

World Athletics is paving the way towards complete exclusion of trans and intersex women from sports

On 10 February 2025, World Athletics announced a new [stakeholder consultation](#) as part of the revision of its eligibility criteria for the Female Category at the elite level, alongside revisions to the existing DSD (*Differences of Sex Development*) and Transgender Regulations. Led by World Athletics' Working Group on Gender Diverse Athletes, the revision claims to be based on “new scientific evidence” and, according to the Federation’s president, is intended to “preserve the integrity of the Female Category in sports”.

However, rather than an impartial consultation process that seeks genuine stakeholder inputs and submissions, the framework of the consultation predetermined the focus and outcomes of the consultation in favour of further restricting trans and intersex women from competition. Unsurprisingly, these outcomes are framed with the clear intentions to exclude the participation of trans and intersex athletes in the female category.

The objectives of the consultation include:

- Formally affirming a biologically exclusive definition of the Female Category
- Revising eligibility regulations to align with this exclusionary framework
- Merging DSD and Transgender Regulations with a clear impact on restricting DSD athletes while offering only vague reassurances about addressing their reliance interests
- Introducing a pre-clearance requirement for all athletes competing in the Female Category
- Considering forward initiatives to support “elite gender diverse XY athletes” - a framing that misgenders intersex and trans women and implies they should not compete in the Female Category

OII Europe and TGEU express serious concern over the biased framing of this stakeholder consultation, its predetermined exclusionary goals, and its misrepresentation of science to justify discrimination. The consultation process fails to reflect the diversity of human bodies and ignores scientific complexities in athletic performance.

One of the consultation [questions](#) directly asks: “How World Athletics can best educate the public about its ‘biological sex-exclusive design for the Female Category’?”. This framing indicates that the outcome has already been decided before engaging stakeholders. Another question assumes that the new eligibility conditions will negatively impact certain groups of athletes, suggesting that World Athletics is already prepared to accept the harm these policies will cause.

The decision to further tighten the exclusionary criteria comes despite the absence of scientific consensus on whether higher testosterone levels in trans and intersex women provide a performance advantage, or whether there are any supposed advantages resulting from trans women athletes having undergone male puberty. In 2016, in the 33rd session of the Human Rights Council, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Health affirmed that “there is insufficient clinical evidence to establish that those (intersex) women are afforded a ‘substantial performance advantage’ warranting exclusion”.

Research indicates that bodies are complex systems, and there is not one biomarker that determines performance. World Athletics’ decision to base their exclusion solely on testosterone levels above a certain limit is therefore patently incorrect and biased. Scientific evidence shows that a multitude of factors inform and impact athletic performance and testosterone is only one of many factors (e.g. oxygen uptake, capillary density, or the ability to tolerate high levels of lactic acid) that impact performance.

The decision to once again revise the guidelines – which were last revised only in 2023 – is no doubt encouraged by the ongoing global targeting of the human rights of LGBTI people and the current political situation in the US, including the Executive Order signed by US President Trump to ban all trans woman athletes from sports.

“Sport has the power to transform lives”, says Dan Christian Ghattas, Executive Director of OII Europe, and continues: “All women and girls deserve the right to participate in sports free from abuse, violence, and discrimination. Women and girls in all their diversity, including those who play sports deserve to have their health, safety and dignity be respected, no matter their gender identity or sex characteristics. Sports empower trans and intersex people, offer a sense of community, build essential social skills, and help dispel entrenched notions

about the capacities and limits of the body.”

“TGEU and OII Europe reaffirm our unwavering commitment to upholding the human rights of trans and intersex athletes, ensuring they can compete in sports without discrimination or exclusion,” says Ymania Brown, TGEU’s Executive Director and continues, “We strongly oppose the increasing over-policing, medicalisation, and pathologisation of trans and intersex women’s bodies under the guise of fairness. These restrictive policies are not about protecting sport - they are about control. We call for inclusive, evidence-based regulations that recognise the diversity of human bodies and the transformative power of sport. Every athlete, regardless of their gender identity or sex characteristics, deserves the right to compete safely, equitably, and with dignity.”

For a more thorough analysis of the World Athletics decision to revise the eligibility criteria for the Female Category, please see here:

<https://www.oiiurope.org/topics/sports/world-athletics-sets-exclusionary-standard/>

See also:

Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES) and E*Alliance. (2022). Transgender Women Athletes and Elite Sport: A Scientific Review, p. 29. Available online at: https://www.cces.ca/sites/default/files/content/docs/pdf/transgenderwomen_athletesandelitesport-ascientificreview-e-final.pdf

‘Intersex’ athletes to learn if they will be forced to take drugs to suppress testosterone, Sarah Knapton, 11 August 2017. Available at:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/08/11/intersex-athletes-learn-will-forced-take-drugs-suppress-testosterone/>

– END –