus, among other information and evidence, the Working Group agreed on the following:

- **Sex and Gender:** Biological sex, which is divided into categories (Male and Female, based on their reproductive biology, including their sex chromosomes, gonads and hormones), is distinct from gender identity, which is a person's sense of themselves as a woman or a man or neither/non-binary.
- **Testosterone Levels:** Healthy adult Males have 15 to 20 times more circulating testosterone than healthy adult Females. Testosterone levels do not overlap between the two groups. The gap in testosterone levels exists in the general and elite athlete populations. Males experience three significant testosterone peaks: in utero, in mini-puberty of infancy and beginning in adolescent puberty through adulthood.
- **Performance Advantage:**
 - Consistent with the functional effects of higher circulating testosterone levels, Males have larger and stronger skeletal muscle and bone, larger and stronger hearts, larger lung size, more red blood cells, and lower body fat than Females trained to the equivalent level. Together these attributes afford Males individual sex-based performance advantages in sports and events that rely on strength, power and/or endurance.
 - Female athletes experience performance disadvantages relative to Males, associated with Female anatomy and physiology, that contribute to overall Male performance advantage in sports and events that rely on strength, power and/or endurance. These disadvantages may include, for example, the menstrual cycle, gestation and anatomical differences such as periodic ligament laxity (looseness), wider hips and more breast tissue.



- XY Transgender athletes and athletes with certain XY differences/disorders in sex development (DSD) (as defined in Schedule 1) have anatomical and physiological advantages in line with being Male even as their legal sex, the manner in which they were raised, and/or their gender identity may vary. XY transgender athletes and athletes with XY-DSD typically have testes/testicles and testosterone levels in the Male range. The clear majority are androgen-sensitive, meaning that their bodies are receptive to and make use of that testosterone during growth and development and throughout their athletic career.
 - Androgen-sensitive XY-DSD and XY Transgender athletes retain Male performance advantage due in part to training effects and fixed traits. There is no current evidence that testosterone suppression or gender-affirming hormone treatment eliminates this advantage.
 - XY-DSD athletes with Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (CAIS) (defined in Schedule 1) and other rare XY DSDs that do not benefit from the anabolic and/or performance-enhancing effects of testosterone should, on that basis, be included in the Female Category.
- **Magnitude of Advantage:** At the elite level, the magnitude of the Male performance advantage is different depending on the sport or event:
 - There is a 10-12 per cent Male performance advantage in most running and swimming events.
 - There is a 20+ per cent Male performance advantage in most throwing and jumping events.
 - The Male performance advantage can be greater than 100 per cent in events that involve explosive power, e.g. in collision, lifting and punching sports.
- **Variation in Advantage:** The extent of the performance advantage (and its implications) varies across sports and events and from occasion to occasion, depending on the athletes involved.
- **Safety risks:** In contact sports (e.g., individual and team combat, collision, projectile sports), the strength and power differential between Males and Females increases safety risks to Female athletes.
- **SRY Gene Screening:**
 - Screening for the SRY Gene via saliva, cheek swab or blood sample is minimally intrusive.
 - The presence of the SRY Gene is fixed and thus provides better evidence of biological sex than measuring testosterone levels, which are variable and can be changed.
 - SRY Gene screening is almost always sufficient to determine sex for eligibility purposes.
 - All Biological Female athletes screened will be negative and eligible, and virtually all athletes who screen positive will have testes/testicles that naturally produce testosterone at adult Male levels.
 - Because a positive SRY Gene screen does not establish a specific DSD diagnosis, further evaluation should be made available to the athlete to determine whether they have CAIS or another rare XY DSD that precludes testosterone's anabolic and/or performance-enhancing effects.



Review of IF Chief Medical Officers' Concerns and Developments in IF Policies

The Working Group and the IOC reviewed IF positions on the Framework. These included:

- i. The fact that, for fairness and safety and to meet additional institutional priorities, many IF policies continue to be based on the scientific understanding that Male athletes have a performance advantage in all sports and events that rely on strength, power and/or endurance.
- ii. Concerns in some sports about being able to preserve the unique nature of the Female game without relevant eligibility rules.
- iii. A preference for policy alignment led by the IOC, to achieve Olympic Movement integrity (consistency among sports that have a Female Category).

Review of and Developments in Law

The Working Group and the IOC examined the state of the law and took special note of the following:

- i. Based on IF experience, genetic screening for sex does not create significant problems in practice. It is legal in most countries, and athletes from the countries where it is not permitted can lawfully be tested elsewhere.
- ii. Human rights experts, including UN Special Rapporteurs, disagree on the legitimacy of sex-based eligibility rules in competitive sports. Some hold that they violate the rights of XY individuals who identify as women. Others also consider the rights of XX individuals.
- iii. No supranational court has held that defining eligibility for the Female Category by reference to biological sex would constitute an unjustifiable infringement of individual and/or human rights.

Review of and Developments in Olympic Movement Constituent Perspectives

As part of the Review, the IOC considered competition results and Olympic Movement constituent perspectives, and found that eligibility rules based on legal sex or gender identity do not align with the IOC's Policy Goals for the Female Category, as stated below. Specifically, there is broad consensus among Female athletes, and other Olympic Movement constituents, in favour of eligibility rules for the Female Category based on biological sex.

The IOC consulted athletes in three ways: through an online Athlete Survey that received over 1,100 responses, through in-depth individual interviews with impacted athletes from around the world, and via a presentation to and discussion with members of the IOC Athletes' Commission.

Although nuances exist across sex and gender, region and athlete status (active/retired), the athlete consultation revealed a strong consensus that fairness and safety in the Female Category requires clear, science-based eligibility rules, and that protecting the Female Category is a common priority.



POLICY GOALS

The IOC's role as leader of the Olympic Movement is to ensure the regular celebration of the Olympic Games. The Olympic Games host elite athletes who are among the best in the world according to their age, sex and skill. The IOC also recognises the importance of widespread participation in grassroots and recreational sports programmes, to which this Policy does not apply, and that different sport contexts are motivated by different goals. As such, eligibility rules should be carefully considered and tailored accordingly.

At the Olympic Games, in light of the scientific consensus that Males have a performance advantage in all sports and events that rely on strength, power and/or endurance irrespective of subsequent testosterone suppression or gender-affirming hormone treatment, the Olympic Movement has a compelling interest in having a sex-based Female Category, because this is necessary to ensure fairness, safety and integrity in elite competition. It is also necessary for the reliable attainment of the IOC's modern goals for the Female Category, shared with other Olympic Movement constituents:

- i. Equality - equal opportunities for Female athletes in finals, on podiums and in championships;
- ii. Enhancing Olympic Value - featuring both women's and men's finals in every sport; and
- iii. Visibility and Inspiration - celebrating Female athletes on the Olympic podium to inspire and represent women and girls worldwide.

It is universally accepted that providing for a Female Category is necessary to allow equal access to elite sport to both Males and Females. Including athletes who are XY transgender and/or androgen-sensitive XY-DSD athletes (whatever their legal sex or gender identity) in the Female Category in sports and events that rely on strength, power and/or endurance runs fundamentally counter to ensuring fairness, safety and integrity in elite competition and to the reliable attainment of the IOC's modern goals. Furthermore, the need for consistency and fairness across sports precludes eligibility criteria that require case-by-case consideration of differences in Male performance advantage.

To reliably uphold fairness, safety and integrity in elite sport and to meet these shared goals, and in light of relevant developments since 2021, the IOC is issuing this new *Policy on the Protection of the Female (Women's) Category in Olympic Sport and Guiding Considerations for International Federations and Sports Governing Bodies*.

THE POLICY

For the purpose of this Policy, the IOC has adopted the consensus definitions of the Working Group, which are set out in **Schedule 1**.

For all disciplines on the Sports Programme of an IOC Event, including individual and team sports, eligibility for any Female Category is limited to Biological Females.



Eligibility for the Female Category is to be determined in the first instance by SRY Gene screening to detect the absence or presence of the SRY Gene. On the basis of the scientific evidence, the IOC considers that the SRY Gene is fixed throughout life and represents highly accurate evidence that an athlete has experienced or will experience Male sex development. Furthermore, the IOC considers that SRY Gene screening via saliva, cheek swab or blood sample is unintrusive compared to other possible methods.

Athletes who screen negative for the SRY gene permanently satisfy this Policy's eligibility criteria for competition in the Female Category. Unless there is reason to believe a negative reading is in error, this will be a once-in-a-lifetime test.

With the exception of athletes with a diagnosis of CAIS or other rare DSDs that do not benefit from the anabolic and/or performance-enhancing effects of testosterone, no athlete with an SRY-positive screen is eligible for competition in the Female Category.

Athletes with an SRY-positive screen, including XY transgender and androgen-sensitive XY-DSD athletes, continue to be included in all other classifications for which they qualify, for example, they are eligible for (i) any Male Category, including in a designated Male slot within any mixed category, and (ii) any open category or in sports and events that do not classify athletes by Sex.

The IOC recognises that XY athletes who identify as women and who want the opportunity to compete at IOC Events according to their legal sex or gender identity may disagree with this Policy. However, after a thorough scientific review and consultations with constituents of the Olympic Movement, the IOC determined that a Sex-based eligibility rule is necessary and adequate to the attainment of the IOC's goals for competition at IOC Events.

SCOPE OF APPLICATION

This Policy applies to all IOC Events and enters into force at the date of its adoption by the IOC Executive Board. It is not retroactive and shall be applicable for the first time at the LA28 Olympic Games.

This Policy shall be adopted by IFs and other sports governing bodies, such as National Olympic Committees ("**NOCs**"), National Federations and Continental Associations ("**SGBs**"), when exercising their responsibility in implementing eligibility rules in relation to IOC Events.

The IOC retains the authority to establish that the IFs and SGBs have satisfied their obligations under the Policy, including but not limited to ensuring that all athletes participating in the Female Category at IOC Events are either SRY negative or qualify for an exception.

IFs and SGBs may request an exemption from this Policy if the IF/SGB can establish that their sport or discipline does not rely on strength, power and/or endurance, that their women's category exists for reasons unrelated to Sex differences in anatomy and physiology, and that ignoring Sex would not result in diminished opportunities for Female athletes.

This Policy replaces all previous IOC statements on this matter, including the Framework.

GUIDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR IFS/SGBS

In consultation with IFs that have already implemented such criteria and screening, the IOC will make available and periodically update best practice standards, but, consistent with the Olympic Charter, the IFs and SGBs must define, as applicable, the details of their respective programmes themselves. For the development of those details, the IOC provides the following guiding considerations and strongly recommends as follows:

SRY Gene Screening for Eligibility Purposes

- Individual athletes should be provided with age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and accessible information necessary to make an informed decision about whether to undergo SRY Gene screening.
- Beyond relevant medical indications, information to make an informed decision about whether to undergo SRY Gene screening should include the facts that:
 - Athletes who wish to compete in the Female Category at IOC Events must demonstrate their eligibility in advance by means of SRY Gene screening results.
 - Athletes can expect to be eligible to compete in the Female Category if the results are negative.
 - Athletes will be ineligible for competition in the Female Category if the SRY results are positive, pending any further evaluation the athlete may choose to undergo regarding CAIS or other rare DSDs that do not benefit from the anabolic and/or performance-enhancing effects of testosterone. The opportunity for further evaluation should include counselling and an informed consent process at each step.
 - An athlete who declines SRY Gene screening or who has a positive result (and does not fit within the exception) can participate in all other sporting opportunities, including any other elite category competitions for which they meet the qualifying standards.

Athlete-Centred Approach

IFs and SGBs should undertake affirmative measures to educate their constituents and to mitigate foreseeable harm. Among other actions, IFs and SGBs should:

- Ensure that the athlete's human dignity, physical and psychological well-being, health and safety, and right to privacy and confidentiality are respected.
- Educate athletes, coaches, managers and other members of the athletes' entourage, with particular emphasis on the position that competitive integrity in women's sport requires eligibility criteria that ensure a level playing field consistent with Female sex development and Female anatomy and physiology. Such education should also emphasise the responsibility of coaches, managers and entourage members to support the athlete's autonomy, privacy and wellbeing, and to refrain from sharing information beyond authorised channels.
- Ensure full transparency of the process (what the screening is, how it works, what it measures, how to interpret results, who is involved, how information is shared, and the implications of the various outcomes).



- Establish internal mechanisms that offer athletes and other impacted stakeholders accessible, legitimate, safe and predictable avenues to obtain information on the process and rules, including clear pathways to raise concerns, seek safeguarding support or report inappropriate conduct or breaches of confidentiality without fear of retaliation.
- Encourage screening for biological sex early in the athletic career (for example, at the same time as entry of the athlete in international competition under the jurisdiction of the relevant IF, and in any case before embarking on the qualification pathway to participate in an IOC Event) so that athletes and their entourage can make informed decisions about their investment in competition in the Female Category.
- Carefully consider the special situation of minors and ensure that appropriate safeguards and protections are in place, including the involvement of appropriately qualified professionals, age appropriate explanations, parental or guardian consent, where required by law, and the prioritisation of the best interests of the minor at all stages.
- Wherever possible, combine SRY Gene screening with regular health evaluations.
- Reassure athletes that:
 - All athletes have a place in sport according to their age, sex and skill.
 - Biological sex-based eligibility criteria (including SRY Gene screening) are not a judgment on, and do not question, the athlete's legal sex or gender identity.
 - SRY Gene screening is a highly accurate, non-invasive screen for biological sex.
 - Unless there is reason to believe that the results are in error, SRY Gene screening will be required only once in an athlete's lifetime.
- Ensure that physical examinations are not required for initial sport eligibility determinations. In the very rare case of an athlete screening positive for SRY (<1%), such athlete may choose to either: (i) seek (with informed consent and support) further evaluation to obtain a clinical diagnosis that would clarify their eligibility and any health implications, or (ii) decline further evaluation which would make them ineligible. SRY-negative athletes (>99%) will have lifelong eligibility without further evaluation or examination.
- Make available or facilitate access to mental health and safeguarding resources for athletes undergoing SRY Gene screening, particularly for those with a positive result.

Right to Privacy and Confidentiality

IFs and SGBs must:

- Respect the right to privacy and confidentiality of athletes.
- Comply with all applicable data protection and privacy laws to which they are subject when processing any personal data (including sensitive personal data such as health or medical information). This includes, without limitation, applying relevant data protection principles such as:
 - Transparency towards athletes about how their personal data will be processed;
 - In relation to the implementation of this Policy, using athletes' personal data only to the extent strictly necessary.



- Comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including, those governing genetic screening for sex, and confidentiality obligations (for example when handling information protected by medical confidentiality), and obtain any required consents or authorisations.

Implementation Workshops and Knowledge Sharing

IFs/SGBs are responsible for implementing this Policy within their respective organisations and areas of competence. The IOC will organise a series of workshops, seminars and/or webinars with IFs and NOCs, including athlete representation, to provide guidance and facilitate the exchange of information and athlete-centred best practices related to the implementation of this Policy. These workshops will provide a platform to share experiences, discuss practical challenges and promote consistent, safe and effective application of the Policy across the Olympic Movement.

PERIODIC REVIEWS

This Policy will be subject to periodic review, and may be amended following such review, to consider any new and relevant scientific, medical, ethical and legal (including human rights) developments, and should include the impacted stakeholders' feedback on their application.

ADOPTION BY THE IOC EXECUTIVE BOARD

This Policy has been issued pursuant to Rule 19.3.10 of the Olympic Charter and was adopted by the IOC Executive Board on 26 March 2026.



SCHEDULE 1 – DEFINITIONS

Sex: Either of the two categories, Male or Female, into which humans are divided according to their reproductive biology.

Biological Female (Female): An individual who, regardless of their legal sex or gender identity, experienced female sex development usually based on their XX-chromosomes, ovaries, and estrogenic hormones.

Biological Male (Male): An individual who, regardless of their legal sex or gender identity, experienced male sex development usually based on their XY-chromosomes, testes/testicles and androgenic hormones.

Differences/Disorders of Sex Development (DSD): Rare genetic conditions that result in atypical sex development.

XY-DSD: A DSD that affects biological males who have the SRY Gene. With rare exceptions, athletes with XY-DSD have testes/testicles and testosterone levels in the Male range, and the vast majority are androgen-sensitive.

Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (CAIS): An XY-DSD characterised by the body's inability to respond to androgens, including testosterone. As a result, although the individual has XY chromosomes, testes/testicles and testosterone levels in the Male range, they do not experience androgen-dependent Male sex development.

Gender Identity: A person's sense of themselves as a woman or a man or neither/non-binary. While biological sex does not and cannot change, a person's gender identity can change over the course of a lifetime.

Transgender: A person whose gender identity is different from their biological sex. For example, they may have typical male sex development but female gender identity, or typical female sex development but male gender identity. Some transgender people take gender-affirming hormone treatment and/or undergo gender-affirming surgeries, and others are/do not.

SRY Gene: A segment of DNA which is almost always on the Y-chromosome, signalling the presence of testes/testicles and initiating Male sex development by the production of testosterone. SRY stands for "sex determining region Y."

Female (Women's) Category: The competition category designated for athletes who are biological females.

Male (Men's) Category: The competition category designated for athletes who are biological males.

IOC Events: Sports events organised by the IOC, including the Olympic Games, Olympic Winter Games, Youth Olympic Games, Winter Youth Olympic Games, and any other event organised by the IOC.