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International Olympic Committee announce new Policy on the Protection of the Female (Women's) Category in Olympic Sport

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has announced a new [Policy on the Protection of the Female \(Women's\) Category in Olympic Sport and Guiding Considerations for International Federations and Sports Governing Bodies](#).

Following today's approval of the policy by the [IOC Executive Board](#), it will apply for the LA28 Olympic Games onwards, and is not retroactive.

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IOC Executive Board

Press Release

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KEY FACTS

- Eligibility for any female category event at the Olympic Games or any other IOC event, including individual and team sports, is now limited to biological females, determined on the basis of a one-time SRY gene screening.
- Evidence-based and expert-informed, the policy – applicable for the LA28 Olympic Games onwards – protects fairness, safety and integrity in the female category.
- It is not retroactive and does not apply to any grassroots or recreational sports programmes.



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The policy explains that, for all disciplines on the sports programme of an IOC event, including the Olympic Games and for both 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.

Based on scientific evidence, the IOC considers that the presence of the SRY gene is fixed throughout life and represents highly accurate evidence that an athlete has experienced 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 that a negative reading is in error, this will be a once-in-a-lifetime test.

With the rare exception of athletes with a diagnosis of Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (CAIS) or other rare differences/disorders in sex development (DSDs) who 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 at an IOC event.

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 any male category, including in a designated male slot within any mixed category, and any open category, or in sports and events that do not classify athletes by sex.

Speaking about the policy, IOC President Kirsty Coventry said: "As a former athlete, I passionately believe in the rights of all Olympians to take part in fair competition. The policy that we have announced is based on science and has been led by medical experts. At the Olympic Games, even the smallest margins can be the difference between victory and defeat. So, it is absolutely clear that it would not be fair for biological males to compete in the female category. In addition, in some sports it would simply not be safe."

She continued: "Every athlete must be treated with dignity and respect, and athletes will need to be screened only once in their lifetime. There must be clear education around the process and counselling available, alongside expert medical advice."

WHY WAS THE POLICY DEVELOPED?

The IOC administration was tasked with drafting a policy on the protection of the female category in an Olympic context that would reflect the findings of the [Working Group on the Protection of the Female Category](#), various IOC consultations, and consideration of recent developments, including in international human rights law.

The policy was developed on the basis that it is universally accepted that providing for a female category is necessary to allow both males and females equal access to elite sport. It was guided by the IOC's modern goals relating to equality (equal opportunities for female athletes in finals, on podiums and in championships); enhancing Olympic value (featuring both women's and men's finals in every sport); and visibility and inspiration (celebrating female athletes on the Olympic podium to inspire and represent women and girls worldwide).

WHAT WERE THE FINDINGS OF THE WORKING GROUP?

The working group reviewed the latest scientific evidence, including developments since 2021, and reached a clear consensus. Male sex provides a performance advantage in all sports and events that rely on strength, power and endurance. To ensure fairness, and to protect safety, particularly in contact sports, eligibility should therefore be based on biological sex. The group also agreed that the most accurate and least intrusive method currently available to verify biological sex is screening for the SRY gene, a segment of DNA typically found on the Y chromosome that initiates male sex development in utero and indicates the presence of testes/testicles.

HOW WAS THE POLICY DEVELOPED?

The policy is the result of an IOC review between September 2024 and March 2026, and included consideration of the IOC's policy goals for the female category, which are, in addition to ensuring fairness, safety and integrity in elite competition, to promote equality, enhance

Olympic value and increase visibility for the female category. For these reasons, the Olympic Movement has a compelling interest in having a sex-based female category.

The review included consultations with a range of experts in relevant fields, and lessons learned and feedback from Olympic Movement constituents, including International Federations (IFs) and athletes from around the world, including athletes potentially impacted by any new policy.

As part of the review, in September 2025 the IOC established a working group to specifically examine scientific, medical and legal developments since 2021. The working group members came from all five continents and included specialists in sports science, endocrinology, transgender medicine, sports medicine, women's health, ethics and law. As a separate part of the working group, International Federation Chief Medical Officers representing individual and team sports were also included.

In addition, athletes provided crucial feedback 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. Feedback from the athlete consultation revealed that, although nuances exist across sex and gender, region and athlete status (active/retired), there was a strong consensus that fairness and safety in the female category required clear, science-based eligibility rules, and that protecting the female category is a common priority.

The policy has been developed through an athlete-centred approach that prioritises athletes' human dignity, physical and psychological health and well-being, and safety. Their right to privacy and confidentiality should be respected. IFs and National Olympic Committees (NOCs) should lead the education of athletes and entourage members, with a particular emphasis on the responsibility of coaches, managers and entourage members to support the athlete's autonomy, privacy and well-being, and to refrain from sharing information beyond authorised channels. They should ensure access to mental health and safeguarding support, provide clear early guidance on SRY gene screening and, where appropriate, align it with regular sports health checks. They should also maintain safe, accessible channels for information, concerns and reporting, with specific safeguards for minors. This education and guidance should provide reassurance that all athletes have a place in sport according to their age, sex and skill, and that biological sex-based eligibility criteria (including SRY gene screening) are not a judgement on, and do not question, the athlete's legal sex or gender identity.

WHO SHOULD ADOPT THIS POLICY?

This policy should be adopted by IFs and other sports governing bodies, such as NOCs, National Federations and Continental Associations, when exercising their responsibility in implementing eligibility rules in relation to IOC events only.

It replaces all previous IOC statements on this matter, including the *Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity and Sex Variations*.

It is important to note that this policy does not apply to any grassroots or recreational sports programmes.

Note to editors:

- There is a video of IOC President Kirsty Coventry speaking about the announcement in the [IOC News Room](#) for download and use by media.
- There is a press briefing with IOC President Kirsty Coventry today at 16:15 CET on this topic. You can follow live at www.youtube.com/iocmedia.

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