



NHSMUN

CSW

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Secretary-General
Terry Wang

Director-General
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Delegate Experience
Nastasja Vásquez

Global Partnerships
Daniela Maciel
Sebastian Jimenez

Under-Secretaries-General

Nachiketh Anand
Alina Castillo
Seonghyun Chang
Naina Dhawan
Ximena Faz
Kellie Fernandez
Grace Harb
Adiva Ara Khan
Anshul Magal
Analucia Tello
Sofia Velasco
Renata Venzor

Dear Delegates,

It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I welcome you to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at NHSMUN 2025. My name is Lillian Hunter, and I am honored to serve as your director for this committee.

In our world, Female Digital Literacy is at the heart of global discussions and will continue to stay in the spotlight with how involved technology is in our everyday lives. We will explore a range of critical issues that impact women worldwide—gender-based exclusion, access to digital education, and socioeconomic factors. These are not just topics for debate; they are real, current issues that affect the lives of millions of women across the globe. It is our responsibility to address them with the seriousness and sensitivity they deserve.

As we prepare to delve into these discussions, I encourage you to bring your passion, creativity, and critical thinking to the table. Your role as a delegate is not just to represent the views of your assigned countries, but to also challenge the “status quo”, propose solutions, and work collaboratively to draft resolutions that would make a real difference. Be serious, work kindly and diligently, and enjoy your time researching and debating our topic.

I believe our collective efforts in this committee will lead to meaningful outcomes. I am excited to see the perspectives and ideas you will bring forward and how you will grow as a delegate. I have full confidence that each of you will contribute to making this committee a dynamic and impactful space.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or concerns you may have as you prepare for the conference. My goal is to support you in every way possible to ensure a successful and rewarding experience for all. I am not just here to help you foster debate but to help learn and mentor you. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to this important work. I look forward to meeting you and embarking on this journey together.

Kind regards,

Lillian Hunter

Director of the Commission on the Status of Women

Session I

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Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to introduce you to NHSMUN 2025, as the Director for Session II of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). My fellow co-director and I have prepared a background guide to start your immersion into this committee. This year the two topics are “Gender Equality in Women’s Sports” and “Female Education and Literacy in the Digital World.”

A quick note about me, I go to Amherst College and am a double major in Political Science and Environmental Studies. This will be my second-year staffing NHSMUN, and last year I was the Session II Director for the UN Peace Building Committee. Some of my hobbies include photography, art, reading, and weightlifting. I also love to travel and learn new languages.

Let this background guide be the beginning of your research into these two important topics, and help you prepare your thoughts and initiatives in preparation for the conference. Remember to think critically while researching, and always consider how your country would comprehend and approach these issues and current applications. There is no right or wrong answer but take this as a challenge to embody a country and culture different from your own. I encourage you to take extra steps towards learning about the policies and history of your country and look at their most recent diplomatic speeches and entries.

Be creative in your position paper and try to utilize the resources and thorough network that has already been established in the UN to its fullest capacity. The core purpose of the UN is to facilitate compromise and cooperation, please keep this mindset when arriving at a conference. See your fellow delegates as possible partners, as you can achieve more together than alone. While it is your role to embody your country, there are still ways you can incorporate your own opinions and personality throughout your written work and during conferences. I hope to see you invest in your role, but also let your ambitions and desires show. Most importantly, have fun and learn as much as you can.

Good luck with your pre-conference research and preparations. If you come across any issues or need assistance, feel free to email me at any point. I am always here to provide help and support. Please do not be afraid to make mistakes, take the initiative to speak and lead, and learn from and respect your peers. See you in New York!

All the best,

Olivia Keller

Director of the Commission on the Status of Women

Session II

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A Note on the NHSMUN Difference

Esteemed Faculty and Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2025! We are Terry Wang and Jordan Baker, and we are this year's Secretary-General and Director-General. Thank you for choosing to attend NHSMUN, the world's largest and most diverse Model United Nations conference for secondary school students. We are thrilled to welcome you to New York City in March.

As a space for collaboration, consensus, and compromise, NHSMUN strives to transform today's brightest thinkers, speakers, and collaborators into tomorrow's leaders. Our organization provides a uniquely tailored experience for all through innovative and accessible programming. We believe that an emphasis on education through simulation is paramount to the Model UN experience, and this idea permeates throughout numerous aspects of the conference:

Realism and accuracy: Although a perfect simulation of the UN is never possible, we believe that one of the core educational responsibilities of MUN conferences is to educate students about how the UN System works. Each NHSMUN committee is a simulation of a real deliberative body so that delegates can research what their country has said in the committee. Our topics are chosen from the issues currently on the agenda of that committee (except historical committees, which take topics from the appropriate time period). We also strive to invite real UN, NGO, and field experts into each committee through our committee speakers program. Moreover, we arrange meetings between students and the actual UN Permanent Mission of the country they are representing. Our delegates have the incredible opportunity to conduct first-hand research, asking thought-provoking questions to current UN representatives and experts in their respective fields of study. These exclusive resources are only available due to IMUNA's formal association with the United Nations Department of Global Communications and consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. No other conference goes so far to deeply immerse students into the UN System.

Educational emphasis, even for awards: At the heart of NHSMUN lies education and compromise. Part of what makes NHSMUN so special is its diverse delegate base. As such, when NHSMUN distributes awards, we strongly de-emphasize their importance in comparison to the educational value of Model UN as an activity. NHSMUN seeks to reward students who excel in the arts of compromise and diplomacy. More importantly, we seek to develop an environment in which delegates can employ their critical thought processes and share ideas with their counterparts from around the world. Given our delegates' plurality of perspectives and experiences, we center our programming around the values of diplomacy and teamwork. In particular, our daises look for and promote constructive leadership that strives towards consensus, as real ambassadors do in the United Nations.

Debate founded on strong knowledge and accessibility: With knowledgeable staff members and delegates from over 70 countries, NHSMUN can facilitate an enriching experience reliant on substantively rigorous debate. To ensure this high quality of debate, our staff members produce detailed, accessible, and comprehensive topic guides (like the one below) to prepare delegates for the nuances inherent in each global issue. This process takes over six months, during which the Directors who lead our committees develop their topics with the valuable input of expert contributors. Because these topics are always changing and evolving, NHSMUN also produces update papers intended to bridge the gap of time between when the background guides are published and when committee starts in March. As such, this guide is designed to be a launching point from which delegates should delve further into their topics. The detailed knowledge that our Directors provide in this background guide through diligent research aims to increase critical thinking within delegates at NHSMUN.

Extremely engaged staff: At NHSMUN, our staffers care deeply about delegates' experiences and what they take away from their time at NHSMUN. Before the conference, our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained rigorously through hours of workshops and exercises both virtual and in-person to provide the best conference experience possible. At the conference,

delegates will have the opportunity to meet their dais members prior to the first committee session, where they may engage one-on-one to discuss their committees and topics. Our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained and empowered to be experts on their topics and they are always available to rapidly answer any questions delegates may have prior to the conference. Our Directors and Assistant Directors read every position paper submitted to NHSMUN and provide thoughtful comments on those submitted by the feedback deadline. Our staff aims not only to tailor the committee experience to delegates' reflections and research but also to facilitate an environment where all delegates' thoughts can be heard.

Empowering participation: The UN relies on the voices of all of its member states to create resolutions most likely to make a meaningful impact on the world. That is our philosophy at NHSMUN too. We believe that to properly delve into an issue and produce fruitful debate, it is crucial to focus the entire energy and attention of the room on the topic at hand. Our Rules of Procedure and our staff focus on making every voice in the committee heard, regardless of each delegate's country assignment or skill level. Additionally, unlike many other conferences, we also emphasize delegate participation after the conference. MUN delegates are well researched and aware of the UN's priorities, and they can serve as the vanguard for action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, we are proud to connect students with other action-oriented organizations to encourage further work on the topics.

Focused committee time: We feel strongly that face-to-face interpersonal connections during debate are critical to producing superior committee experiences and allow for the free flow of ideas. Ensuring policies based on equality and inclusion is one way in which NHSMUN guarantees that every delegate has an equal opportunity to succeed in committee. In order to allow communication and collaboration to be maximized during committee, we have a very dedicated administrative team who work throughout the conference to type up, format, and print draft resolutions and working papers.

As always, we welcome any questions or concerns about the substantive program at NHSMUN 2025 and would be happy to discuss NHSMUN pedagogy with faculty or delegates.

Delegates, it is our sincerest hope that your time at NHSMUN will be thought-provoking and stimulating. NHSMUN is an incredible time to learn, grow, and embrace new opportunities. We look forward to seeing you work both as students and global citizens at the conference.

Best,

Terry Wang
Secretary-General

Jordan Baker
Director-General

A Note on Research and Preparation

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to NHSMUN in March.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging, but to assist delegates, we have updated our [Beginner Delegate Guide](#) and [Advanced Delegate Guide](#). In particular, these guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a country, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. In delegations with two students, we strongly encourage each student to research each topic to ensure that they are prepared to debate no matter which topic is selected first. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the NHSMUN Research Guide. To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections:

I: Topic Background – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's country. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic, but rather focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

II: Country Policy – This section should discuss the delegation's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate here.

III. Proposed Solutions – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the country's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages** long double-spaced with standard margins and font size. **We recommend 3–5 pages per topic as a suitable length.** The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for sending a copy of its papers to their committee Directors via [myDais](#) on or before **February 21, 2025**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, a position must be submitted on or before **January 31, 2025**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the dais of each committee and returned prior to your arrival at the conference.

Complete instructions for how to submit position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at info@imuna.org.

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.

Committee History

The United Nations Commission on Status of Women (CSW) is a body formed by 45 member states elected by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is focused on women's equal gender rights to achieve empowerment. Its mandate is to "prepare recommendations and reports to the Economic and Social Council on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields".¹ CSW is one of the United Nations' eight functional commissions. They act as sub-bodies for ECOSOC. Their job is to tackle specific social issues to assist the work of the UN General Assembly. Historically they worked together to accomplish their shared goals for social justice and peace.²

Furthermore, CSW's history goes back to San Francisco, 1945, for the signing of the UN Charter. Women's equal rights were contemplated in the founding document. In London, 1946, the Sub commission on the Status of Women was established under the Commission on Human Rights. This event was supported by women delegates and NGOs to address women's issues separately. On June 21 of the same year, the Sub commission became a formal Commission due to the first chairperson's request to the Economic and Social Council.³

Although the committee's objective is not to address specific human rights cases, it established the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. Likewise, the Commission participated in the development of conventions and resolutions. They used the Convention on the Political Rights of Women as an example. The convention was adopted in 1952 by the General Assembly. This event was the first international law that recognized and protected women's political rights universally.⁴ Similarly, CSW participated in the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is a guiding document for all ECOSOC committees.⁵ Specifically, delegates of CSW ensured that the document used gender inclusive language. In depth, it highlights the negative impact of using the word "men" when referring to humanity or the world.⁶ CSW played a major role in creating the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Beijing Declaration was signed in 1995 at the fourth UN Conference on Women. This document is considered by UN Women to be "the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights."⁷ Clause 9 of the document's mission statement, states that their objective is empowerment for women. It emphasizes the role of individual nations in protecting the freedom of their female citizens.⁸ These UN Conferences are very important to the success of CSW, because they tackle the most relevant and pressing issues facing women of that time. For example, those who participated in the 1980 conference in Copenhagen focused on a woman's right to control and own property, along with their rights to child custody.⁹

Considering the many beneficial acts of CSW, the committee has its limitations. The UN Watch, an accredited NGO that works with ECOSOC, points out three areas for improvement. One flaw is their misfocus on what they believe to be biggest international women's rights violations¹⁰. For example, CSW has not adopted resolutions for the gender crisis in Yemen. This

1 "A short history of The Committee of the Status of Women," UN Women, last modified 2019, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/A-short-history-of-the-CSW-en.pdf>.

2 Ryan Brown, "Women at the UN: Everything you need to know about #CSW68," UN News, last modified 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147362>.

3 Isabelle Engeli and Amy Mazur, "Research Guides: Gender and the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW): A Quick Guide." UN Research Guides, last modified 2024, <https://research.un.org/en/CSW>.

4 Carolyn Hannan and Devaki Jain, "The achievements of the Commission on the Status of Women," the United Nations, last modified 2006, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw50/statements/NGOCSWConsultationCH26feb06.pdf>.

5 UN General Assembly, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." un.org, 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

6 UN Women, "CSW: Advancing women's rights since 1946 | UN News," UN News, last modified 2023 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1134132>.

7 "Resolution 1 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* The Fourth World Conference on Women, Having met in Beijing from 4 to," the United Nations, last modified 1995, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

8 Resolution 1 Beijing, 1995

9 United Nations, "Conferences | Women and gender equality | United Nations," the United Nations, last modified 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women>.

10 "3 Problems with the Commission on the Status of Women," UN Watch, last modified 2024, <https://unwatch.org/database/problems/>

issue ranks at the bottom of the gender equality index. UN Watch notes Yemen's consistent practice of child marriage. We encourage CSW delegates to focus on these issues especially.

To solve related problems to the committee, guidelines direct the procedure for cases. These may be modified if it is decided otherwise. More in depth, the Economic and Social Council dictated that the functional commission need to hold sessions biennially. For this reason, the opening date of each session is arranged by the Council. If they take into consideration any recommendations and with the previous approval of the Secretary-General. It is held at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York. Moreover, the members of the commission should be notified by the Secretary-General with six weeks of advance about the essential information of the date and place of each session's first meeting. Following, at the beginning of each session the speakers are elected, to adopt the topic's agenda. In addition, the commission may revise or modify the agenda during a session by adding, deleting or amending items. It needs to be noted that only urgent items can be added to the agenda. This year's conference was held in March of 2024. One of the major goals of this most recent session was to "strengthen institutions and finance them with gender perspective."¹¹ The Commission on the Status of Women represents an important role in the UN. Since they seek to defend women's integrity universally, by shaping their dignity and importance as human beings despite gender.

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11 "Commission on the Status of Women." UN Women, last modified 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women>.



CSW

NHSMUN 2025



TOPIC A:

FEMALE EDUCATION AND LITERACY IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

Photo Credit: Mahmud Imran

Introduction

Digital literacy means knowing how to use digital tools and services. This includes everyday tasks such as doing homework online, paying bills, or ordering food. It also includes the ability to navigate the internet safely, verify the trustworthiness of websites, and create responsible content. Lack of these skills can limit access to employment, education, and important digital resources. Digital literacy is incredibly important, but women and girls are less likely to have these skills. UNICEF analyzed 32 countries and territories and found that 35 percent fewer girls have digital literacy skills than boys.¹

The gap is especially noticeable in studies and STEM sectors. Only 18 percent of computer science degrees in the US are earned by women.² This reflects not only gender inequality but increases the stereotypes and social barriers women face. In addition, women have less access to technology globally, especially in less digitized regions. This limits their participation in the digital economy and their access to resources such as health information and online education.

Digital literacy has changed a lot since the mid-20th century. In the 1970s, people talked about “computer literacy” with a focus on technical knowledge.³ Over time, the concept was expanded and adapted to the everyday use of technology.⁴ Today, it is key in sectors such as education, healthcare, and commerce.

The goal of this committee is to increase access to technology for women in less digitized regions. It also seeks to develop solutions that use resources economically and sustainably. In addition, it wants to encourage the enrollment of women in technology programs to improve their representation. To avoid future problems, delegates must focus on areas where women are underrepresented. It is essential to boost their participation in fields such as programming, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and software development. This will require inclusive education policies, awareness-raising campaigns, and mentoring programs. It is also necessary to create more

equitable work environments. All of this will help to close the gap and ensure women’s full participation in the digital age. As the world becomes more dependent on technology, female representation in the sector is important.

History and Description of the Issue

Digital Gender Gaps

Historically, women have faced several challenges in accessing education. Girls are more likely than boys to never set foot in a classroom.⁵ Around the world, 119 million girls are out of school.⁶ Gender gaps in education have significantly affected women for centuries. Girls with access to education are more likely to have healthy and productive lives. They are less likely to marry young. This allows them to have higher incomes and to have a greater say in the decisions that affect their lives. Education helps women build better futures for themselves and their families.⁷ Gender gaps in education are also harmful to countries. Girl’s education strengthens economies and allows for more stable societies.⁸ Despite the importance of education, there are still gender disparities.

Over the past century, worldwide efforts have helped narrow the gender gaps in education. As a result, more girls than ever are going to school.⁹ However, only 49 percent of countries

1 “Bridging the Gender Digital Divide,” UNICEF, May 2023, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/ictgenderdivide/>.

2 UNICEF, Advancing girls’ education and gender equality through digital learning.

3 Davis, Judith, “What Is Digital Literacy?” Education Week, November 18, 2016.

4 Judith, “What Is Digital Literacy?”

5 Raja Bentaouet Kattan and Myra Murad Khan, “Closing the gap: Tackling the remaining disparities in girls’ education and women’s labor market participation,” last modified March 9, 2023, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/education/closing-gap-tackling-remaining-disparities-girls-education-and-womens-labor-market>.

6 “Girls’ Education,” UNICEF, accessed September 7, 2024, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/education/closing-gap-tackling-remaining-disparities-girls-education-and-womens-labor-market>.

7 UNICEF, “Girls’ Education.”

8 UNICEF, “Girls’ Education.”

9 “SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” UN Women, accessed September 7, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-4-quality-education>.

have equal numbers of boys and girls in primary school.¹⁰ This means that boys are more likely to have access to education. 15 million girls are not in primary school compared to 10 million boys.¹¹ This gap only widens for higher education. More girls often drop out of secondary school. In fact, only 24 percent of countries have gender equality for upper secondary education.¹² This reduces many labor opportunities for women.

There are many reasons why women do not have access to education. These include poverty, child marriage, and gender-based violence. Outdated teaching practices can result in gender gaps in learning and skills development. Early pregnancies or the need to leave school for household work prevent women from receiving a secondary education.¹³ In conflict zones, girls are twice as likely to be out of school.¹⁴ Education is more than just access to schools, however. It also refers to girls feeling safe in classrooms. Additionally, some schools do not meet the hygiene or sanitation needs of girls.

Gender gaps in education also lead to lower female literacy rates. According to UNESCO, literacy is the ability to identify, interpret, create, and communicate using written materials of different contexts.¹⁵ Literacy is a necessary skill to attain a range of rights and opportunities to work. However, the global literacy rate shows gender inequalities. There are about 757 million adults who lack basic literacy. For the past two decades, women have been two-thirds of all illiterate adults.¹⁶

These gender gaps are impacted by the changes posed by the digital world. Digital technologies are continually evolving and

expanding. These technologies have the potential to expand access to education for this reason.¹⁷ For instance, distance learning can mitigate the effects of education disruption and school closures. However, digital technologies can also worsen gender gaps in education and literacy. This creates the digital divide. The digital divide is the difference between groups with and without access to technology and the internet.¹⁸ The digital divide leaves 2.9 billion people worldwide without internet access.¹⁹ Women are more likely to be impacted by the digital divide. Gender inequality in the physical world is replicated in the digital world.²⁰

Girls and women often have less access to technology and the internet compared to boys and men. For example, girls are 1.8 times less likely than boys to own a smartphone.²¹ Stereotypes around technology being ‘for boys’ stop girls from using digital tools. As a result, women are 25 percent less likely than men to know how to use technology for basic activities.²² In developing countries, girls and women struggle to gain technology and internet access. In developing countries, women are 33 percent less likely to have access to the internet than men.²³ Thus, reliance on technology increases educational inequalities between men and women. Approximately 11.2 million young women did not finish their education due to unreliable technology access during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴

Without equal access to technology and the internet, girls and women are not able to equally participate in our ever-more digital societies. This eliminates opportunities in several aspects of their lives. Without access to technology, they

10 UNICEF, “Girls’ Education.”

11 UN Women, “SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

12 UNICEF, “Girls’ Education.”

13 UN Women, “SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

14 UNICEF, “Girls’ Education.”

15 “Literacy,” UNESCO Institute for Statistics, accessed September 7, 2024, <https://uis.unesco.org/node/3079547>.

16 Louise Wetheridge, *Girls’ and women’s literacy with a lifelong learning perspective: issues, trends and implications for the Sustainable Development Goals* (Paris: UNESCO, 2016), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244959.locale=en>.

17 “Digital learning and transformation of education,” UNESCO, accessed September 7, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/digital-education>.

18 “Bridging the digital gender divide,” Plan International, accessed September 7, 2024. <https://plan-international.org/quality-education/bridging-the-digital-divide/>.

19 UNICEF, “What We Know About the Gender Digital Divide for Girls: A Literature Review.”

20 Alexandra Tyers-Chowdhury and Gerda Binder, *What we know about the gender digital divide for girls: A literature review* (UNICEF, 2021), <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/8311/file/What%20we%20know%20about%20the%20gender%20digital%20divide%20for%20girls%20A%20literature%20review.pdf>

21 Mandry, “The Digital World: What about girls?”

22 Antonia Mandry, “The Digital World: What about girls?” July 14, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/blog/digital-world-what-about-girls>.

23 Plan International, “Bridging the digital gender divide.”

24 UNICEF. “What We Know About the Gender Digital Divide for Girls: A Literature Review.”

also lose the ability to be part of conversations on issues that affect them. This can emphasize already existing inequalities. The gender technology gap also has consequences on a country's potential for economic growth and development. Economically, countries lose millions in GDP by not funding women's digital education.²⁵ More women with digital skills mean more skilled workers for the economy. Skilled workers help meet the changing digital demands and increase the earnings for companies and the government. Over 90 percent of jobs worldwide already have a digital component.²⁶ If governments equip girls with digital skills, they will help girls thrive in economies where routine work has been automated and digital skills are prized. If 600 million more women are connected to the internet in 3 years, this would translate to a rise in global GDP of between USD three billion and USD 18 billion.²⁷

While unequal access to technology can expand the education and literary gender gaps, digital empowerment can do the opposite. Technology can also be a powerful tool for girls to become activists and lead change on issues that affect them. Social media platforms, for instance, allow activists to reach a wide audience and organize action towards common causes. Also, increasing access to technology can improve the quality of education. Some countries have taken steps to eliminate this divide by developing laws on broadband internet access. Establishing policies that help low-income families obtain broadband internet, creating plans to provide public access computers at public locations are a few examples. Many governments around the world are working to reduce or eliminate the digital divide.

Digital Literacy and Economic Equality

Today, the gap in digital literacy has major impacts on economic equality between men and women.²⁸ Women with

fewer digital skills may struggle to compete for jobs compared to those educated in these skills. Digital skills are essential for well-paying jobs, most minimum wage jobs, and higher educational opportunities.²⁹ If men are more likely to have digital skills, women are less likely to get similar paying roles or better job opportunities. In the tech sector, where digital skills are crucial, women are underrepresented.³⁰ Women in tech often earn less and may face discrimination, hindering their salary and career growth, making the field less attractive to them.

The gender gap in digital literacy is growing as technologies become more advanced.³¹ These advancements in technology are also introducing new threats to women's well-being, which further increases the gap of inequality. Online harassment and violence make it less likely for women to use digital products or enter tech-focused careers. Approximately 48 percent report experiencing workplace harassment.³² The harm to the personal potential of individual women in the labor market is just one of the effects. Women are a minority in STEM education and careers, representing one-third of all global technological sector employees. Women who enter the tech workforce often face a hostile environment. A study conducted by UN Women states that there is a 21 percent pay gap between men and women. And a 48 percent report of experiencing workplace harassment. There is also a lower promotion rate of 52 women for every 100 men. Due to the many challenges, they face, 22 percent of women working in the tech sector are considering leaving due to these factors.³³

A lack of technical confidence limits women's access to the technological labor market. This affects their overall lives. A digital livelihood allows them to expand businesses and secure better jobs.³⁴ It also helps them communicate and be more active in community and family life. Information and

25 European Parliament. "Digitalisation and the Future of Work: Gender and the Digital Divide." 2018.

26 Plan International, "Bridging the digital gender divide."

27 Plan International, "Bridging the digital gender divide."

28 Carlson, Deedee. "Are Men Better at Video Games Than Women? Research Gives Us the Answer." Michigan State University, January 18, 2019.

29 European Parliament. "Digitalisation and the Future of Work: Gender and the Digital Divide." 2018.

30 Carlson, Deedee. "Are Men Better at Video Games Than Women? Research Gives Us the Answer." Michigan State University, January 18, 2019.

31 Tyers-Chowdhury and Binder, What we know about the gender digital divide for girls: A literature review.

32 UN Women, "Power on: How we can supercharge an equitable digital future."

33 UN Women, "Power on: How we can supercharge an equitable digital future."

34 Anton Santoso, "Empowering women through digital literacy", Antara News, March 27, 2024,

communication technologies (ICTs) are a set of technological tools used to transmit, store, or share information.³⁵ They facilitate services that improve the quality of life. In addition, they offer girls and women opportunities to develop skills and enter any workforce. Implementing ICTs for women creates employment in almost all sectors. Therefore, digital literacy has become the “new literacy” required in all sectors.³⁶

Yet, building technical trust requires careful implementation. This is especially important in communities where digital life is not common. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has a plan to improve digital literacy. This approach focuses on two pillars: capacity and safety. Capacity refers to technical knowledge and skills. It includes using a smartphone and platforms such as WhatsApp or visual tools. Safety involves knowing how to use digital tools carefully. It also includes knowledge to counter misinformation.³⁷

USAID’s Women Connect Challenge, a global public-private funding initiative of USD 4.9 million, was designed to close the

Gender Digital Divide (GDD) through the implementation of five key strategies. The first was to promote positive social rules and to be mindful of cultural perceptions. Secondly, to use digital tools to create economic opportunities. Thirdly, to help women gain confidence in the use of ICTs. Fourth, to design women-centric technology, especially for those that do not have internet access. Lastly, to develop community support.³⁸

The benefits of this strategy have been seen in digital literacy training programs across Europe. One example is the Rehabilitation Centre for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Romania. The program is based on the idea that digital skills are essential for entering the labor market. This is especially true for women who have only completed secondary education. The success of the program is due to the development of community support. In addition, it helps women gain confidence in using ICTs. This has enabled them to find employment in a country where patriarchal values are

<http://en.antaranews.com/>.

³⁵ “Information and communication technologies (ICT),” UNESCO, accessed August 24, 2024, <https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/glossary/information-and-communication-technologies-ict>.

³⁶ “Women’s Pathways to the Digital Sector: Stories of Opportunities and Challenges”, (Berlin: BMZ, 2017),

<http://www.enterprise-development.org/>.

³⁷ USAID, “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment”, (Washington, DigitalFrontiers, 2017),

<http://www.digitalfronteirsdai.com/resources/>.

³⁸ USAID, “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.”



Woman teaching a girl how to code

Credit: Justice Okai Allotey

common.³⁹

However, these programs are just small steps. They need to grow and expand to close the large digital gender gap. This gap affects the economic strength of women in their communities. Ninety percent of future jobs will require digital skills. Despite improvements in women’s digital literacy, technology and other careers remain tied to gender inequality. This hinders progress toward women’s financial independence.⁴⁰

The gender gap in digital literacy affects economic equality between men and women. Women’s limited digital skills make it difficult for them to get good paying jobs. They also limit their access to higher education. As a result, women have lower participation in the technology sector. To close this gap, the international community must implement digital literacy programs. These programs must ensure a safe online environment for women. It is essential to create collaborative communities for women who use ICTs. By investing in digital equity, women are empowered. This helps the economy grow and the future becomes more inclusive.

Female Education and Literacy Inequalities

Gender exclusion persists even in the tech world. It particularly affects women who live in impoverished households, have disabilities, or live in rural areas. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, digital education started to grow. Many schools and universities now use technology daily.⁴¹ Classes often have virtual elements or even fully online. This offers women with access to technology more opportunities to learn. All girls need digital literacy to survive and compete in the growing tech economy.

The gender gap in digital education and literacy reflects educational inequalities worldwide.⁴² Even though the situation

has improved over the years, many regions still face inequalities in their education. Girls are often less likely to finish primary and secondary education. This limits their chances of higher education and digital literacy. In countries with high levels of digital literacy, women may still face employment biases that discourage them from pursuing STEM careers. Some women may feel pressure, lack of support, or lack confidence in their digital skills. Even in developed countries, many STEM fields are still male dominated.

Access to technology varies between households for economic and familial factors. Not only can mothers be victims of the digital literacy gap, but their daughters also fall into this category. A 2021 study by UNICEF showed that boys were 1.5 times more likely to own a smartphone than girls.⁴³ Even though a smartphone is not always used for educational technology, it may give young adolescents a way to familiarize themselves with digital spaces. Even out of a professional site, boys are still 1.5 times more likely to have digital literacy skills.⁴⁴ UNICEF also says that it is more common for young women and girls in the household to share digital devices than it is for boys. They also show that young girls who own smartphones are less likely to have Google accounts, or email accounts that allow them to download apps. In addition, they state that most smartphones are designed for a generic consumer and are normally tested on male users as opposed to female users.

Other than gender, poverty is one of the most frequent factors of discrimination in schools.⁴⁵ Women who live in poverty experience higher discrimination. This is particularly evident throughout worldwide education systems.⁴⁶ This is considering some countries face more challenges than others. Developing countries have worse statistics as opposed to developed countries. In developed countries, most women

39 Irina Hildebrandt, “Digital competencies of women of Gagauzia. Challenges and Prospects”, (Moldova: UNDP, 2022), <https://www.undp.org/moldova/publications/>.

40 “Building digital skills will help women and girls benefit from connectivity and enable them to fully participate in the digital economy,” GSMA, last modified April 16, 2020, <http://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/>.

41 Deedee Carlson, “Are Men Better at Video Games Than Women? Research Gives Us the Answer,” Michigan State University, January 18, 2019.

42 UNICEF, “What We Know About the Gender Digital Divide for Girls: A Literature Review.”

43 UNICEF, “What We Know About the Gender Digital Divide for Girls: A Literature Review.”

44 Deedee Carlson, “Are Men Better at Video Games Than Women? Research Gives Us the Answer.” Michigan State University, January 18, 2019.

45 Equinet, “Women in Poverty: Access to Education.”

46 Equinet, “Women in Poverty: Access to Education.”

exhibit higher female literacy rates due to more equitable access to digital education.⁴⁷ In low- and middle-income countries, mobile phones are often the primary way people access the internet. In these countries, women are 20 percent less likely than men to own a smartphone.⁴⁸ In the past, some developed countries have implemented policies that promote gender equality in schools. They also created support structures at professional levels that promote women to have the same digital achievements as men.⁴⁹ There are many curriculum policies in place that give both genders equal opportunities to learn digital skills before they leave school. However, these policies are still not seen worldwide and developing countries are where women are suffering the most.

Even in countries with developed education systems, women who grow up in rural areas have less educational resources and opportunities as those that grow up in urban areas. Rural areas around the world typically have lower incomes, giving families from lower income areas less economic resources to fund education that would include digital literacy skills and necessary skills to succeed in today's digitized world.⁵⁰ However the urban and rural educational gap in the United States pales in comparison to the educational gaps in places like Madagascar, that don't even have paved roads or telephone poles in extremely rural areas of the island. Women who grow up in rural, remote and uncontacted Villages and countries such as Brazil or Indonesia have extreme disadvantages.

Hence, young women and children in less urbanized areas face digital and educational barriers due to limited access to resources. Technologies and school funding are challenges that worsen in developing countries where basic and technological infrastructure are lacking. Women from more developed economies and extremely underprivileged communities face the same issue. Efforts should be made to close these gaps in

developed or developing nations or sub-religious or ethnic communities. Targeted policies, community awareness, and national and local support for women across governments around the world can mitigate the divide.

Barriers to Digital Literacy in Rural Areas

The digital divide is defined as “the split between those with and without reliable internet connectivity and related technologies”. Limited internet access affects the economy, decreases opportunities, and creates educational inequality. With 45.2 percent of the world's households without internet, a UNESCO report also states that women are 23 percent less likely to use mobile internet than men. In Asian, African, and South American countries women are 30 to 50 percent less likely to have no internet access of any kind.⁵¹

To counteract the rural digital divide, and help women bridge the gap on digital inclusivity, requires an understanding of its root causes. Initially, urban areas are primary targets for infrastructure development such as broadband which helps bridge the digital divide. Rural areas are most affected because they have a lower population density. With fewer people living in the area, companies are less incentivized to invest in expansion in less profitable communities. Moreover, rural areas contain challenging terrain for infrastructure development. Therefore, digital infrastructures become even more costly due to the logistical obstacles and labor-intensive processes required. Altogether, this makes maximizing the return on investments in the short term difficult. The cost for broadband infrastructure deployment in rural areas varies between USD 25,000 and 30,000 per mile.⁵²

Another barrier to digital literacy access in rural communities is language. English remains to be the dominant language on the internet, populations with limited knowledge of the

47 “Narrowing the Gender Digital Divide: Empowering Girls Around the Globe to Build Digital Skills for a Lifetime,” U.S. Department of State, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/narrowing-the-gender-digital-divide-empowering-girls-around-the-globe-to-build-digital-skills-for-a-lifetime>.

48 United Nations Development Programme. “Toward an Equitable Digital Future: Women and Girls as Active Agents of Change in Digitalisation.” Accessed July 31, 2024.

49 U.S. Department of State, “Narrowing the Gender Digital Divide: Empowering Girls Around the Globe to Build Digital Skills for a Lifetime.”

50 Monica Anderson, “Some Digital Divides Persist Between Rural, Urban and Suburban America.” Pew Research Center, August 19, 2021.

51 “Impact of the Digital Divide: Economic, Social, and Educational Consequences”, IEEE, accessed September 10, 2025, <http://ctu.ieee.org/>.

52 Liz Cooper, “The Stakes Are Too High to Not Solve the Rural Digital Divide”, last modified October 6, 2023, <http://www.human-i-t.org/>.

English language face difficulties in using the internet.⁵³ Therefore, centers for digital inclusion should aim to fill the gaps for English as a Second Language women by designing more inclusive websites and learning tools, especially where the practiced language of the community is not found in digital inclusivity projects.

⁵⁴The digital divide is notably marked by different economic classes. Families with lower incomes tend to not have the resources to purchase digital devices or to pay for monthly subscription services. Specifically, those living in rural areas may not have access to broadband infrastructure that provides access to the internet. Rural areas usually are the last in line to learn about technological advancements. For instance, the growth of 5G technology and other advanced applications further cements the digital divide. Users that are not already familiar with a baseline understanding of ICTs will fall further and further behind.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, digital advancements should not only be seen as a further limiting factor. Emerging technologies such as satellite and mesh networks are alternatives that can serve

as solutions for the challenges of providing internet access to rural landscapes. With proper government funding, these technologies can promise faster infrastructure creation, reduced costs, and coverage to rural communities.⁵⁶

Projects like the Digital Literacy for Rural Women (PROFEA) project are designed to empower women by providing access to the digital economy, focusing on rural populations centered around personal development and social inclusion programs. One of the focuses of this project is targeting the territorial gap in rural areas. Spain has implemented PROFEA with the goal of targeting 180,000 women in eight rural areas, offering tailored digital literacy training via in-person sessions. Their State Public Employment Service (SEPE) oversees the program's management, ensuring adaptation to the student's needs and competencies. As of December 31, 2023, 85.57 percent of the target population have completed their digital training with improved personal, social, and work-related confidence.⁵⁷

While enhancing ICT infrastructure in rural areas helps the Gender Digital Divide, cultural and religious practices could

⁵³ "Language Barriers and Digital Equity", Benton Institute, last modified September 5, 2023, <http://www.benton.org/>.

⁵⁴ Emma Stone, Rebecca Rae-Evans and Kevin Maye, "Supporting digital inclusion of adults with low English language skills", (London: CarnegieUK, 2020), <http://carnegieuktrust.org/>.

⁵⁵ Impact of the Digital Divide: Economic, Social, and Educational Consequences", IEEE.

⁵⁶ Cooper, "The Stakes Are Too High to Not Solve the Rural Digital Divide"

⁵⁷ "Rural Women Digital Literacy: Breaking Barriers, Building Skills", European Union, last modified April 3, 2024, <http://year-of-skills.europa.eu/news/>.

Girls in rural Waist province of Iraq receive computers in their school

Credit: Sgt. 1st Class Stacy Niles



further exacerbate the limited access to ICTs. For example, Kenya is implementing policies to address gender and cultural norms that restrict women from engaging with digital platforms. The creation and application of gender-inclusive policies are essential to bridging the digital divide, especially in rural areas where these limitations are most present.⁵⁸

Bridging the digital literacy gap in rural areas requires a comprehensive solution. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution, and several areas of focus such as education.⁵⁹ For example, over 95 percent of children in rural communities in Uganda are not learning in the same quality as urban community and household level students due to limited access to electricity, internet, and related ICT tools. Children in these rural areas went through an even more significant setback with the COVID-19 lockdown, creating an estimated fifteen months of lost learning.⁶⁰ India understood that education and digital literacy were not separate entities. They worked in tandem, and if one was improved, the other would improve as well. The Digital India Programme laid the groundwork for implementing solutions to form a digital literate generation. Its area of focus was recognizing the pivotal role of making digital literacy a cornerstone of education. With low-cost connectivity solutions and user friendly devices supported by government funding to rural areas, digital inclusive communities will close the gap of the digital divide.⁶¹

While several countries are leading their initiatives to bridge the digital divide in their rural communities, the benefits on a global scale remain insufficient. Recently, the digital divide has also been expanding at an alarming rate. The GMSA Mobile Gender Gap Report of 2022 states that women's digital inclusion across low and middle-income countries was only 59 million in 2021, compared to 110 million in 2020. The data is alarming because men continued with high growth rates year after year. From 2017-2020 the mobile internet gender gap narrowed every year. In 2021, data from GMSA suggest that

progress reverted.⁶² The most recent GMSA Mobile Gender Gap Report of 2024 notes that overall women's rate of mobile internet adoption has increased to the point more women are using mobile internet than ever before, an estimated 1.5 billion. Yet, these improvements have only narrowed the gender gap back to where it was in 2020, meaning that progress on a global scale hasn't reached its all-time high. The report concludes that Growth in mobile use remains relatively flat, given that remaining women that do not own a mobile device are in particularly hard to reach rural communities, have low literacy levels, are older than 55, and are unemployed.⁶³

Bridging the digital divide in rural areas is a challenge that requires a multifaceted approach. While advancements in technology can be resourceful, it is more important to address the root causes of the Gender Digital Divide present in rural areas. Infrastructure limitations, economic disparities, and cultural barriers are crucial to progress. Governments, NGOS, and the private sector of the international community must work together to invest in digital infrastructure, its distributions, and more inclusive policies that empower women in these marginalized communities.

Current Status

Literacy for Women in Afghanistan

Between 2001 and 2018, Afghanistan had a tenfold increase in enrolment at all education levels from around 1 million students in 2001 to around 10 million in 2018. Specifically, the number of girls in primary school increased from almost zero in 2001 to 2.5 million in 2018. And by August 2021, four out of 10 students in primary education were girls. When talking about girls in higher education, the country saw an increase of almost 20 times, from 5,000 female students in 2001 to over 100,000 in 2021. Moreover, literacy rates for women doubled during the period, from 17 percent of women

58 Frederick Okello, "Bridging Kenya's Digital Divide: Context, Barriers and Strategies", (Ontario, CIGI, 2024), <http://www.cigionline.org/>,

59 Sudarshan Suchi, "Bridging the Gap: Digital Literacy Initiatives for Rural Communities", last modified March 22, 2024, <http://www.yourstory.org/>.

60 Olivia Mugabirwe, "Digital Literacy for Rural Schools", accessed September 10, 2024, <http://www.solve.mit.edu/>.

61 Suchi, "Bridging the Gap: Digital Literacy Initiatives for Rural Communities"

62 "New Report Shows Worrying Slow-down in Digital Inclusion for Women in Low- and Middle-Income Countries", GMSA, last modified June 15, 2022, <https://www.gsma.com/newsroom/press-release/new-gsma-data-is-a-wake-up-call-for-the-digital-gender-divide/>.

63 Nadia Jeffrie, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2024", (GMSA, 2024), <http://www.gsma.com/>.

being able to read and write in 2001 to nearly 30 percent for all age groups combined. All of this shows a significant increase in women and girls' education in Afghanistan. Even though the education system has had many efforts to be rebuilt since 2001, it seems that Afghanistan will continue to suffer from high illiteracy rates.⁶⁴ Additionally, August 2021 meant a step back for all these advancements.⁶⁵

The Taliban are an Islamic fundamentalist group that seized power in Afghanistan in 2021 after waging a 20-year insurgency. After the US invasion that overthrew their regime in 2001, the Taliban regrouped in the Pakistan border and began taking more and more territory. In 2020 a peace agreement was settled and afterwards the US withdrew its troops from the country, leading to the Taliban's return to power. The Taliban have imposed a harsh interpretation of Islamic law. Therefore, women and girls in the country have seen their rights obliterated. For instance, the Taliban prohibited most girls from attending secondary school and banned all women from attending and teaching at universities. This has affected literacy rates in the country.⁶⁶ Currently, 80 percent of Afghan girls and young women, meaning 2.5 million people, are out of school. Around 30 percent of girls in Afghanistan have never entered primary education.⁶⁷ Additionally, the Taliban has prohibited women from teaching, depriving women teachers of their jobs and often leaving students with unqualified replacement male teachers or sometimes no teachers at all. Corporal punishment has also been an increasing issue in schools in the country.⁶⁸

Political unrest and conflict are not the only barriers for Afghan girls and women in terms of literacy rates. Geographical barriers, such as long distances to schools, extreme weather in the desert, or high mountain ranges, could make it more difficult for girls to attend school if they do not have proper transportation or safe conditions to walk alone.⁶⁹

Compared to many other countries around the globe,

Afghanistan has an extremely poor technological infrastructure and faces significant challenges and improving their system. Continuous political conflict and instability have contributed to long-term blocks of development and infrastructure investments. When there is a bigger political issue, there is no time left for governments to focus on improving the digital infrastructure of the country. Additionally, after being involved in many wars the country faces great economic constraints and limited financial resources to invest into the tech sector. Technological infrastructure development is crucial for advancing literacy in Afghanistan, particularly in the modern day. Growth of mobile phone usage and internet access in urban areas helps bridge this gap. Nevertheless, the rural areas of Afghanistan lack access to reliable technological infrastructure. These technologies will remain even more limited for women and girls, who are often excluded from technology training programs throughout Afghanistan. Without equitable access to technological infrastructure throughout the country, benefits of female digital literacy will not be accessed. The future of literacy in Afghanistan will rely on citizen cooperation, collaborative efforts from the government, NGOs, and international organizations, as well as adequate digital framework and infrastructure.⁷⁰

Moreover, as seen in many other countries, poverty is attributed to the cycle of illiteracy. This makes the Afghan people, especially women, more susceptible to lower education rates since they do not have the same educational opportunities.⁷¹ In some parts of the country, a shortage of schools and insufficient transportation are the main obstacles to education. Additionally, once children do make it, they often receive a lower quality of education because only 48 percent of their teachers have the minimum academic qualifications which is equivalent to an associate degree. Most Afghan teachers hold an associate's degree while in most of the developing world most teachers must have master's degrees to be able to teach.

64 The Global Economy. "Female Literacy Rate (15-25)."

65 "Let girls and women in Afghanistan learn!" UNESCO, April 20, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/let-girls-and-women-afghanistan-learn>.

66 Lindsay Maizland, "The Taliban in Afghanistan," Council on Foreign Relations, January 19, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan>.

67 UNESCO, "Let girls and women in Afghanistan learn!"

68 Human Rights Watch. "Schools Are Failing Boys Too: The Taliban's Impact on Boys' Education in Afghanistan." December 6, 2023.

69 Human Rights Watch. "Schools Are Failing Boys Too: The Taliban's Impact on Boys' Education in Afghanistan." December 6, 2023.

70 UNICEF. "Education in Afghanistan."

71 UNICEF. "Education in Afghanistan."



Group of Afghan girls in school
Credit: Sgt. Kimberly Lamb

Unfortunately, almost half of Afghan teachers are not qualified to even be teaching.⁷² On average, girls in poor households are much less likely to attend school than girls in wealthier households.⁷³ Furthermore, the lack of future employment opportunities for girls pose a barrier for families investing in their education. The labor market is closed to women in many provinces.

Persistent culture barriers that Afghanistan continues to challenge these initiatives. Traditional cultural practices also contribute to low literacy, particularly due to the Taliban's repressive education policies.⁷⁴ These policies limit educational access to women and girls, repressing them and not even giving them the opportunity to get an education. Educating adolescent girls carries multiple perceived risks such as safety, health, and social repercussions. Moreover, the traditional perception of purity and marriage opportunities often outweigh the perceived benefits from the parents' perspective of literacy and education. Additionally, the threat of sexual harassment and abuse are especially significant factors that deter parents from sending their daughters to school. Essentially, there is a

belief that keeping adolescent girls at home protects them and ensures their purity. Furthermore, religious beliefs have also been a barrier for girls and women in the literacy aspect. Many families assume girls are only meant to be protected inside the house and do not send their daughters to school. Additionally, girls face restrictions due to taboos around menstruation.⁷⁵

The United Nations has taken actions to improve literacy rates in Afghanistan. Logar province is one of the most conservative places in the country. Girl and women's access to education was very rare even before the Taliban seized power. Therefore, UNESCO launched a community-based program called Basic General Literacy Classes.⁷⁶ Essentially, UNESCO and local NGOs partner together to train teachers and provide them a certification. Afterwards, these teachers give reading and writing classes to women and girls. Currently, over 1,000 women and young girls between the ages of 15 to 45 are enrolled in these courses. Moreover, considering the lack of access to resources, UNESCO also provides digital materials in accordance with international standards and their cultural context.⁷⁷

⁷² "Education," UNICEF, accessed on September 1, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education>.

⁷³ "Education Equity Profile for Adolescent Girls," UNICEF, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/5491/file/Afghanistan%20%E2%80%93%20Education%20Equity%20Profile%20for%20Adolescent%20Girls.pdf>.

⁷⁴ UNICEF, "Education in Afghanistan."

⁷⁵ UNICEF, "Education Equity Profile for Adolescent Girls."

⁷⁶ "How UNESCO is supporting Afghan girls and women with literacy classes," UNESCO, October 20, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/how-unesco-supporting-afghan-girls-and-women-literacy-classes?hub=701>.

⁷⁷ UNESCO, "How UNESCO is supporting Afghan girls and women with literacy classes."

This initiative has proven to be successful. Bi Bi, a 32-year-old woman mentioned: “In the past, I was not allowed to attend school by my father but now my husband allows me to join UNESCO’s classes and learn. I have nine children: Eight girls and one boy. I want my girls to go to school and I want to help them learn.”⁷⁸ Currently, because of the education she received on digital literacy, she is a home-based tailor who works independently and even manages her income and expenses.

Initiatives like this help women and girls in Afghanistan access education and improve the digital literacy rates in the country. This is why the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Government of Japan are now supporting UNESCO’s program. They are now providing Basic General Literacy classes to over 25,000 people in Afghanistan, of which 60 percent are women and girls in over 20 provinces. The classes last nine months and have a numeracy curriculum equivalent to Grades 1 to 3 of general education. The goal of these organizations is simple: teaching girls and women how to read and write, ensuring a bright future for them and their country.⁷⁹

The development of technology infrastructure in Afghanistan is crucial for increasing the female digital literacy rate in the country. Much of the country lacks reliable digital infrastructure, setting Afghanistan back when compared with other countries in the same region. In Afghanistan, access to digital literacy resources remain limited, with modern day rates still falling behind. Unfortunately, there is no current promise for improvement due to political issues and economic constraints. The history of literacy, especially female digital literacy, in Afghanistan has always had significant gender gaps in education and literacy. However, as delegates of the CSW it is your responsibility to figure out tangible solutions that can shrink these gaps. It is essential to foster a culture that values the education of all genders and promotes equality among both men and women. Afghanistan still has many steps to take to build a more literate society, especially teaching digital skills

to Afghan women and girls.⁸⁰

Proposed Solutions

In a modern digitized world, countries and governments can be creative and supportive with how they create solutions to close the female digital literacy gap. Online safety can be promoted, educators can be re-taught on how to educate inclusively, and educators can be shown how to promote female students to feel comfortable in digital spaces.⁸¹

Different types of approaches have been taken to reduce the literacy gap and foster digital skills among women and girls. For instance, in Chad, the Ministry of National Education and Promotion of Civic Responsibility launched the Girls’ Education and Women’s Literacy Project (PEFAF) to promote quality education and functional literacy for girls and women. The project aimed to increase access for girls’ enrolment in middle, or secondary school or vocational training. Additionally, it seeks to provide functional digital literacy programs for women with a focus on learning a trade linked to income-generating activities. Lastly, it focuses on improving the quality of education and training for girls and women. To achieve this, PEFAF aims to rebuild two schools and construct a new one while also providing all digital equipment necessary like laptops, mobile phones, digital boards, and so on. The project also provides teachers with the necessary skills to educate the women and girls enrolled. PEFAF has helped over 5,000 girls and 7,000 women. It also trained over 2,200 teachers.⁸²

Accessing education is a first step, but certainly not the only one. Some countries can have a high access rate, but a low retention rate. This is the case of Senegal. This country has almost 100 percent access to primary education, but only 51 percent of a completion rate. Evidently illiteracy is a major issue in the country, particularly for women. 30 percent of women in the country are considered literate, compared to 62 percent of men. This affects even more women and girls

78 UNESCO, “How UNESCO is supporting Afghan girls and women with literacy classes.”

79 UNESCO, “How UNESCO is supporting Afghan girls and women with literacy classes.”

80 “Expanding Connectivity to Pave the Way for Digital Transformation in Afghanistan,” World Bank, February 11, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2021/02/11/expanding-connectivity-pave-way-digital-transformation-afghanistan>.

81 United Nations. “Digital Safety.”

82 “Chad - Girls’ Education and Women’s Literacy Project (PEFAF),” African Development Bank Group, accessed September 2, 2024, <https://mapafrica.afdb.org/en/projects/46002-P-TD-IAE-002>.

in situations of poverty. Without literacy skills, the cycle of poverty will only continue, deepening social and economic inequality in the country.⁸³

Because of these issues, UNESCO launched the Literacy Project for Girls and Women in Senegal (PAJEF) to improve the literacy skills of over 40,000 girls and women aged between 15 and 55 years and to explore the role ICTs can play in this. For instance, they teach the participants how to write through text messages using mobile phones. The program aims to improve literacy by introducing new technologies such as ICTs, phones, TV, and more. The curriculum focuses on four areas: language and communication, social education, entrepreneurship, and vocational training. However, the areas are adapted based on the needs of each student. Additionally, UNESCO partnered with Radio Télévision Sénégalaise, Senegal's national television station, to help make television a key feature in the classroom, including news and educational programs. This has ensured that young girls and women not only improve their basic literacy skills, but also learn about nutrition, health, and other important issues.⁸⁴

PAJEF has made the courses available on CD, television, and mobile applications. Therefore, young girls and women

⁸³ "Literacy Project for Girls and Women using ICTs, Senegal," UNESCO, May 23, 2024, <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/litbase/literacy-project-girls-and-women-using-icts-senegal>.

⁸⁴ UNESCO, "Literacy Project for Girls and Women using ICTs, Senegal."

⁸⁵ UNESCO, "Literacy Project for Girls and Women using ICTs, Senegal."

are available to improve their skills on a day-to-day basis and wherever they are located. The benefits are many. The program has opened more than 200 classrooms equipped with a digital kit including a laptop, an interactive beamer, and a digital board. In a single year, the program has achieved over 4,000 girls and women enrolled with 54 percent of those ready to transfer into formal education. Additionally, over 110 teachers were trained and around 800 girls at risk of dropping out of school were given help. Ultimately, girls and women are not only improving their literacy skills but learning about the new technologies in a globalized world as well.⁸⁵

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has conducted research in Lebanon and Uganda to understand the digital literacy gender gap. Their studies showed that some of the barriers women and girls face are the lack of technical confidence, disapproval attitudes towards their use of phones, among others. Therefore, the IRC developed a gender-sensitive curriculum for women and girls. It covers different topics including: an introduction to digital spaces, digital accounts and apps, finding information online, staying safe online, social media, and digital employment and education skills. The program notably increased the participants skills

Girls in Uganda learning how to publish articles on the Internet

Credit: Geoffrey Kateregga



in crucial digital areas, including online navigation, secure account management, and proactive online safety strategies. This translated into tangible benefits, like resume writing, new job platforms, and online skill development programs. Based on such success, the IRC broadened the program, and it is now freely available to other organizations and in different languages like Arabic, Burmese, English, French, and Spanish.⁸⁶

It is necessary to decrease the literacy rate gap that currently exists. However, it is seen that that gap is larger in conflict zones. Girls and women face significant barriers when trying to obtain an education when they live in a context of war, political unstableness, and the like. Girls in conflict are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than girls not in these contexts. Additionally, 90 percent of the girls in secondary school are more likely to drop out if they live in a conflict environment. These statistics are very concerning. Several countries have taken different steps. In Nigeria, the World Bank launched the Adolescent Girls' Initiative for Learning and Empowerment. It has focused on renovating destroyed or abandoned classrooms. With this, over 5,000 classrooms have been restored. Moreover, the program has offered scholarships to impoverished families affected by conflict, leading to over 250,000 young girls and women receiving an education. Specifically, the program provides different skills in the digital literacy area. Literacy education serves as a positive support for girls and women living in a conflict context. Nevertheless, it is often difficult for them to access it considering the fragile environments. Therefore, it is necessary to consider different pathways using technology to ensure quality education.⁸⁷

Other types of solutions have been not in how the education is being provided but the content of the actual education. Teachers can support the reduction of the literacy gender gap by using materials that empower female students. Some educators have been using digital materials that feature strong female characters, thus expanding student perspectives of empowered

people. Focusing on female writers is another opportunity for students to learn about successful women through literacy. Additionally, some teachers have also developed writing activities that allow students to write about women of interest, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding about the woman they selected and share information. The goal of these activities is to provide female students with examples of how to tackle challenges they face with confidence by reading and writing about similar experiences.⁸⁸

If digital education content is more aligned and stereotyped with male interests while they are young, girls might feel less interested or represented. They may not feel like they have a space in this field and search for other non-digital careers and activities. The presence of role models in digital fields can inspire children to pursue similar paths. A lack of female role models and digital education can make it harder for girls to envision themselves in these fields. It is important for schools to highlight the accomplishments of not just men but women also in digital spaces. As women get older it may be harder to de-root some of these old stereotypical beliefs that they cannot use technology as men can.⁸⁹

Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as the basis for the United Nations 2030 Agenda. SDGs are supposed to be achieved by the year 2030, tackling a wide variety of social, political, and economic issues. They take on a global and diplomatic approach to these issues. So far, there has already been significant progress in these areas. Digital literacy holds the transformative potential to reduce inequality. While all SDGs contain underlying themes that relate to the present topic, there are four key goals that are most relevant.

The SDG most relevant to reducing the digital literacy gap is SDG 4: Quality Education. The goal seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning

86 "Safe Space to Learn: Digital Literacy and Inclusion for Women and Girls in Humanitarian Settings," International Rescue Committee, January 23, 2024, <https://www.rescue.org/report/safe-space-learn-digital-literacy-and-inclusion-women-and-girls-humanitarian-settings>.

87 Raja Bentaouet Kattan and Myra Murad Khan, "Girls' education in conflict is most at risk: Here's how to reach them," World Bank, March 12, 2024, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/education/girls-education-conflict-most-risk-heres-how-reach-them>.

88 Jill Tussey and Leslie Haas, "Girl Power Through Literacy," World Literacy Foundation, September 19, 2021, <https://worldliteracyfoundation.org/girl-power-through-literacy/>.

89 UNESCO, "Media and Information Literacy in an Age of Uncertainty."

opportunities for all.⁹⁰ The United Nations outlined ten targets related to SDG 4. They created these to measure progress in this area. The targets seek to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. SDG 4 also focuses on achieving universal literacy, which is particularly key to this topic.⁹¹

Moreover, SDG 1: No Poverty is also related to digital literacy.⁹² Since digital education was introduced, digital literacy inequalities have remained a significant worldwide issue. The most unequal differences are seen between developing and non-developing countries, with disparities rooted in economic and cultural factors.⁹³ Women's opportunities and professional educational spaces are at risk without modern-day digital literacy skills. Families in situations of poverty may choose to prioritize boys' education over girls. Because of past beliefs they believe that investing in their sons may give them better economic returns or just believe that women will grow up to take on traditional gender roles such as taking care of the house.⁹⁴ Educating girls and women in digital literacy can open their door to countless economic opportunities, ultimately achieving this specific SDG.

Additionally, Goal 5: Gender Equality and Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries, aim to provide equal chances for young girls and women to attend school and receive quality education. This goal focuses on helping girls and women worldwide attend school. Girls are a very vulnerable group, especially regarding education.⁹⁵ Digital literacy can dramatically improve the quality of young girls and women's lives. Technology can be used to dismantle barriers that perpetuate inequality and can uplift those out of poverty. Ultimately, providing girls and women education

in digital literacy can be a useful tool for gender equality and empower them towards paths of social and economic mobility.

The SDGs are an urgent call to action for all member states of the United Nations and in this committee, specifically, to all members of the CSW. With the 2030 deadline for the SDGs quickly approaching, female education in the digital world can help us make rapid and important progress and build a society that is equitable and full of prosperity.⁹⁷

Bloc Analysis

Points of Division

For this bloc division the World Bank Literacy Rate was used. Specifically, the layer 'map' and then filtered by gender and age 15+. This rate measures different indicators related to educational attainments, for example females above 15 years old who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement about their everyday life.⁹⁸ This statistic is important because it evaluates the progress of education and gender equality in different states. Literacy rates are crucial to understand the opportunities available to women. Higher literacy is generally associated with better employment opportunities and participation in decision-making. Female education has seen progress, it is estimated that between 1995 and 2018 the number of illiterate girls and young women reduced almost by 50 percent.⁹⁹ This can be related to technology as it facilitates the educational process by offering powerful online platforms.¹⁰⁰

This index can help governments identify their progress related to education and gender equality. Analyzing the scores over the years can be used to measure the impact of educational

90 "Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities For All," United Nations, accessed September 2, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>.

91 "Sustainable Development Goal 4," SDG Tracker, accessed September 2, 2024, <https://sdg-tracker.org/quality-education>.

92 "End Poverty in all its Forms Everywhere," United Nations, accessed September 2, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>.

93 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Millions of Girls Are Out of School."

94 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Millions of Girls Are Out of School."

95 "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls," United Nations, accessed September 2, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>.

96 "Reduce inequality within and among countries," United Nations, accessed September 2, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal10>.

97 "The 17 Goals," United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, accessed September 2, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

98 "Literacy rate (%)," World Bank, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/se-adt>.

99 "5 Things You Should Know About Girls Around the World," Equal Everywhere, last modified October 3, 2022, https://equateverywhere.org/story/5-things-you-should-know-about-girls-around-the-world/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCCQjwi5q3BhCiARIsAJCfuZk4ZJakQqD_q8dZx_srYcLQFNhH8sxxYAFb8HnsZnrILOTCGQUTl_saAlhHEALw_wcB.

100 Equal Everywhere, "5 Things You Should Know About Girls Around the World."

policies. States should adjust national strategies according to their need to achieve gender equality in education. Using the index and the scores given by the World Bank, the blocs have been divided into three groups. Low female literacy rates, which includes all the states that have a percentage under 40. Countries with percentages between 40 and 70 are going to be considered as medium female literacy rates. Finally, all those countries with a percentage above 70 will be considered with a high female literacy rate. It is important that states address educational gaps, as educated women are empowered to make positive contributions to the development of the country.

Low Female Literacy Rates

Countries within this bloc are those that have a percentage under 40 in the World Bank Literacy Rate. Different factors can cause the low levels, such as cultural factors, ongoing conflicts, gender norms, poverty, among others. States facing political instability and conflicts struggle to provide quality education and interrupt their educational process. UNESCO estimates that girls living in conflict zones are twice as likely to be out of school than girls living in non-affected countries.¹⁰¹ Cultural beliefs and gender roles are also crucial, as young girls are discouraged from studying and expected to do domestic labors from an early age. Countries in this bloc should work on improving education and reducing gender gaps.

For example, Afghanistan has a 22 percent female literacy, one of the lowest in the world.¹⁰² The situation has worsened with the rise of the Taliban Regime. In 2022 they imposed strict limitations on women's education. The Taliban Regime prohibited girls' education after sixth grade, also banning universities for young women.¹⁰³ UNESCO has worked closely to improve women's education in Afghanistan. They launched the program Basic General Literacy (BGL) where they provide

basic education –equivalent to first to third grade– to young adults. It is estimated that over 60 percent of the participants of this program are women.¹⁰⁴

Other countries within this bloc are South Sudan, with 28 percent of women knowing how to write and read, Burkina Faso, with 29 percent, and Mali, with 22 percent. Countries in this bloc usually rely on international aid to provide education. Policies and solutions should focus on improving educational systems despite their circumstances and reducing gender gaps in the educational system.

Medium Female Literacy Rates

This bloc includes all the countries that have a percentage between 40 and 70 in the World Bank Literacy Rate. States in this bloc have made efforts to promote gender equality in education and are still working on reducing the gap and improving education. Increasing rates can be related to the modernization process in state members. The United Nations estimates that education is crucial for the development and stabilization of the states.¹⁰⁵

For example, India's last report on the index gives them a 69 percent.¹⁰⁶ India has implemented several policies to improve female literacy rates, focusing on addressing the urban-rural gap.¹⁰⁷ Rural areas are still dependent on traditional norms and economic conditions that prevent girls from pursuing education. India launched the "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" –Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter– campaign in 2015.¹⁰⁸ It aims to encourage the education of girls by improving educational infrastructure in rural areas and creating awareness around the importance of female education. In addition, the program also counts with small saving programs. Parents can open bank accounts for girls below 10 years old

101 "Female Literacy Rate in Spain (2010 - 2021, %)" Global Data, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://www.globaldata.com/data-insights/macroeconomic/female-literacy-rate-in-spain/>.

102 "Community-based Literacy and Complementary Learning Possibilities," UNESCO, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/fieldoffice/kabul/expertise/education/literacy-learning-possibilities>.

103 Fershta Barakzai, "Women's Education Under The Taliban," Global History Dialogues, last modified 2023, <https://globalhistorydialogues.org/projects/womens-education-under-the-taliban/>.

104 UNESCO, "Community-based Literacy and Complementary Learning Possibilities."

105 "Spread of literacy among women highlighted in UNESCO anniversary global review," United Nations, last modified April 21, 2017, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/04/555752>.

106 World Bank, "Literacy rate (%)."

107 Yash Gupte, "India's female literacy is going up but rural-urban education divide continues," India Tracker, last modified December, 2022, <https://www.indiatracker.in/story/indias-female-literacy-is-going-up-but-rural-urban-education-divide-continues>.

108 "Top-6 government schemes for girls' education in India," India Today, last modified May 21, 2024, <https://bestcolleges.indiatoday.in/news-detail/top-6-government-schemes-for-girls-education-in-india>.

and withdrawn the money once they are 18, aiming to reduce child marriage and girls to finish their education.¹⁰⁹

Other countries in this bloc include Angola, Mozambique, Pakistan, Senegal. States in this bloc should focus on keeping their scores rising by evaluating the effectiveness of their policies and programs implemented.

High Female Literacy Rates

This bloc includes all the countries that have a percentage above 70 in the World Bank Literacy Rate. Countries on this bloc are all those that have achieved gender equality in education or are close to do it. These scores reflect the efforts and effectiveness of the policies. States of this bloc should focus on keeping their scores while helping other countries to achieve gender equality in education. Their policies and educational models are used as examples and implemented in other countries trying to achieve female literacy.

For example, Spain is characterized for having a continuous high female literacy rate since 2010. In 2021 they reported 99.77 percent of female literacy, and it is estimated that it grows 0.02 percent per year.¹¹⁰ Recent initiatives focus on promoting gender equality in closing remaining gaps, particularly in fields like STEM. It is estimated that men represent almost 77 percent of applicants to engineering schools.¹¹¹ Therefore, the government has implemented different policies to promote female participation in STEM from young ages and early stages of education. *Niñas en Pie de Ciencia—Girls on Science*—was a report done by the State Secretariat for Education to implement activities that spark interest in scientific careers from an early age.¹¹² These policies not only maintain the high literacy rate but also work to reduce the remaining gaps and ensure employment opportunities and women empowerment in different sectors.

Other countries in this bloc are Brazil, Colombia, Ukraine and

Portugal. It is important to share the experience and trajectory of these countries so that it can be implemented in other states and ensure female literacy globally.

Committee Mission

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established in 1946 after the states under the Commission on Human Rights recognized the importance of having a commission dedicated just to women’s rights. Its mandate is to prepare recommendations and reports to the ECOSOC on promoting women’s rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields.¹¹³ CSW meets yearly to address the challenges women keep facing around the world. CSW68 took place in 2024 and focused on eliminating poverty. One of the events hosted by UNESCO addressed the barriers through education, culture, and sciences.¹¹⁴

Delegates will work on drafting realistic and accessible solutions to bridging the gender digital literacy gap, recognizing the complex and regional issues. Delegates will want to focus on debating how we can make technology more accessible, spread awareness about the gender gap in technology, and encourage women to participate in STEM fields. Technology has been and will continue to be present for the lives of everyone on Earth today. Delegates must understand why digital literacy is very important in everyday areas such as education, and work. Our committee will focus on finding ways to increase access to reliable technology for women, draft solutions that outline how we can sustainably increase technology, and finally encourage women to find their place in technological fields. Understanding the importance of technology as a tool to achieve gender equality, especially in education. Delegates are free to be creative with their ideas, as there are countless ways to bridge these gaps. We will discuss regional issues, such as Afghanistan’s literacy rates and the digital divide for

¹⁰⁹ India Today, “Top-6 government schemes for girls’ education in India.”

¹¹⁰ Global Data, “Female Literacy Rate in Spain (2010 - 2021, %).”

¹¹¹ “The tech industry’s persistent gender gap in Spain,” Do Better, last modified July 6, 2023, <https://dobetter.esade.edu/en/tech-industry-gender-gap-persistent-spain>.

¹¹² “Niñas en pie de ciencia», un nuevo impulso para las vocaciones STEAM,” Digitales, last edited February 8, 2021, <https://www.digitales.es/ninas-en-pie-de-ciencia-un-nuevo-impulso-para-las-vocaciones-steam/>.

¹¹³ “Women at the UN: Everything you need to know about #CSW68,” United Nations, last modified March 7, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147362>.

¹¹⁴ “UNESCO highlights initiatives to eradicate poverty and accelerate gender equality at CSW68,” UNESCO, last modified March 13, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-highlights-initiatives-eradicate-poverty-and-accelerate-gender-equality-csw68>.

refugee women. Our purpose now is to find realistic solutions, especially in a post-Covid digitalized world.



CSW

NHSMUN 2025



TOPIC B: GENDER EQUALITY IN SPORTS

Photo Credit: Marie-Lan Nguyen

Introduction

Women have faced gender inequality and discrimination throughout history in different situations. This includes professional environments, learning environments, and even extracurriculars such as sports. While there has been growth in the opportunities and rights that female athletes have, a lot of issues continue to arise. When the United States (US) passed Title IX in 1972, it outlawed any discrimination based on sex for any educational activity.¹ This led to significant increases in opportunities for female athletes in the US and created a foundation for other countries to follow. While this allowed for an increase in participation, this did not correct many of the other inequalities in women's sports. Several years later, women around the world are still facing many of the same issues of discrimination, lack of resources, and unequal pay to their male counterparts. While the US and other countries have supported the rights of their female athletes, some countries still discourage or completely restrict females from participating in sports or competing on a global scale. One example includes Saudi Arabia, which did not allow a single woman to compete in the 2012 Olympic Games.² On the other hand, Norway was the first country to pay their female and male football players the same amount in 2017.³ Although great strides have been made in women's sports, there is still much more to do.

With a rise in urbanization, industrialization, and increased global relations, sports became a massive form of entertainment and contributor to societies worldwide. With the state's passing legislation for female athletes, many organizations in sports followed. In the 2024 Olympic Games, for the first time, female athletes will have the same number of spots as male athletes. One concern that still might persist, however, is media coverage. Not only have women athletes received less coverage across platforms, but also the way that they have commonly been portrayed is also questionable. Women athletes are often portrayed as lesser than or inappropriately based on many stereotypical or discriminatory factors. A study from 2014 to 2019 concluded that coverage of female athletes did decrease in discriminatory marks, but found that these stories received less attention and excitement compared to men's sports stories.⁴ In another study, by Nielson research, a survey concluded that 84 percent of sports fans claimed to have an interest in women's sports.⁵ Thus, the problem lies

in how female athletes are portrayed and how often they are broadcast across media platforms. If women are appropriately displayed across all media platforms, then the stronger interest in inappropriate content may finally cease.

UN Women outlined many aspects that women can benefit from in sports. Women have been proven to have long-term impacts from participating in sports. In a 2023 report, 85 percent of the women surveyed claimed that they developed skills by playing sports that were applicable to their professional success. Sports allow women to practice and master many crucial skills, like leadership, teamwork, time management, and resilience. These skills can allow a young woman to thrive in the professional world and have a better chance at attaining a professional career and leadership role. This can contribute to further benefits in other aspects of her life, such as her financial success and security. As far as leadership roles within the sports sector, only 26.9 percent of positions in international sports

1 Cheryl Cooky, "The Unevenness of Social Change in Women's Sports in the United States: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," Gatorade Sports Science Institute, May 2023, <https://www.gssiweb.org/sports-science-exchange/article/the-unevenness-of-social-change-in-women-s-sports-in-the-united-states-historical-and-contemporary-perspectives>.

2 "IOC/Saudi Arabia: End Ban on Women in Sport," Human Rights Watch, February 12, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/15/ioc/saudi-arabia-end-ban-women-sport>.

3 "Gender equality: Women empowerment in sports and science," UNESCO, July 5, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality-women-empowerment-sports-and-science>.

4 Cooky, "The Unevenness of Social Change in Women's Sports in the United States."

5 Lynsey Douglas, "The Rise of Women's Sports: Identifying and Maximizing the Opportunity," Nielsen, 2018, <https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/04/the-rise-of-womens-sports.pdf>

federations are held by female executives.⁶

While these numbers are promising, they are still not equal. Female athletes and sports can have a significant impact on their audience members, as a survey claimed that 88 percent of sports fans regard female athletes as impactful role models for young women.⁷ A woman from Afghanistan, Nadia Nadim, recently shared her story of living under the Taliban's tyranny, living in a refugee camp in Denmark, and then becoming a female athlete and doctor. She first started playing on local football teams in Denmark and then made the national team in 2009. She is now recognized as a UNESCO Champion for Girls' and Women's Education and works against gender stereotypes and discrimination.⁸

The marginalization and restrictions placed on women, in and outside of sports, undervalue their talents and their abilities. This can limit and hinder growth for both women and society. Moving forward, the issues in women's sports must be recognized, accurately measured, and corrected. Many concerns like equal pay, media coverage, funding, and leadership opportunities persist. As the interest to watch and participate in women's sports increases, all member states should strive to create a safe, equal, and welcoming environment, so that these athletes can fully benefit the sport and society that they compete in. To do this, it will take active advocacy, global support, and changes in public policy, which is not always easy to achieve but is long overdue.

History and Description of the Issue

Gender Inequality and Discrimination in Sports

Since sports are a popular element of culture and society, they often reflect social norms and behaviors. In terms of women's sports, this often means gender roles and stereotypes. When

considering history and traditional roles, one can identify how the past still impacts women's sports today. For example, women often did not physically exert themselves, nor was it deemed appropriate for them to do so for a variety of reasons. Common societal expectations for sports did not originally include women in the picture. Mostly because they were not seen as physically capable or had a personal interest in it. Women were expected to sit on the sidelines, watch and support, but never participate.

Whether you look at tournaments in the Renaissance period or World War I and II, women were kept from the action and were given a reserved spot on the side. As the sports market grew, female athletes were already at a disadvantage. They had to prove they were physically capable and interested in participating in such sports. Women had to find a way to juggle society's expectations, of being a good student, a dutiful wife, a homemaker, or a successful mother. That is where women were expected to be and that was their 'place' in life, not on the sports field. They had to work for that place on the field when men were simply handed it. Sports alone does not have the power to change these cultural norms or perceptions that are so deeply rooted in our history and generational behavior. However, Maria Bobenrieth, the executive director of the international non-governmental organization Women Win, asserts that by making sporting spaces more equitable, the opportunities for women grow exponentially.⁹ This should make improving women's sports a priority when discussing the status of women.

The Women Win organization has outlined numerous efforts that would lessen the inequality within women's sports while also improving the status of women overall.¹⁰ One of their initiatives, called Building Young Women's Leadership through Sport, was created in 2013 to help young girls play a more active role in society and their personal lives. They provided the resources and ability for these young girls to enjoy sports

⁶ "85% of Women Surveyed Who Played Sports Say It's Important to Their Career Success," Deloitte, September 19, 2023, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/press-releases/new-deloitte-tv-spots-turn-the-tables-on-fandom-as-survey-reveals-girls-who-play-sports-are-likely-to-have-successful-careers.html>

⁷ "From Moment to Mainstream: What Consumers in 7 Countries Really Think about Women's Sports," Parity. May, 2024, <https://paritynow.co/report-2024-parity-surveymonkey>.

⁸ "Gender equality," UNESCO, accessed on August 5, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality>.

⁹ Maria Bobenrieth, "Play It Forward: The Untapped Potential of Sport to Accelerate Global Progress towards Gender Equity," United Nations, August, 2016, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/play-it-forward-untapped-potential-sport-accelerate-global-progress-towards-gender-equity>.

¹⁰ Bobenrieth, "Play It Forward"

across seven different countries and with the help of eight other partner institutions. The selected countries included Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zambia. The partner institutions were local corporations with similar goals of uplifting female athletes and improving equality, such as the Naz Foundation in India or the Sadili Oval in Kenya.¹¹ During this time, they provided gender-based skills and education focused on gender equity and combating gender-based violence and discrimination.¹² When the history of women’s sports is evaluated, one can discover the multiple ways that women’s sports and society are interconnected. For example, women having more opportunities to participate in sports can lead to more job and leadership opportunities. Like how women’s sports reflect societal norms, they also have the power to change inequalities and define gender roles and expectations. Organizations like Women Win and these initiatives can make lasting changes and improvements, but it must be implemented on a large scale and with supporting policy.

According to a study performed by the Women’s Sports Foundation (WSF), they reported that 60 percent of

11 “Building Young Women’s Leadership through Sport,” Women Win, January 1, 2015, <https://search.issuelab.org/resource/building-young-women-s-leadership-through-sport.html>.

12 Bobenrieth, “Play It Forward”

13 Charlotte Gibson, “Report finds strides made in women’s sports in past few years, but inequality remains,” ESPN, January 15, 2020, https://www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/28489077/report-finds-strides-made-women-sports-years-inequality-remains.

14 Federico Ilaria, Mario Bowden, and Stéphane Hamalian, “Gender Inequality in Sport: The Challenges Facing Female Athletes,” Euronews, July 27, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/07/27/gender-inequality-in-sport-the-challenges-facing-female-athletes>.

female sports leaders claimed to have experienced sexual discrimination in their profession. Additionally, 60 percent are being paid less compared to a man doing the same job.¹³ Despite the rise or improvements made in women’s sports, issues of stereotyping and discriminatory comments accompany it. Women have achieved the ability to participate in sports and receive coaching, training, gear, and opportunities to compete locally and internationally. However, they are still struggling to be treated appropriately, compensated fairly, and have the same number of resources as male athletes. For example, two commentators from Italy made derogatory comments about the appearance of the women’s diving team from the Netherlands during the 2023 World Swimming Championships.¹⁴ Angela Schneider, an Olympian in rowing and director of the International Center for Olympic Studies in London, explained to a reporter that media coverage for female athletes traditionally focuses on their bodies or marital status rather than their athletic performance or achievements. Schnieder claimed that media coverage of women’s sports has made improvements, however, these discriminatory and inappropriate attitudes and behaviors are still present and



Young girls playing sports in school
 Credit: US Department of Education

common.¹⁵ This creates an inaccurate depiction of women's sports and disrespects female athletes and the work they have invested. Moreover, this can lead to hurtful environments that these women might be subjected to before, during, or after their performance.

A report from Canadian Women & Sport argued that sexism and discrimination are responsible, along with many structural barriers, for stalling progress in women's sports and its growth as a profession. The report also explored the investments that take place for women's sports and proved that the discriminatory bias and gender stereotypes about female athletes have impacted investment decisions in the industry.¹⁶ Funding is an important factor in sports, and it can impact the athletes involved in nearly every way possible. It can determine how many people can watch them compete, how much they are paid, their contracts, their sponsorships, and their uniforms and gear. Along with remarks about female athletes' marital status, a 2016 study from Cambridge University, discovered that women's sports receive a disproportionate focus on what the athletes are wearing, their appearance, and emphasize "aesthetics over athletics." When they analyzed media reports and coverage, they found words commonly associated with female athletes included, "aged," "unmarried," or "pregnant." On the other hand, common word associations for male athletes included, "strong," "fast," or "great." They also claim that male athletes are most likely to be referred to as "men," while female athletes are commonly referred to as "girls" or "ladies."¹⁷ This report shows that even tiny details like the words used to describe athletes, can display the gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices that are deeply rooted and practiced in society. When hearing some of these words alone, one may not think anything of it, but upon further research and comparison, the way female and male athletes are viewed and treated are different and unequal. The more that these word associations are used, the more likely they are

to continue these gender stereotypes in media and for future generations.

One athlete who has received a lot of scrutiny over her appearance is Simone Biles, a US gymnast. Leading up to the 2016 Olympic Games, Biles received attention for her academic dominance over and competitiveness over other fellow US gymnasts. Sadly, this also led to a lot of scrutiny and sexist remarks through the media. It was during this time that many reporters were comparing her to many other great, but male athletes, in which Biles said "I'm not the next Usain Bolt or Michael Phelps. I'm the first Simone Biles."¹⁸ In the 2023 US Classic, Biles had the best all-around score, however, social media made negative remarks about the appearance of her hair.

There have also been some concerning situations about the uniforms that female athletes are given or required to wear. In 2021, the Norwegian beach handball team was fined EUR 150 by the International Handball Federation for wearing shorts instead of the mandated bikini bottoms. While the rule for this was later changed following media resentment and protest from the Norwegian team, many other teams and sports display female athletes in similar uniforms. Moreover, the Norwegian team has been complaining to the International Handball Federation since 2006, through numerous letters, complaints, and motions during conferences. They argued that wearing bikini bottoms was not necessary for performance and that in Norwegian domestic tournaments, they were already allowed to wear shorts instead.¹⁹

This simple, yet understandable request, took several years to correct. Some of these uniforms are specific to the sport and the physical performance it demands. Nevertheless, a female athlete should always have the option to wear what she feels comfortable in without facing judgment or penalty. When comparing female and male uniforms in sports, there

¹⁵ Natalie Stechyson, "Women's sports are having a moment, but sexism is still holding back success," CBC Canada, April 23, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/womens-sports-sexualizing-athletes-1.7180765>.

¹⁶ "It's Time: A Roadmap for Accelerating Professional Women's Sport in Canada," Canadian Women & Sport, accessed on August 5, 2024, https://womenandsport.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/ItsTime-Roadmap-Womens-Pro-Sports-Canadian-Women-Sport.pdf?utm_source=form&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=itstime2024.

¹⁷ "Aesthetics over athletics when it comes to women in sport," University of Cambridge, August 12, 2016, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/aesthetics-over-athletics-when-it-comes-to-women-in-sport>.

¹⁸ Stechyson, "Women's sports are having a moment"

¹⁹ Jenny Gross, "Women's Handball Players Are Fined for Rejecting Bikini Uniforms," The New York Times, July 20, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/20/sports/norway-beach-handball-team.html>

are a few situations where female uniforms are significantly more revealing than male uniforms. For example, in track, professional female athletes typically wear a bra and bikini bottoms, while men wear spandex shorts, usually reaching right above their knee, and tank tops. This difference in uniforms is also seen in gymnastics when comparing men and women. A female athlete should always be allowed to wear what uniform she feels comfortable in and perform to her fullest ability. It is unfair for female athletes to be expected or mandated to wear a more revealing uniform. The development of female athletes' uniforms being more revealing dates back throughout history and ties into gender stereotypes.²⁰

Another notable female athlete, Serena Williams, one of the most decorated female tennis players, has faced constant sexist and racist criticism about her body, appearance, and even her clothing choices. A reporter from Vox outlined that following the French Open in 2015, “Williams was compared to an animal, likened to a man, and deemed frightening and horrifyingly unattractive.”²¹ This unfair, discriminatory depiction of female athletes and their appearance is not relevant to their athletic performance. Not only do male athletes not receive this type of criticism, but they are not compared to female athletes in this manner, if at all. The study from Cambridge University referred to this as “overt gender marketing,” when women’s sports are seen as secondary to men’s sports. For example, in women’s and men’s basketball in the US, there is the National Basketball Association and then the Women’s National Basketball Association. In the Cambridge study, they mentioned how for football, people tend to refer to men’s football as just “football” while for women they say, “women’s football.”²² This can be seen in many other sports as well when it comes to marketing, sports associations, and casual conversation. Hence, female athletes and women’s sports are unfairly discriminated against and compared to male athletes and sports in general.

The WSF report also noted some other concerning statistics and findings. The study examined women’s sports in the US at multiple levels and concluded that women’s collegiate sports had more than 60,000 fewer participants than their male counterparts. This gap only increased when it came to the professional level as they attributed this wider gap to a decrease in opportunities for female athletes to become professional athletes. A more concerning conclusion is that the study found that women of color, lower socioeconomic status, or girls not located in major metropolitan areas are more likely to enter sports later in life. Additionally, young females within these categories participate less often or in lower numbers. They are also more likely to drop out than females who do not fall into one of these categories. Young girls and women of lower socioeconomic status may not have the financial freedom to participate in sports. If the opportunities or compensation in women’s sports are minimal, then this will also cause further discouragement. They also found that these girls will quit sports at twice the rate of their male counterparts.²³

Some black female athletes have reported that they felt discriminated against in media covers and reports, for having “bodies of larger sizes or more muscle mass.” In the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, there was a ban on swim caps that were suited for black hair types.²⁴ It is inexcusable for any female athlete to experience sexual discrimination, but racial discrimination on top of that is even more unfair and further violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.²⁵ Not only are women’s sports struggling to compete with men’s sports, but subdivisions with women’s sports also persist causing further inequality. Hence, when discussions about these inequalities take place, these specific characteristics and others should be given the necessary consideration to correct these injustices.

The California Women’s Law Center (CWLC) further analyzed women’s collegiate sports in the US and made several

20 Sharon Pruitt-Young, “The Sexualization of Women in Sports Extends Even to What They Wear,” NPR, July 23, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/23/1019343453/women-sports-sexualization-uniforms-problem>.

21 Jenee Desmond-Harris, “Serena Williams is constantly the target of disgusting racist and sexist attacks,” Vox, September 7, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2015/3/11/8189679/serena-williams-indian-wells-racism>

22 University of Cambridge, “Aesthetics over athletics when it comes to women in sport.”

23 Charlotte Gibson, “Report finds strides made in women’s sports in past few years, but inequality remains,” ESPN, January 15, 2020. https://www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/28489077/report-finds-strides-made-women-sports-years-inequality-remains.

24 TALA, “Inequality in Women’s Sport.” accessed June 29, 2024, <https://www.wearotala.com/en-us/blogs/tala-talks/inequality-in-womens-sport>.

25 UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/translations/english>

conclusions about discrimination. As previously mentioned, in 1972 passed Title IX, which outlined the requirement for educational facilities and programs to not discriminate based on sex for extracurriculars. US Senator Birch Bayh supported the process of creating and passing Title IX. He witnessed the limitations and discrimination women faced in the educational and professional fields through his wife, Marvella Bayh, and set out to change it. Looking at women's sports now, more than 200,000 female athletes compete through their universities and the official National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) every year.²⁶ The CWLC, however, found that 90 percent of US colleges and universities are still not fully meeting Title IX. This is because of the differences in sports opportunities, funding, and the inability to escape these inequalities regardless of what sport, school, or organization they compete for. Looking at athletic scholarships alone, female athletes lose out on USD one billion in scholarships for athletics every year.²⁷ The legislation of Title IX was a huge milestone for the support and recognition of women's sports. However, it must be fully implemented and upheld to make the difference that it was intended to.

Appropriate Access and Resources

Aside from the discrimination that female athletes face, they also struggle to receive equal pay and proper resources. The quality and accessibility to training facilities and equipment are necessary for an athlete to perform. This can discourage growth and development in the field for future female athletes. If other female athletes do not see other women being paid or treated equally, it will not build hope or confidence in pursuing sports further. An article from Lily Amidon at Santiago Canyon College summarized that many Division I colleges in the US can provide more access to sports and equipment for female athletes. However, many Division II and III schools do not. Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the US have shown even lower reports of equal

access due to widespread interest in athletics from their student body and limitations with funding.²⁸ Thus, another example of noncompliance with Title IX and further discrimination against female athletes.

Regarding access to resources and equipment, many examples and athletes have spoken out about their personal experiences with this issue. Melissa Plaza, who was a professional football player for the France team, reported that the training conditions and equipment provided were "inadequate" compared to the men's team. She explained how the women's team would use the old equipment or gear from the men's team, whatever was left over. For the gear and uniforms, she explained how the socks given to them were originally meant for the men's team but were too big or too small. However, this did not mean that these socks properly fit the female athletes, and Plaza said that many of the women would resort to buying their own socks that fit them properly. It is conservative and sustainable to reuse equipment or gear, especially if it is still in good condition to do so. However, specifically only giving the women's team reused equipment could be argued as discriminatory. When the gear or equipment does not properly suit them, it is most certainly discriminatory and unfair. Plaza also explained how throughout her career playing Division I football, she often struggled to find preferred training time slots. She regularly waited until the boys' training concluded, in which she was left having to train late at night for the 8 P.M. to 10 P.M. slot.²⁹

Another former football player, Alexandra Culvin, explained that many dissatisfied female athletes felt that football confederations need to improve "its infrastructure, training pitches, accommodation, transport when traveling, as well as outfits and footwear."³⁰ This dissatisfaction from female athletes can make them feel undervalued and lesser than their male counterparts. If they are not receiving appropriate access to facilities and gear, they cannot perform to their fullest potential. Furthermore, if it seems as if their football club or federation does not value them as an athlete nor cares

26 Greg Johnson, "The Origins of Title IX," NCAA, June 23, 2023, <https://www.ncaa.org/news/2022/6/23/features-the-origins-of-title-ix.aspx>.

27 "CWLC Initiative: NCAA Data Shows Discrimination Against Female Athletes Is Getting Worse," California Women's Law Center, 2020, <https://www.cwlc.org/download/cwlc-initiative-ncaa-data-collection/>.

28 Lily Amidon, "Game On: Accessibility and Equality in Women's Sports," *The Macksey Journal* 2, no. 3 (2021): 4-9, <https://mackseyjournal.scholasticahq.com/article/27853-game-on-accessibility-and-equality-in-women-s-sports/attachment/73341.pdf>.

29 Ilaria, Bowden, and Hamalian, "Gender inequality in sport."

30 Ilaria, Bowden, and Hamalian, "Gender inequality in sport."

to provide them with the resources to perform, they will be discouraged from competing.

Like how some female athletes struggle to attain suited equipment, other athletes have shared that sometimes they are not even given access to the same equipment. Stacie de Armas compiled an article from some of these comments that female athletes have made along with some personal statements. One example she mentioned was Sedona Price, a collegiate basketball player at the University of Oregon. She posted a video on social media displaying how the women had a weight room containing minimal equipment and light dumbbells, while the men's weight room was state-of-the art.³¹ However, the lack of access does not stop there. A survey from TALA, a women's fitness wear company, summarized from a survey that 41 percent of women in the US were not allowed to play rugby and football for their schools.³²

Despite many sports having both a men's and women's team, some sports do not allow women to compete. These sports, such as football or rugby, are typically perceived as extremely physical and demanding, and that it is not appropriate for women to necessarily participate in such sports. For the sport of wrestling, many high schools do not have enough interest from women, so they are required to be allowed to join the men's wrestling team. However, Victoria Ngai, a former wrestling athlete, explained that throughout high school the wrestling technique she was taught and the weight requirements she had to meet were not suited equally for her compared to her male teammates. She claimed, "The standard method of coaching in wrestling is designed to teach men how to wrestle best, not women. The standard method of weight cutting is designed to help men cut weight, not women." Throughout her career, she struggled with finding proper coaching, maintaining full athletic performance, and struggled with numerous health issues. It was not until she was coached by a female and on a women's team in college, that she learned how to work with her body and not against it. She acknowledged her capabilities

and limits as a woman, and how this is not the same for male wrestlers.³³ Hence, there are both problems with women not being allowed to participate in sports seen as 'too manly' and issues with women participating in these sports but not being accommodated appropriately. The coaches and teammates in the sport are already predominantly male, so the teaching style, techniques, and training are suited best for them but not for female athletes. It is not only equal for women to be allowed access to these sports, but for them to also have the accurate development and resources to thrive in these environments and activities.

Another example that de Armas mentioned was that she has a son and daughter, who were both active in sports when COVID-19 hit. When the ban was lifted all sports in California, where she lives, were allowed to return. However, while her son actively participated again, her daughter was not because she competed in cheerleading. There has been continued debate over whether cheerleading should be considered a sport, but according to the state of California, it is not. Thus, the girls who enjoyed this "sport" were not allowed to return to practice or perform. Thankfully, de Armas explained that she and other parents appealed and were able to get the matter remedied.³⁴ However, these female athletes were not treated as athletes nor given the same treatment as other sports and male athletes.

Cheerleading itself poses a special application to Title IX. Originally the act was passed to allow women to participate in sports equally rather than sit on the sidelines. While cheerleading requires demanding physical activity and training, it has been consistently perceived as the 'sideline' performance for the sports people come to watch. Because of this, cheerleading has not been given NCAA recognition for US colleges. While college cheerleaders compete for their school, it is not through the NCAA, which is required to meet the requirements of Title IX.³⁵ While cheerleading is a predominantly female activity, it does also include males, who

31 Stacie De Armas, "On Different Playing Fields: The Case for Gender Equity in Sports," Nielsen, March, 2021, <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2021/on-different-playing-fields-the-case-for-gender-equity-in-sports/>.

32 TALA, "Inequality in Women's Sport."

33 Victoria Ngai, "Women Shouldn't Wrestle Like Men," American Women Wrestling, January 31, 2023, <https://www.americanwomenswrestling.com/opinion/women-shouldnt-wrestle-like-men>.

34 De Armas, "On Different Playing Fields."

35 Jennifer Gersen, "The complicated history of cheerleading, Title IX and what it means to be a sport," The 19th, June 16, 2022, <https://19thnews.org/2022/06/cheerleading-title-ix-sport-complicated-history/>.



Stony Brook University cheerleaders with knee and ankle braces

Credit: Kenneth C. Zirkel

are both not receiving the full benefits and protections from the NCAA. This means that cheerleaders do not have access to the same funds and resources, such as coaching staff, gear, or equipment. Additionally, the safety measures put in place by the NCAA and Title IX are not applied to cheerleaders, such as the regulations about how long and often they can practice and the number of days they must have off. A study from the National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research from 1982 to 2018 found that after football, cheerleading had the highest rate of “catastrophic injuries” for high school and college athletes.³⁶ Thus, cheerleaders, both men and females, are exerting themselves at such a physical level that they have surpassed the injuries reported from numerous other sports. However, there are no protections in place to regulate the sport and protect the athletes. Furthermore, they are receiving less funding, scholarships, athletic gear, and support from staff and their college.

With the great support and growth that cheerleading has had recently, questions arise as to why it is not considered a sport. Independent club teams and associations for cheerleading have developed over the years, to where they have several regional,

³⁶ Kristen L. Kucera and Robert C. Cantu, “Catastrophic Sports Injury Research,” National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, October 3, 2019, <https://nccsir.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5614/2019/10/2018-Catastrophic-Report-AS-36th-AY2017-2018-FINAL.pdf>.

³⁷ “Federal Judge: Cheerleading Is Not a Sport,” ABC News, June 21, 2010, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/judge-cheerleading-sport-quinnipiac-university-squad-title-ix/story?id=11219913>.

³⁸ Gersen, “The complicated history of cheerleading.”

national, and global competitions yearly. However, in 2010 US District Judge Stefan Underhill ruled over a lawsuit from a volleyball team at Quinnipiac University that had their funds pulled to support the competitive cheerleading team. He decided that the activity of cheerleading “did not yet meet the criteria to be defined as a sport under Title IX” and that the school was not allowed to redirect funds from a women’s sports team which violates Title IX.³⁷ This is a unique example of how legislation can address a problem while also limiting how the implemented solution can be applied.

Thus, even today, cheerleading is still not perceived as a sport, regardless of the rise in its popularity and its increasing difficulty and physical exertion. Ellen Stauowsky, a professor of sports media at Ithaca College, explained that during the 1970s and the creation of Title IX, cheerleading was, “seen as an accessory rather than as a central part of the male-dominated sports system.”³⁸ While this may have been the case then, it does not accurately apply to cheerleaders now. Instead, this idea and limitation on cheerleading are continuing the gender stereotypes and perception of cheerleaders from a time when women were not given equal access to sports in general.

Many organizations are fighting against the stereotypes often associated with cheerleaders and focusing on allowing them to perform or compete comfortably and respectfully. Many high schools in Japan recently reported that they have been placing more restrictions and surveillance during school events, as cheerleaders have been previously photographed and treated in an inappropriate and sexualized manner. Multiple schools have changed the uniforms; to make them longer and teachers patrol the stands for the entirety of the event.³⁹ Thus, any discriminatory behavior is discouraged, and the cheerleaders can perform without distractions or mistreatment. However, it is concerning that to correct how certain individuals see and treat cheerleaders, their uniforms must be changed to have more coverage. Moreover, teachers are required to watch over the audience to keep anything from happening. A proper solution would mean that people would treat and respect cheerleaders without parameters or restrictions in place forcing them to.

Issues for women's sports with scholarships, access, equipment, and other resources may have several reasons and determining factors. However, one main concern is funding. The NCAA managing director for the Office of inclusion, Amy Wilson, told a reporter that in the top performing Division I colleges in the US, the expenditure between men's and women's sports had a difference of USD 25.6 million in 2019. This difference rose by USD 12.9 million from 2009. Hence, in the past ten years, men have spent significantly more money than women in collegiate athletics, and this difference is rising instead of decreasing. This stems from the higher importance placed on men's sports compared to women's sports. Fans, leagues, organizations, and investors all see more potential and interest in male athletes and sports compared to women. The funding gap does not stop there. Wilson also claims that the funding for recruiting, and compensation of coaches is three times as much for men's collegiate sports compared to women's.⁴⁰

This disparity in funding also applies to pay for athletes. For six years, the US women's soccer team voiced their demands to receive equal pay and equal treatment as the men's team, ultimately resulting in a settlement in 2022.⁴¹ While the US women's national teams have been able to fight and achieve equal pay for female athletes, this is not guaranteed universally. The International Federation of Professional Footballers' Associations conducted a report following the qualifiers for the 2023 World Cup. They interviewed more than 300 female athletes from six continents and found significant disparities in their compensation. The statistics showed that 29 percent of the players received zero compensation for their participation, and 66 percent of the female athletes took unpaid time off from their place of employment while competing in the qualifiers.⁴² The gender gap for women is a serious problem when it comes to ensuring economic welfare and overall wellbeing. This concern could worsen if these female athletes have medical concerns, educational costs, or children and families to support. The lack of funding and adequate pay further worsens the status of women in sports. If they are not able to be properly compensated for their time and effort while facing limited or poorly suited resources, it can interfere with their ability and desire to compete. This is not providing equal opportunities and rights for female athletes, which previous legislations were intended to resolve.

Overall Health and Performance

When an individual participates in sports, for them to fully enjoy and perform to their fullest ability, their health must be maintained. For women's sports, the health of these female athletes must be advocated for and protected. A study from surgeons at the University of California found that "Female athletes are considered high risk for certain conditions such as ACL tears, patellofemoral pain syndrome, bone stress injuries, sport-related concussion, and sexual violence in sport."⁴³ The

³⁹ Justin McCurry, "Japan Schools move to protect cheerleaders from upskirting at sporting events," *The Guardian*, March 22, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/22/japan-schools-move-to-protect-cheerleaders-from-upskirting-at-sporting-events>.

⁴⁰ "Title IX: NCAA report shows stark gap in funding for women," NPR, June 24, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/24/1107242271/the-ncaa-says-that-funding-for-women-in-college-sports-is-falling-behind>.

⁴¹ Andrew Das, "U.S. Soccer and Women's Players Agree to Settle Equal Pay Lawsuit," *The New York Times*, February 22, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/22/sports/soccer/us-womens-soccer-equal-pay.html>.

⁴² "The 2023 Qualifying Conditions Report for the Women's World Cup," FIFPRO, accessed on June 29, 2024, <https://fifpro.org/media/ivfgkxex/2023-qualifying-conditions-report%5Ffr%5Fweb.pdf>.

⁴³ Celina de Borja, Cindy J. Chang, Rhonda Watkins, and Carlin Senter, "Optimizing Health and Athletic Performance for Women," *Current Reviews in Musculoskeletal Medicine* 15, no. 1 (2022): 10-20, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12178-021-09735-2>.

causes for this can be influenced by multiple factors. One example includes the difference in bone density and fat and muscle ratios of women compared to men. The combination of these factors as well as the female menstruation cycle can lead to a common condition called the female athlete triad. The 'triad' refers to the diagnosis of severe loss of weight or being underweight, decreased bone mass, and an irregular or delayed menstruation cycle.⁴⁴

When an athlete is putting stress on their body through physical activity, this can cause an individual to change the fat and muscle ratios in their body. Since a woman needs certain hormone levels, specifically estrogen, a significant shift in the fat stored in a woman's body can impact her estrogen levels. This rapid or severe change in estrogen can negatively impact her menstruation cycle, bone density, and overall health of one's immune system. This can also lead to long-term damage to a woman's reproductive system and an increased risk of osteoporosis, a condition of low bone density and strength.⁴⁵ Thus, while women should have equal access and opportunities to sports, this does provide cause for how female athletes should approach competing.

Women have different bodily demands and necessities than men, meaning that the training and conditions that may work for men may not always work for women. These differences should not be ignored nor seen as an argument for female athletes being lesser than. It is simply just different, and it should be properly recognized and taken into consideration properly. Another common medical concern for women is an increased risk of an ACL injury, which is a tear of the anterior cruciate ligament in the knee. The common causes of this include the female's anatomy, hormonal influences, and muscular strength.⁴⁶ These injuries can be avoided with preventative measures. If a coach and training program properly consider these risks, female athletes can be properly strengthened and conditioned to avoid these accidents. Sadly,

many athletes are only required to do these exercises and types of training programs after an ACL tear or other knee injury already occurs for rehabilitation. Once again, a female athlete is not less capable or physically able to perform in sports. However, there are medical concerns and differences from men that need to be accounted for, so that they can perform at their best and safest.

The workforce of physicians also provides important considerations for female athletes and their care. Not only is it important for women to have equal opportunities to work in the medical field, but it is also important for female patients to have equal access to desired or needed care. Studies have shown that female physicians are more likely to screen for breast and cervical cancer, maintain better communication with patients, and have improved readmission and mortality rates compared to male physicians.⁴⁷ Hence, in a study where several collegiate athletes were surveyed, most of them said they preferred a female physician when it came to matters of their diet, mental health, contraceptives, and more.⁴⁸ Since many athletes may experience persistent physical injuries, stress, anxiety, and other impactful emotions, it is beneficial to have a strong, and reliable relationship with one's practitioner. Furthermore, having this strong relationship with one's doctor can help a female athlete cope with the struggles of an injury or participating in their sport. This can encourage them to stay motivated and committed to their sport and performance.

Despite these differences, female physicians are not equally represented in sports medicine. When evaluating the physicians for the Women's National Basketball Association between 2009 to 2019, less than 30 percent of the team physicians were women.⁴⁹ Having a female physician in women's sports can make a big impact on how these athletes are being treated and prepared to compete. Female athletes have different bodily demands, risks, and struggles compared to male athletes. While a male physician may be equally

44 "The Healthy Female Athlete." American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, May, 2019, <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/the-healthy-female-athlete>.

45 American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, "The Healthy Female Athlete."

46 Borja, Chang, Watkins, and Senter, "Optimizing Health and Athletic Performance for Women."

47 Borja, Chang, Watkins, and Senter, "Optimizing Health and Athletic Performance for Women."

48 Francis G O'Connor, Christopher W. Bunt, and Timothy L. Switaj, "College Athletes' Preference of Physician Gender," *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine* 16 (5): 434, <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.jsm.0000244600.23472.88>.

49 Andrew J. Hinkle, Symone M. Brown, and Mary K. Mulcahey, "Gender disparity among NBA and WNBA team physicians," *The Physician and Sportsmedicine* 49, no. 2 (2021): 219-222, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913847.2020.1811065>

capable of accounting for this as a female physician, female athletes feel more comfortable around a doctor of the same sex. More urgently, if a woman has concerns about her health and has the desire to only be treated by another woman, then that option should be readily accessible.

Sports provide many physical health benefits for female athletes, not just medical concerns or injuries. If they fuel and care for their bodies appropriately, female athletes are likely to have fewer chronic illnesses, reduced risk of obesity, and better overall health.⁵⁰ There has also been a connection between older women who played college sports having better health compared to women who did not. Since they were an experienced athlete, these women continued to exercise throughout their adulthood resulting in many of them having lower rates of hypertension or high cholesterol. Women who have or still compete in sports are also less likely to use recreational drugs and alcohol.⁵¹ For female athletes in high school, they are less likely to experience an unintended pregnancy and more likely to get better grades and graduate. Also, maintaining a steady amount of exercise can reduce the risk of breast cancer for teenage girls.⁵² In addition to the physical benefits of participating in sports, there are also many mental health benefits. For women who participate in sports, they are less likely to have mental health disorders such as depression or anxiety.⁵³ Young female athletes are more likely to have better confidence and self-esteem.⁵⁴ Being physically active and a part of a team, can give a woman a sense of purpose and an uplifting body image and perception of themselves on and off the field.⁵⁵ The skills that a young woman develops through sports, both in physical health and mental strength, can provide lasting and crucial abilities that can last throughout their lifetime. The people they meet and

the connections they build in these extracurricular activities can build a strong support system and uplift communities both near and far.

The benefits of sports for women are unlimited and lasting. However, like the benefits and risks of a female athlete's physical health, there are also possible risks that sports may have on a woman's mental health. Nevertheless, many of these risks are linked to the presence of gender inequalities and stereotypes, meaning these risks can be addressed. For example, the unrealistic expectations commonly placed on young girls and their physical appearance can cause all young girls, not just athletes, to struggle with many insecurities. While there is no way to directly fix this issue, there are ways to approach the problem, such as the way female athletes are talked about in the media and the habit of photoshopping and editing pictures of these athletes. An unfair expectation has been placed on female athletes, to not only compete and win, but to also look perfect while doing it. The effects of this are not definite and can lead to an athlete and other young females having decreased self-esteem, eating disorder habits, substance abuse, or depression. These unfair expectations have also led to an increased amount of pressure on female athletes. This can lead to a damaging and dangerous practice, of female athletes competing at high physical levels when they are not mentally at their best.⁵⁶

The pressure of always looking and doing your best only adds more pressure and can lead to female athletes suppressing these struggles. However, there are a handful of examples where popular athletes have come forward with their struggles and have served as an example of the importance of mental health in sports. In 2021, Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open. Osaka is a rising star in the world of female

50 "Sports Benefit Girls in Many Ways," Children's Medical Group, January 31, 2019, <https://childrensmedicalgroup.net/sports-benefit-girls-in-many-ways/>

51 Joanne Barker, "Female athletes and long-term health - Boston Children's Answers," Boston Children's Hospitals, April 6, 2023, <https://answers.childrenshospital.org/female-athletes-qol/>.

52 Billie J. King, "Benefits - Why Sports Participation for Girls and Women," Women's Sports Foundation, August 30, 2016, <https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/advocacy/benefits-sports-participation-girls-women/>.

53 Billie J. King, "Amid the Nation's Ongoing Youth Mental Health Crisis, New Research Shows the Critical Role Sports Can Play in Promoting Girls' Mental Health," Women's Sports Foundation, April 23, 2024, https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/press_release/amid-the-nations-ongoing-youth-mental-health-crisis-new-research-shows-the-critical-role-sports-can-play-in-promoting-girls-mental-health/.

54 Amy Ward, "7 Reasons to Get Your Daughter Involved in Sports, according to Science," Penn State pro Wellness, January 5, 2023, <https://prowellness.childrens.pennstatehealth.org/7-reasons-to-get-your-daughter-involved-in-sports-according-to-science/>.

55 J. King, "Benefits - Why Sports Participation for Girls and Women."

56 Luis Gallardo, "The Importance of Mental Health in Women's Sports," World Happiness Foundation, August 31, 2021, <https://worldhappiness.foundation/blog/happiness/the-importance-of-mental-health-in-women-sports/>.

tennis and has become increasingly recognized since her win over Serena Williams in the 2018 US Open. Osaka stopped participating in the news conferences following her matches due to the impact it was having on her mental health. This resulted in her being fined and was at risk of further penalties if she did not participate in the required media conferences.⁵⁷ However, Osaka posted to her social media that she would not be participating in the tournament further and that she has been experiencing increased social anxiety and stress from the media.⁵⁸ This public announcement allowed for other female athletes and fans to see the importance of an athlete's mental health as well as the impacts of the sports world, which can impact both professional and successful athletes. Mental health is rightfully gaining proper acknowledgment in many societal sectors, and sports should be no exception. Furthermore, for a professional female athlete to take the brave step of talking about their struggles openly with the public, can provide reassurance for other female athletes and start discussions about addressing these issues. Many other female athletes have taken similar initiatives and prioritized their health, such as Simone Biles pulling out of the Team USA gymnastics team in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Another athlete in the 2020 Olympics, Liz Cambage, dropped out of the Australian women's basketball team and announced that she was experiencing increased anxiety and feelings of isolation from the COVID-19 precautions.⁵⁹

An athlete's physical, mental, and emotional health can have a tremendous impact on their success and long-term wellbeing. Sports can provide both good and bad outcomes for women, which is why it is important that these possible negative outcomes and risks need to be resolved. A woman's full physical health should be properly taken into consideration separate from men. They should not be expected to conform to a system that was designed for the success of a male athlete and is not fully applicable to women. The unfair expectations and treatment of women in sports and throughout society have led to many athletes struggling with their mental health rather than improving. It has been monumental for

professional athletes to come forward with their struggles and will hopefully encourage other athletes and organizations to prioritize mental health and correct mistakes causing harm to female athletes. The benefits of sports to a female's health are bountiful, and with a good mindset and healthy body, female athletes can perform to their fullest potential in both sports and their personal lives.

Representation and Development

Many athletes develop beneficial skills and foundational experiences through sports that can lead to development in other parts of their lives. This can include career success following the end of their sports career or social involvement in their communities. Athletes are shown to attain strong leadership skills, discipline, independence, and teamwork. Female athletes who participate throughout their adolescent life are shown to have good sportsmanship and better emotional control. Since sports simulate a collaborative environment, with all its members working to achieve a common goal, there are links between this kind of mindset and professional work environments. Hence, previous female athletes were able to thrive in many work environments, such as in the business field. Specifically, as sports are a common interest throughout society, conversations or utilization of sports as a bonding experience is a popular choice. For example, some businesses hold fantasy football competitions or watch parties for national or international competitions. Women who have previous experience in athletics will already have a basic understanding and exposure to sports and will feel more comfortable participating in these activities rather than being excluded. Moreover, this sense of involvement and inclusion can stem beyond the workspace. Female athletes are shown to form more friendships, especially strong friendships when they participate in sports. Women who are associated with sports are likely to be more recognized through social situations and are more likely to be involved in other community activities.⁶⁰

The ability of sports to unite and encourage integration and inclusion in society has been documented in both developed

⁵⁷ Gallardo, "The Importance of Mental Health in Women's Sports."

⁵⁸ Matthew Futterman, "Naomi Osaka Quits the French Open After News Conference Dispute," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/31/sports/tennis/naomi-osaka-quits-french-open-depression.html>

⁵⁹ Gallardo, "The Importance of Mental Health in Women's Sports."

⁶⁰ Children's Medical Group, "Sports Benefit Girls in Many Ways."

and developing countries. More specifically, for developing countries, sports can provide access and opportunities to safe spaces. This can allow these young girls to feel a new sense of freedom, safety, and control over their lives that they may not be able to experience anywhere else. Hence, researchers claim that despite the limitations on women's sports, it still makes a positive impact on gender equality and the women who participate. Hosting women's sports alongside men's sports can also impact the way men perceive and treat female athletes and women in general. The Kenya Mathare Youth Sports Association is a community sports development organization that first started in 1987 and aims to help strengthen and uplift the community through sports and various other initiatives. One of these projects includes the boys' and girls' sports program which allows for both genders to participate in football and facilitates sportsmanship, health, and opportunity in the Mathare area.⁶¹ Research on this program has concluded that the combined gender program has influenced the way that young male football players perceive women's participation in sports and their roles in society.⁶² Other programs can have the same effect. Young minds are extremely impressionable and the education and environments that are given to them can shape their behavior and ideas about society. Hosting sports programs that allow for both girls and boys to practice and play alongside each other, can show new generations that women should have an equal right to sports. Furthermore, women are equally capable and entitled to physical activity and sports leisure.

Another similar program is the Moving the Goalposts organization, also based in Kenya. This organization focuses on several social issues that women face, such as gender-based violence, reproductive health, economic stability, and access to sports. They offer their services to young women of various ages and use sports participation to educate and equip these women to handle these issues in their communities. First starting in 2001, they have prioritized leadership skills and offer several

forms of training and opportunities for girls to develop these abilities.⁶³ The participants can directly play a part and apply these skills in developing and running the organization, to witness the responsibilities of governance.⁶⁴ A century earlier, women were barely able to participate in sports. Now, women can engage in sports and use it to develop other aspects of their lives. A recent study on adolescents in the United Kingdom found that 70 percent of the girls who participate in sports mentioned or have the desire to continue sports into adulthood on a "top" level. The female interest in participating and staying committed to sports has grown over the past years, showing that the growth made has been productive. Of the young men surveyed in the study, two out of five expressed a desire for women's sports to receive more support. This is 10 percent more than the number of boys who expressed this desire two years ago in 2020. Thus, there is growth, small but still growth, for women's sports from their male counterparts. The girls in this study also made other relevant claims. For example, four in 10 girls said they feel that women's sports hold lower value than men's sports. Additionally, 58 percent said they would like to see more public support for women's sports, and 54 percent wished that there were more awards and celebrations to acknowledge women's achievements. Perhaps the most important note from the study, is that 67 percent of the girls who wish to do more in sports lack opportunities and encouragement.⁶⁵ The growth made in women's sports has allowed women to participate and now dream of making a name for themselves as top-performing athletes. Programs that help women become leaders and contributing members in their communities prepare these young athletes for careers both in and outside of sports. With these young women being trained or competing with fellow male athletes, it helps build up attitudes and recognition of women's sports despite gender barriers and stereotypes that are still rooted throughout society. Let these programs be a model for the influence that women's sports can have on the development and growth of gender equality and female empowerment both in and outside of

61 "Boys & Girls Sports Program." Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), MYSA, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://www.mysakenya.org/index.php/programs/boys-girls-sports-program>.

62 "The Role of Sport in Addressing Gender Issues," Sportanddev, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://www.sportanddev.org/thematic-areas/gender/role-sport-addressing-gender-issues>.

63 "Leadership." Moving the GoalPosts (MTG), accessed August 7, 2024a <https://mtgk.org/programs/leadership-jahf20>.

64 The International Platform on Sport and Development, "The Role of Sport in Addressing Gender Issues."

65 "More 'Sporty' Girls Now Dream of Reaching the Top in Sport," Women in Sport, September 28, 2022, <https://womeninsport.org/news/more-sporty-girls-now-dream-of-reaching-the-top-in-sport/>.



Agnes Keleti at a celebration for her 98th birthday

Credit: Róth Tamás

sports. These types of programs should continue to be created, funded, and prioritized with the results that they promise and the many possibilities that are yet to be seen.

Many former female athletes serve as role models to young girls and athletes, showing the difference sports can make in a woman's life. Agnes Keleti, a former Olympic gymnast and holocaust survivor, is currently Hungary's most successful living athlete and is the most decorated female Jewish Olympian. Despite having to flee her country from rising antisemitism and losing family members in the deadliest concentration camp Auschwitz, Keleti was able to compete in her first Olympic games in 1952 and won four medals. She outcompeted against girls who were significantly younger than her and started coaching other girls in her training facilities. Following the end of her career, she became an international celebrity and traveled to several countries around the world for media or training. This was a unique privilege since at the time Hungary was under a Communist party, and few were able to leave as often or as far as she was. Keleti even claimed that this was the reason she became an athlete in the first place, to have the opportunities and privileges that so many others did not. Keleti is currently in her 100s and is given a stipend equivalent of USD 13,000 a month according to a law in Hungary that

compensates Olympians per the number of medals they have won.⁶⁶ Keleti is an ideal example of how sports can change a woman's life, even amid war, prosecution, and political instability. Keleti has gained popularity and recognition for her achievements and served as a public role model and coach for other females in the world of gymnastics, while being a wife and mother. Even years after her accomplishments she is still living a fortunate life, showing that the benefits from sports have no time limit.

There are plenty of other female athletes who have been successful in sports and served as a contributing role model to society. Malak Abdelshafi, an Egyptian Paralympic swimmer, hopes her story will inspire other girls to be resilient and confident in achieving their dreams. Anita Karim, the first professional mixed martial arts fighter from Pakistan, hopes that other girls will be inspired to defy social barriers and join whatever sport or extracurricular they desire, even if it is male dominated. Karim hopes that girls will find the courage and strength to go against society's expectations and be self-reliant. Khadija Timera, a boxer and established lawyer originally from Senegal, runs her own business in London and advocates against gender-based violence drawing from her experiences and development as a boxer.⁶⁷ All of these women

⁶⁶ Cnaan Liphshiz, "At 98, Olympic Gymnast and Holocaust Survivor Agnes Keleti Is Feisty as Ever," *The Times of Israel*, August 9, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/at-98-olympic-gymnast-and-holocaust-survivor-agnes-keleti-is-feisty-as-ever/>.

⁶⁷ "Khadija Timera building a legacy for footballers," *FIFPRO*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.fifpro.org/en/supporting-players/>

are athletes who have strived for success while defying gender barriers throughout their communities and the professional environment. They have harnessed the necessary skills through sports to succeed and empower other women and young girls to do the same.

Another former athlete, Leyla Chihuan, is an example of how female athletes can not only be role models, but can also change the world of sports as well. Chihuan was a prominent volleyball player for the national Peruvian team and later pursued a Master in Business and Administration. Starting in 2011, she became a politician and coordinator of the Peruvian Congress Sport Group. Given her own experience as an athlete, Chihuan uses her familiarity with the sports world to improve the resources available to current Peruvian athletes. She spoke with sports federations and current athletes and proposed a variety of legislative initiatives to improve the current system. She strives to improve the sports system throughout Peru and uplift its current and future athletes.⁶⁸ Women's sports have come a long way, with female athletes originally struggling to be allowed to compete or fighting to be given the same resources. Many of these struggles are not completely gone, but now many organizations and fellow athletes are working towards ensuring equality. Female athletes have the power to use the skills and resources they have attained through sports and funnel it back into their communities. Chihuan is only one example of the influence and difference female athletes can make in sports and the future athletes that will depend on it.

While there are plenty of role models for female athletes to choose from, how these women and other athletes are portrayed threatens to undermine their success and purpose. How much and how often women's sports is represented is a powerful determining factor. Media is a widely used and overly trusted source of information, where falsified information and bias can easily interfere with the truth. The first problem is that women's sports are not shown as often as men's sports,

and this has shown little to no improvement over the past 20 years.⁶⁹ The way women are portrayed in the media also tends to further encourage inappropriate perceptions of female athletes and gender stereotypes. Hence, this creates a difficult situation for female athletes to navigate. Accepting promotions, media covers, or social media campaigns can help fund and support an athlete's career. This media attention can also draw more support from fans for the sport itself. However, this also puts the athlete at risk of experiencing distasteful perceptions or comments about her body, performance, and personal life. Female athletes must have the same full and equal opportunities to develop as an athlete and person through sports. Yet, through this development, the way that female athletes are represented throughout the sports sector and wider society must also reflect this development and growth. Female athletes and society as a whole are influenced by the narratives that are created in sports. A path towards gender equality in sports also is a path towards gender equality in the world.

The UN has recognized sports through many objectives and acknowledges its importance throughout the world in many initiatives, such as gender equality. In particular, sports can help with growth and prosperity in developing countries. This was outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, "Sport is also an important enabler of sustainable development. We recognize the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives."⁷⁰ Programs and activities in sports can bring more awareness and funding to marginalized people and youth groups, whether that is for HIV/AIDS awareness or sexual and reproductive health.

A study in India found that young girls were able to form more knowledge about their reproductive health and societal

competitions-innovation-and-growth/global-employment-market-for-women-s-football/ready-to-board-interview-khadija-timera.

68 "Leyla Chihuan: 'In Peru There Is a Lack of Sport Management Professionals,'" Johan Cruyff Institut, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://johancruyffinstitute.com/en/blog-en/leyla-chihuan-peru-lack-sport-management-professionals/>.

69 Katie Lever, "Spotlights and Shadows in Women's Sports Media Coverage," Global Sport Matters, June 16, 2023, <https://globalsportmatters.com/culture/2023/06/16/spotlights-shadows-womens-sports-media-coverage/>.

70 United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 70/1, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1, (Oct. 21, 2015). https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf.

relationships through sporting programs. Another sporting program in Uganda encouraged and taught entrepreneurial and social skills to young women in an attempt to foster economic independence and self-sufficiency in their communities.⁷¹ Sports have the power to fund, encourage, and promote growth in several social issues in developing or unstable regions. Thus, sport is more than a hobby or even a career, it is a historical and deeply appreciated activity in our society. With the power to form relationships or advance communities, it can also help change the narrative and treatment of female athletes. If governments and organizations can fully recognize female athletes and women's sports with the respect and inclusion they deserve, the benefits will only multiply. With more women involved in sports, their development as an athlete will apply to various future endeavors throughout their lives. Whether this is through an alternative career, another role in the sports sector, or as a wife and mother. These strong, resilient, and capable female athletes will serve as role models against gender barriers and stereotypes for future generations.

Supportive Legislation and Programs

Now that many of the recurring issues and limitations in women's sports have been outlined, it is important to also explore the many programs and legislations there are for women's sports. Many of these past or current legislations and initiatives strive to improve gender equality in sports, through various methods and environments. While international agreements hold greater weight, one should also keep in mind that change can also be transformative on a small scale as well. There are many ways that one organized body or group of people can make an impact, even one person alone. For an individual, they can find numerous ways to broaden their awareness and support for women's sports. First, they should work on educating themselves on female athletes and sports specifically. This can be the difference in rules for women's volleyball compared to men's or the difference in equipment and playing field between softball and baseball. A potential supporter can also work towards becoming more aware of

current and past female athletes since women have and still are not represented equally in the media. Many people may know of a decorated male athlete or some aspects of his story, such as LeBron James, even if they are not basketball fans or made any effort to know who he is. Since male athletes are more recognized throughout media and society, this is common for them but not necessarily for female athletes. An individual is still able to find information on certain athletes or the history of women's sports, it just takes more effort.

There are several other ways an individual can effectively support, and should be encouraged, to support women's sports. For sporting events, having active fans who wish to attend and actively engage in the entertainment is not only important, but the whole purpose of sports is to be watched. Hence, consumer interest and engagement in watching or attending sports, even with one person or a small group can collectively build more support over time. Unlike men's sports, tickets to women's sports are generally more accessible and cheaper, which is an opinion that fans should be acknowledged and encouraged to take advantage of. If one notices that there is a lack of media coverage for a specific sports team or game, voicing these concerns to broadcasters, journalists, and producers, may seem hopeless but can have a surprising result. A simple letter or email could be enough to make a monumental change, as with any form of advocacy. Growing up, people constantly witnessed classmates and friends wearing sports jerseys or graphic t-shirts with a male athlete's face, name, or athletic achievements. This makes people aware of male athletes and men's sports, indirectly and without any effort. Thus, imagine how much of a difference it might make if people started wearing more clothing or merchandise of female athletes. Some fans have reported issues with women's sports merchandising, claiming that it was of lower quality, had limited options, limited inventories, and difficulties finding options to buy such clothing.⁷² If there is an increase in demand for female athlete's merchandise, perhaps these issues can be resolved and the supplies and companies that are responsible for this inequality may give the proper

71 Lyndsay M.C. Hayhurst, "The 'Girl Effect' and Martial Arts: Social Entrepreneurship and Sport, Gender and Development in Uganda," *Gender, Place and Culture: a Journal of Feminist Geography*, vol. 21, No. 3 (March 2014), pp. 297-315, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.802674>.

72 Mykenna Maniece, "Women's Sports Merchandise Is an Estimated \$4 Billion Industry but Fans Still Can't Find the Items They're Looking For," *Business Insider*, July 3, 2024, <https://www.businessinsider.com/womens-sports-merchandise-market-gap-2024-7>.

amount of attention and resources to female athletes and the merchandise that represents them.

As mentioned previously, female athletes have not always been perceived appropriately or positively across media platforms and accounts. While a bystander does not have any control over this, most individuals today have some form of social media participation. When applicable, one could encourage or engage in women's sports with social media and spread positivity and recognition for female athletes, it may start a chain reaction. To go an extra step, individuals or corporations should discourage or remove any inappropriate or discriminatory comments about female athletes across media platforms and news broadcasts. These are only a handful of examples of how one person could make a positive and beneficial impact on women's sports and the way that female athletes are treated and perceived. Change always starts small, and one action can become a habit for many others to follow.

Support for women's sports does not and should not stop at an individual level. Both private companies and regional groups have invested in improving women's sports. One example includes Ally Financial, which is a US-based financial services and holding company. They recognized the rise in popularity of women's sports, yet the limitations it still experiences in media coverage. Since 2022, they have increased their investments in women's sports to match men's, created partnerships with women's sports leagues, and sponsored initiatives that support female athletes. More specifically, in a partnership with Disney starting in 2023, 90 percent of Ally Financial's media buy will be channeled into women's sports. Justin Nicolette, the director of public relations for sports at Ally Financial, stated that many fans are eager to support brands that sponsor women's athletics and that through their campaign many other companies have joined along in their efforts.⁷³ Once again, the actions taken by one have the power to change and encourage others to do the same.

The Title IX legislation in the US is a prime example of

supportive legislation for women's sports but not the only one. The International Working Group (IWG) on Women and Sport, passed the Brighton Declaration in 1994, which was an international treaty that outlined a path towards a developed and equal sector of sport for all women. The IWG modified the agreement in 2014, becoming the Brighton plus Helsinki Declaration, to reevaluate the status and concerns and women's sports and adjust their goals to be more effective. The Helsinki addition outlined ten principles where improvement and supervision are necessary to ensure safe, functioning, and fair environments for female athletes. These ten principles include equity and equality in society and sport, facilities, school and youth sport, developing participation, high performance, leadership, education and training, information and research, resources, and domestic and international cooperation. Currently, the Brighton Declaration has more than 600 signatories from around the world including regional organizations, governmental authorities, sports federations, Olympic committees, and international councils, associations, and commissions. Some notable names include the Federation International de Football Association (FIFA), World Athletics, the Olympic and Paralympic Committees, UN Women, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe.⁷⁴

When looking at the European Council solely, following 1994 and the Brighton Declaration, they have passed many supportive strategies of their own and performed reviews on the status of women in sports. In 2020, they published the gender equality strategy, meant to span for the next five years, and focused on promoting participation, leadership, and recognition of female athletes while combating gender barriers. In a press release following a meeting in 2023, the Council confirmed its desire to rectify the female sports sector and focused on the necessity of having role models for young girls and the need for equal pay for professional athletes. They also called on member states to prevent gender-based violence at any level of physical activity and protect victims and witnesses of any such violence.⁷⁵ Hopefully, the Council's

⁷³ Aimee Rawlins, "Why Ally Financial Doubled down on Women's Sports," Fast Company, May 2, 2023, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90877086/ally-financial-womens-sports>.

⁷⁴ "Brighton Declaration," IWG Women & Sport, February 23, 2019, <https://iwgwomenandsport.org/brighton-declaration/>.

⁷⁵ "Women in Sports: Council Approves Conclusions to Combat Gender-Based Discrimination," Council of the European Union, November 24, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/11/24/women-in-sports-council-approves-conclusions-to-combat-gender-based-discrimination/>.

member states will rightfully enact these motions, and other regional blocs will be encouraged to do so as well.

Multiple divisions and actions have been taken on behalf of women's sports and gender equality by the UN along with international cooperation. In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was a large progressive step towards recognizing the need to advance women's rights and equality and outlined numerous suggestions for achieving it. It detailed twelve critical areas for improvement and was adopted by 189 member states. The sports sector was mentioned thoroughly and described as a powerful tool and environment for women's empowerment and equality. Sports has proven that it can mobilize societies, uplift the youth, transcend national and cultural barriers, build desirable qualities for young athletes, and is an effective factor towards better education, healthcare, and development.⁷⁶

UN Women launched a Generation Equality Campaign in 2020, to recognize the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and further propel gender equality. The campaign focuses on recruiting new partners and societies to recognize the need for equality and the issues that must be confronted. UN Women and other corporations have launched numerous efforts, such as updating policies, increasing funding and resources, encouraging leadership development, and publishing more media content for female athletes. Many issues like gender-wage gaps, gender-based violence, and recurrent gender stereotypes and barriers have been targeted. The Sport of Generation Equality Initiative, also launched by UN Women, also focuses on these goals and concerns. However, it was created for the sole purpose of combining all these actions and resources taken by multiple different entities. Through a combined coalition of governments, organizations, sports federations, brands, media, athletes, and more, they can channel all these efforts for a stronger effect. Members of the Sports for Generation Equality Initiative are asked to make commitments under these shared goals and principles and create action plans to achieve these goals, monitor the

effectiveness, and provide details of the achieved or expected progress.⁷⁷ The Beijing Declaration was a revolutionary step towards gender equality and women's sports, and the continued dedication and steps taken in collaboration with it show the present need and desire for these goals to be achieved. These three supportive legislations and agreements should be thoroughly evaluated and used as a model for the next steps to be taken.

More recently, at the 67th Session of the CSW in 2023, the International Olympic Committee (IOC and UN Women collaboratively launched the Gender Equality Through Sport Bridging Project. This initiative is intended to combat gender-based violence and encourage gender equality using sport. This program drew inspiration from the One Win Leads to Another (OWLA) program that was also created with the partnership of the IOC and UN Women in 2016. The OWLA program focused on preventing violence against women in Brazil and Argentina, following the Olympic Games in Rio in 2016. The Gender Equality Through Sport Bridging Project intends to use the information and successes from the OWLA program and share it across other regions, such as South-East Asia. The IOC alone has developed numerous initiatives to protect athletes from gender-based violence and create safe environments. Some of these programs include the Olympic Agenda 2020+5 roadmap and the Olympians 365 strategy, which are in alignment with gender equality and many other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁷⁸ As a global international sports committee, the IOC has the influence and connections to drastically influence women's sports. Hence, they have respectfully collaborated with many UN initiatives and used their position to uplift female athletes, raise support, and implement equal objectives. Organizations like the IOC and many others need to be fully considered and utilized for the path toward gender equality in sports and overall.

An ideal example of the UN collaborating with an international organization would be the Women's 2023 World Football Cup. In 2023, the World Cup was hosted in Australia and

⁷⁶ "Sport for Generation Equality: Advancing Gender Equality in and through Sport., UN Women, March 10, 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/3/news-sport-for-generation-equality>.

⁷⁷ UN Women, "Sport for Generation Equality: Advancing Gender Equality in and through Sport."

⁷⁸ "IOC and UN Women launch new Gender Equality Through Sport initiative in New York," Olympics, March 10, 2023, <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-and-un-women-launch-new-gender-equality-through-sport-initiative-in-new-york>.

New Zealand, and the UN and FIFA organization utilized this event to demonstrate gender equality in the sport of football. The first initiative was to increase the prize money to USD 150 million, which was three times the amount from 2019 in France. Multiple campaigns were launched including the Football Unites the World, Unite for Gender Equality, and Unite for Ending Violence against Women. These calls to action enforced important messages about gender equality, gender-related violence, and sustainability. The Unite for Gender Equality campaign was featured on the third day of the competition and was displayed on the front stage at the semi-finals. Other calls to action were promoted throughout the tournament with inscriptions on the team captains' gear, billboards throughout the facilities, and on social media. Multiple agencies from the UN joined in participation such as UN Women, UNESCO, UN Human Rights Commission, and the World Health Organization.⁷⁹ This tournament and the female athletes who competed set a model for how women's sports should be treated and encouraged.

The Football Unites the World, between the UN and FIFA, is an ongoing campaign still accepting support and partners. Several other campaigns, programs, organizations, and sporting events like this one can have the same positive influence on current and future female athletes.⁸⁰ While the impact of these initiatives may vary, they all still carry significance. Whether it is a small girls' program in Kenya or an international competition for women's football, each step is getting closer to an equal sports sector for women and men to compete fairly. These programs and initiatives must continue to be supported, funded, and multiplied in number and size if their common goal of equality is to be achieved. Additionally, for future programs, areas where equality is still lacking must be identified and prioritized if a solution will be achieved. Whether it is countries and regions that are not

equally compensating their athletes or countries that do not allow women to compete in sports at all. The issues in women's sports and numerous partnerships and funding have already been established, it is time to ensure that these resources and efforts are used most appropriately and productively to correct inequalities in women's sports in every aspect and region.

Current Status

The IOC and the 2024 Paris Olympic Games

To fully understand the status of the Olympic Games and the events of Paris 2024, the largest international gender-equal sporting event, one must consider the history of the Games and the organization that runs it.⁸¹ The first modern Olympic Games was held in Athens, Greece in 1896. However, the Olympics dates back several centuries before that, where it was often held in Ancient Greece Olympia starting in 776 BC.⁸² The Olympic Games occur every four years, with both winter and summer Games that are overseen by the IOC. The 2020 Tokyo Games was named the first gender-equal Games in history, and the Paris 2024 Games was the first time that there was an equal amount of male and female athletes.⁸³ This is a huge step towards gender equality in sports, but it has taken a long time to achieve this one aspect of participating athletes. Starting in Paris 1900, the first female athletes were recorded to compete in the Olympics, with a total of 22 women out of 997 total competitors, which is 2.2 percent.⁸⁴ While the 2024 Olympics had an equal number of female and male athletes, it took more than 100 years to achieve this. Also, women were given the right to participate in sports internationally in 1979 at the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.⁸⁵ However, a woman did not

79 "UN Teams up with FIFA at Women's World Cup in Score for Gender Equality," UN News, July 19, 2023, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/july-2023/un-teams-fifa-women%E2%80%99s-world-cup-score-gender-equality>.

80 "Football Unites the World," Inside Fifa, accessed September 13, 2024, <https://inside.fifa.com/social-impact/campaigns/football-unites-the-world>.

81 "Gender Equality Through Time" International Olympic Committee, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://olympics.com/ioc/gender-equality/gender-equality-through-time>.

82 "Olympic History - From Ancient Greek Olympics to Modern Olympic Games," International Olympic Committee, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://olympics.com/ioc/ancient-olympic-games/history>.

83 Zabeena Rasheed, "Why Sexism Is Still a Problem at the Most 'gender-Equal' Olympics," Al Jazeera, August 8, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/8/sexism-is-still-a-problem-at-the-most-gender-equal-olympics>.

84 International Olympic Committee, "Gender Equality Through Time."

85 "Factsheet: Women in the Olympic Movement," International Olympic Committee, April 18, 2024, <https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/Olympic-Movement/Factsheets/Women-in-the-Olympic-Movement.pdf>.

compete in the Olympics until 1990.

There are still many other concerns regarding gender equality that must be addressed before the Games can be considered truly equal. Hopefully, it will not take 124 years to achieve these solutions as well. Since women have entered the sports field, the IOC has taken many legislative steps to welcome them equally into these environments. Following the Brighton Declaration and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the IOC first amended their Olympic Charter in 1996 for the advancement of female athletes in the Games. The IOC also hosted its first World Conference on Women and Sport that year, which continued until 2012. The IOC has followed with several other programs and initiatives. There is the Olympic Agenda 2020+5, which includes 21 outlined objectives focused on gender equality and inclusion. They also outlined areas of focus for future projects, including participation, safe sport, leadership, resource allocation, and portrayal. It was in 2014, under the Olympic Agenda of 2020, that the IOC first set the goal of achieving 50 percent of female participation in the Olympics. In this Agenda, they also set the target of achieving 30 percent of female participants in the IOC and other governing bodies. To track and report on the growth in gender equality in the Games, the IOC created the Gender Equality Review Project in 2017. The project incorporated several bodies involved in conducting the games, with a focus on encouraging gender equality and brainstorming action-related recommendations that would allow for necessary change.⁸⁶ These legislative programs and initiatives are only one part of the change enacted.

The IOC, National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and International Federations (IFs) have been working on numerous fronts over the past several years to improve participation and opportunities in the Olympic Games. They have set numerous checkpoints and goals to correct eligibility standards, quotas, amount of medal events, and media coverage. For example, the Tokyo 2020 Games doubled the amount of mixed gender events compared to the Rio 2016 Games. These mixed gender competitions are utilized to

promote gender inclusion and equality by having athletes from both genders compete alongside one another. This Olympic Movement is not restricted to the sports fields. In 1995, the IOC created the Women and Sport Working Group focused on advancing women in sports in every application. The current President, Thomas Bach, has continued these motives and sought to resolve the gender gap in IOC employees and membership. The IOC has focused on empowering women and putting them in decision-making positions. In 2023, female IOC members were recorded at 41 percent, which is 100 percent more than the number of members in 2013. A similar increase, of 50 percent, was recorded in 2023 as well for IOC commissions. This has been one of the IOC's proudest achievements and they have achieved their goals that first started in 1996.⁸⁷

They continue to encourage other organizations to do the same, with the NOCs and IFs also setting minimum targets to reach. Currently, many NOCs and IFS have achieved these targets and created a more gender balanced working environment by also adopting supporting policies within their organizations. In the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, four IFs moved to gender-balanced events, including canoe, rowing, shooting, and weightlifting. For many of the women in these IFs and NOCs, the IOC has provided leadership and training opportunities and collaboration to build an encouraging and tight-knit community. This helps fellow female employees to form close relationships and be prepared and empowered to apply or run for middle or top leadership positions throughout their careers.⁸⁸ In 1990, Flor Isabela Fonseca was the first elected woman on the IOC Executive Board. Currently, as of January 2024, there are five women on the IOC Executive Board and numerous women have served as Vice Presidents.⁸⁹ As the Olympic Movement and the creation of the Women and Sport Working Group Division approaches its 35th anniversary, several women, both on and off the field, have entered a new sense of opportunity and empowerment they had not previously experienced. Several policies, programs, and initiatives have been put in place to further encourage equality, and women are finally allowed onto the field and into

⁸⁶ International Olympic Committee, "Factsheet: Women in the Olympic Movement."

⁸⁷ International Olympic Committee, "Gender Equality Through Time."

⁸⁸ International Olympic Committee, "Gender Equality Through Time."

⁸⁹ International Olympic Committee, "Factsheet: Women in the Olympic Movement."

the rooms that have a say in what is decided. Whether or not the next 35 years will be as productive depends on how these women are received and treated today.

When focusing on the progress made with the athletes in the Games, similar results can be found. During the Tokyo 2020 Games, following a rule change, one female and one male were to carry the flag for each country in the opening ceremony. This was a very progressive policy, allowing female athletes to be accurately involved in the portrayal of their country for the most important ceremony in the Olympics. However, only 91 percent of the countries had both a female and male flag bearer.⁹⁰ Despite the IOC encouraging two from both genders, some countries only had one flagbearer of either gender or still chose two male athletes. For example, Ethiopia was represented by two male athletes even though they had both female and male athletes on their committee. Similarly, the United Arab Emirates only had a male flag bearer, but also only had male athletes in their committee. On a more positive note, Congo was represented solely by Natacha Ngoye Akamabi, a female sprinter for their entire mixed gender team.⁹¹ The IOC has

⁹⁰ International Olympic Committee, “Gender Equality Through Time.”

⁹¹ Sakura Murakami, “Olympics: Some Countries Opt Not to Have Male and Female Flagbearers despite IOC Plea,” Reuters, July 23, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/olympics-some-countries-opt-not-to-have-male-female-flagbearers-despite-ioc-plea-2021-07-23/>.

⁹² International Olympic Committee, “Gender Equality Through Time.”

⁹³ “Applying a Gender Lens to Ensure That Men’s and Women’s Sports Have Equal Visibility at Paris 2024,” International Olympic Committee, March 12, 2024, <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/applying-a-gender-lens-to-ensure-that-men-s-and-women-s-sports-have-equal-visibility-at-paris-2024>.

also appropriately identified the competition schedule as an important factor in the Games and where inequalities can form. Starting with the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics, the IOC realized the need to ensure that the number of hours and amount of medal events between the male and female athletes needed to be equalized.⁹² Moreover, with the Paris 2024 Games, they set quotas in place to ensure there was equal media coverage for men’s and women’s sports. Over the 16 days of competitions, they created a balanced schedule of the events so that fans and media would be able to share their attention between both genders’ sports fairly. An issue that was common in recent past Games. In the Rio 2016 Games, on the last day, only two women’s events were scheduled compared to ten men’s events. Furthermore, a handful of the men’s events included medal ceremonies and one of the events was the men’s marathon. Thus, the total broadcast time for the women’s sports was two hours while the men’s events had 22 hours. Similar instances have happened in previous summer and winter Games.⁹³

The IOC recognizes that media coverage and broadcasting play



Medal Ceremony for the Women’s 52 kg Judo event
Credit: National Olympic Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan

a big role in how female athletes are portrayed and treated. These female athletes serve as role models for their countries and future generations and must be treated with respect and equal relevance to male athletes. Hence, the IOC worked very hard to create an equal schedule for the Tokyo 2020 Games and then the 2024 Games. However, this is not the easiest task. When scheduling sporting events, they already must consider sports policies, transportation, time zones, weather, and more. Now gender balance must be added to the mix. The Tokyo 2020 Games went better than the 2016 Games still. On the final day of the competition, the competition hours between men and women were nearly equal but still had some favoritism for men's sports. However, the women had more medal events on the final Sunday than men. This approach continued into the Paris 2024 Games. In previous years, they would have the women for one sport always compete in the morning while the men competed in the evening. Depending on time zones or schedules, this could lead to many people only watching one gender with favoritism for men since they were in the evening. The IOC has also started taking into consideration the order of the days of the week. When looking at the women's marathon, it used to always be scheduled on Sunday in the middle of the Games, which is also one of the busiest days throughout the Games. Since this can lead to less attention on this event, they have since changed the schedule so that the event will be on the last Sunday, the day after the men's marathon. Now, both the men's and women's finishers will be given their medals during the closing ceremony and will have a significantly larger audience than before.⁹⁴ The IOC has no control over people's schedules or whether they will tune into the broadcasting. However, they have created a more equal schedule and coverage that will encourage and allow fans to watch and support female athletes.

When women were first allowed to compete in the Olympics, they competed primarily in the events that were deemed fit for a woman to compete in. Based on gender stereotypes, the sports that were aesthetically pleasing for women to participate in were events like swimming or figure skating. Now, women are allowed to compete in more than 300 events,

however, there are still some events that only allow men. One of these examples includes the Olympic decathlon, where an athlete competes in ten track and field events over two days. The decathlon crowns what is commonly referred to as, 'the world's greatest athlete', since they can competitively perform in multiple events in a short period. This requires a great deal of strength, skill, and resilience. However, women are excluded from this opportunity and honor. This restriction is not limited to the Olympics, as several other professional and amateur competitions and teams do not host the event for women. Perhaps women are not seen as physically capable of competing in such a demanding event, or maybe there is not enough interest from current female athletes.⁹⁵

Nonetheless, the exclusion of women from this event and others shows that gender stereotypes and barriers still linger. Here are other ways that restrictions have been placed on female athletes in the Olympic Games. In the Tokyo Games, families of athletes were not allowed within the Olympic Village where the athletic teams resided. With this restriction, some of the female athletes who were breastfeeding had requested to bring their children with them to be able to properly care for them. Despite multiple requests, the IOC only made the exception when one of the Canadian basketball players, Kim Gaucher, publicly complained about the rule and her circumstances. She argued that she was being put in a position to choose between being an athlete and a mother. While the IOC did finally allow for the mothers to fulfill their wishes, it should not have taken so long nor required pressure from media and fans. Furthermore, if the Games were truly trying to create an inclusive environment for female athletes, this situation should have been taken into consideration beforehand. Striving for gender equality in sports is vital for women's empowerment and female athletes, however, organizations must also realize that there are special circumstances that apply to women that may not always or ever apply to men. With the sports sector, and the world in general, already designed for the leisure of men, there will be times when environments and policies can interfere with female needs or comfortability. What may be equal for both genders, may not be appropriate for both

⁹⁴ International Olympic Committee, "Applying a Gender Lens."

⁹⁵ Rasheed, "Why Sexism Is Still a Problem at the Most 'gender-Equal' Olympics."

genders.⁹⁶

Differences between genders can extend into sports themselves. Even as IFs have allowed women to compete in the same sports, there are many policies instituted within the sport causing a gender imbalance. These differences in an event can range between length, weight categories, equipment, sizes of fields, the way athletes are judged, or the uniforms they wear.⁹⁷ For the Paris 2024 Olympics, Nike was heavily criticized for the US track and field team uniforms between the women and men. Katie Moon, an Olympic pole vaulter, defended the uniforms and said that female athletes have multiple options to choose from with varying levels of coverage. However, the female uniform that Nike used in its advertisements was more revealing than the men's uniform, one included a high-cut bikini bottom while the other was spandex shorts that ended above the knee.⁹⁸ Hence, while female athletes have multiple options, they are still encouraged and expected to wear the more revealing uniform throughout the media.

Another example of gender differences is demonstrated in artistic gymnastics. The age requirement for men is 18 while the age requirement for women is 16. Artistic male gymnasts also have different apparatus events than female athletes, and they also have more events with six compared to four for women. There are examples of sports that are not differentiated between genders, such as archery or badminton, showing that women and men can compete in the same sport in the same manner.⁹⁹ However, differences continue. A prime example is softball and baseball, with a smaller field, different equipment, and length of play. This is common throughout many other sports, along with lower age requirements for women, more revealing uniforms, and less demanding physical requirements. Whether these differences are natural or intended, the IOC has the power to change these expectations and rules.

The Paris 2024 Olympics was specifically criticized for

banning French athletes from wearing a hijab, a head covering worn in public by some Muslim women, during competition. France first banned the hijab and other clothing or symbols of an individual's religious affiliation in schools and government institutions in 2004.¹⁰⁰ This ban has already experienced intense scrutiny from across the globe and different organizations, but it has intensified with the 2024 Games. While the IOC ruled that athletes must be allowed to wear a hijab if desired, this is not extended to French athletes who must follow the rules of their sports federation and country. With Muslims only making up less than ten percent of the population in France, there is not enough public or government support to contest this law. Human rights experts and other policy members have argued that this is excluding and singling out these handfuls of Muslim women and girls from society, and now sports.¹⁰¹ This restriction will prevent hijabi women from participating in sports, as well as other aspects of society. While it does not affect them primarily, nor is the rule specifically outlawing the hijab, it is a form of discrimination against these girls and their religious practices. This will discourage current and future hijabi women from participating in sports and keep them from participating at a professional level. The Paris 2024 Games and the ban on hijabs are only one example of how governments and sports interfere with the cultural and religious practices of women and exclude them from pursuing an athletic career.

Copa America and Women's Football

Copa America is the world's oldest international football tournament and is based out of the South American region. The first tournament was hosted in 1916, with Uruguay being the first team to win the title. Like the Olympics, the Copa America is hosted every four years. The tournament is overseen by the Confederacion Sudamericana de Futbol (CONMEBOL) and consists of 10 national South American teams with two additional teams being invited to participate

⁹⁶ Rasheed, "Why Sexism Is Still a Problem at the Most 'gender-Equal' Olympics."

⁹⁷ Michele Donnelly, "Gender Inequality Will Still Be an Issue at the Paris 2024 Olympics - Despite the Games Being Gender-Balanced," *The Conversation*, August 20, 2023, <https://theconversation.com/gender-inequality-will-still-be-an-issue-at-the-paris-2024-olympics-despite-the-games-being-gender-balanced-210883>.

⁹⁸ Sarah Shamim, "Paris Olympics 2024 Controversy Puts Focus on 'sexist' Women's Sports Kits," *Al Jazeera*, July 28, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2024/7/28/paris-olympics-2024-controversy-puts-focus-on-sexist-womens-sports-kits>.

⁹⁹ Donnelly, "Gender Inequality Will Still Be an Issue at the Paris 2024 Olympics."

¹⁰⁰ Orla Barry, "20 Years after France's Hijab Ban, the Issue Remains Divisive," *The World*, May 2, 2024, <https://theworld.org/stories/2024/05/02/20-years-after-frances-hijab-ban-the-issue-remains-divisive>.

¹⁰¹ Shamim, "Paris Olympics 2024 Controversy Puts Focus on 'sexist' Women's Sports Kits."

in every tournament.¹⁰² The first tournament in 1916 only allowed men's football, with women's teams not joining until 1991. Copa America Femenina started with only three teams, Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela. Women not participating in the Copa America was not a result of a lack of interest, but because women were banned or discouraged from playing the sport. Brazil did not allow women to play football until 1983. Uruguay also banned women from playing football in 1960 and argued that women participating in football went against their "nature." In Chile and Argentina, women only had access to basketball, swimming, and other sports that were seen as suitable for females. Even though women were not recognized or allowed to play, they still played in local club teams, at charity events, or recreationally in their communities. In 1995, Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador joined with women's teams. Then in 1998, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay completed the final ten.¹⁰³

Copa America Femenina has come a long way, with the tournament now being hosted every two years instead of every four as a result of growing popularity.¹⁰⁴ In 2016, CONMEBOL announced its commitment to developing and encouraging women in the sport and working environment of football, and the importance of equality.¹⁰⁵ As of 2022, more than 45 percent of the employees at CONMEBOL are women. Thus, even though it took 75 years for women's football to be included in the tournament, it did not take nearly as long for women to be welcomed into the federation that runs the tournament. CONMEBOL also announced that for the 2024 Copa America, female referees would be allowed for the first time. While only eight out of the 101 match officials are women, this is still a notable step towards gender equality in the world of football. Two of the women were game referees, one was a video assistant referee, and the remaining five were assistant referees. Edina Alves, from Brazil, was also the first female referee to oversee a Men's World Cup game.¹⁰⁶

Along with promoting gender equality, CONMEBOL has also taken additional steps to prioritize safety. Referees used red, yellow, and now pink cards throughout the game as necessary. The new pink card is used when a player experiences a concussion or other form of a head injury, and another player is needed to replace them. A pink card is used when the team coach notifies the referee, and that player is not able to rejoin the game once being pulled out.¹⁰⁷ This new rule will correct the concerns and risks that commonly occur with head injuries and sports and will protect current and future athletes both during and beyond the game. CONMEBOL has shown that not only are they taking women's sports more seriously, but they are also maintaining the importance of safety for their female athletes.

Through the Copa America Femenina, the South American teams can qualify for the upcoming Olympics and World Cup. At the 2022 Cup, the women's Brazilian and Colombian teams qualified for the Paris 2024 Games. Brazil has gained a spot in the Olympics through the Copa America since 1996, as they have won most of the Copa Cups or come in a close second.¹⁰⁸ This has allowed for the Brazil women's team to be highly regarded in the world of women's football and for its players to also be highly recognized. One of these players include Marta Vieira da Silva, who is considered the greatest female football player of all time. Silva experienced limited opportunities as a female football player throughout her youth, but her interest and commitment to the sport persevered and led to her joining a local men's junior team in Brazil. She was then scouted by Vasco da Gama, which was a men's football club looking to begin a women's team. Through this opportunity, she was able to be scouted by the Sweden Umea team, where she gained global recognition by leading the team to multiple championships and finals. Silva has won six FIFA World Player of the Year Awards. She has had a long and very successful career, but her most outstanding accomplishments

102 "Copa América," Encyclopædia Britannica, July 25, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/sports/Copa-America>.

103 "Stories from the Copa America Femenina," CONMEBOL, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://cdn.conmebol.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/History-of-the-Copa-America-Femenina-ING.pdf>.

104 Tim Vickery, "Copa America Femenina Improving, but Can Anyone Beat Brazil?" ESPN, July 4, 2022, https://www.espn.com/soccer/story/_/id/37629763/copa-america-femenina-improving-anyone-beat-brazil.

105 Martina Alcheva, "Female Referees to Make Historic Debut at Copa America," World Soccer Talk, May 25, 2024, <https://worldsoccertalk.com/copa-america/female-referees-to-make-historic-debut-at-copa-america/>.

106 CONMEBOL, "Stories from the Copa America Femenina."

107 Martina, "Female Referees to Make Historic Debut at Copa America."

108 "Marta and Linda Caicedo Lead Brazil and Colombia at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games," CONMEBOL, July 25, 2024, <https://copaamerica.com/en/news/olympic-games-2024-womens-soccer-brazil-colombia-marta-caicedo>.

have been through her participation on the national Brazilian women's team. First joining in 2002, she scored several worthy goals during championship games that led to her setting a record for Women's World Cup scoring. In 2017, when she scored her 17th World Cup goal, she set an all-time record for the most World Cup goal scorer for both male and female athletes.¹⁰⁹ This record was formerly held by Miroslav Klose, from Germany, who played in four World Cups from 2002 to 2014 and scored a total of 16 goals.¹¹⁰ Silva also competed in the 2004 and 2008 Olympic Games, where Brazil won two silver medals. At the Tokyo 2020 Games, she became the first football player to ever score a goal in five back-to-back Olympic Games. Despite Brazil commonly losing World Cup or Olympic Gold titles, Silva has repeatedly proven herself as the best female athlete of all time, and one of the best football players in the world.¹¹¹

Before 1983, Brazil did not allow women to compete in football. Before 1991, there were no women's teams in the Copa America. The first women's Copa America was held between April and May of 1991.¹¹² Later that year, the women's first FIFA World Cup was held in November.¹¹³ Finally, in 1996, women's football was included as an event in the Olympic Games for the first time.¹¹⁴ This chain reaction has led to numerous teams and players, such as Brazil and Marta Silva, to break records, make history, and gain global recognition. It has allowed for women, who at one point only had access to deflated balls or abandoned fields, to play in some of the biggest and most highly regarded sports federations and international events.¹¹⁵ After winning several Copa America Cups and qualifying for the Olympics, Brazil will host the 2027 Women's World Cup. They will be the first South American country to host the Cup. Once again, making history, as a country that originally deemed football as inappropriate for

women, now has one of the top performing women's national football teams will host the biggest football tournament of the year. Silva claimed that playing in a World Cup has been a "dream" of hers and many other Brazilian players. The Brazil team will be honored during this tournament and has set its sights on winning the cup for the first time and encouraging the next generation of female football players.¹¹⁶ Brazil and the Copa America Femenina are role models, a standard, demonstrating that changing policies and breaking barriers is indeed possible with persistence. Most importantly, this team, this tournament, and players like Marta Silva display the numerous possibilities that female athletes can achieve if given the chance and the platform. Silva has shown that female athletes are just as capable and skilled as male athletes, and possibly even more, by beating records and making history that her male counterparts have never accomplished. Silva did all of this while fighting for opportunities that fellow male athletes already had, and still having less global attention and recognition.

On the other hand, there are still many issues within the world of women's football. While Brazil has been able to effectively build up its women's team and players, other countries have not been as successful or giving. A reporter, Brenda Elsey, from Global Sports Matters previously compiled an article in 2023 on the Colombian women's team and their shocking circumstances. For the national Colombian women's team, the female players struggle with a corrupt and sexist football federation. Reports first started in 2015, with several past and current players, employees, and family members of players stating incidents of sexual harassment, assault, and even theft. While the players could seek justice, international federations like FIFA and CONMEBOL are composed of officials from several national football federations. Hence, Ramon Jesurun,

¹⁰⁹ Adam Augustyn, "Marta," Encyclopædia Britannica, August 7, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marta>.

¹¹⁰ "FIFA World Cup All-Time Leading Scorers," FIFA, November 9, 2023, <https://www.fifa.com/en/tournaments/mens/worldcup/articles/fifa-world-cup-all-time-leading-scorers>.

¹¹¹ Augustyn, "Marta."

¹¹² "History of the Copa America Femenina," CONMEBOL, accessed on August 5, 2024, <https://cdn.conmebol.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/History-of-the-Copa-America-Femenina-ING.pdf>.

¹¹³ "FIFA Women's World Cup: The Beginning," FIFA, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://www.fifa.com/en/tournaments/womens/womensworldcup/fifa-womens-world-cup-china-1991>.

¹¹⁴ "History of Football at the Olympic Games," The Olympic Studies Centre October 19, 2017, <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Factsheets-Reference-Documents/Games/OG/History-of-sports/Reference-document-Football-History-at-the-OG.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Augustyn, "Marta."

¹¹⁶ Tabata Viapiana, "Brazil Will Be First South American Country to Host the Women's World Cup in 2027," Brazil Reports, May 17, 2024, <https://brazilreports.com/brazil-will-be-first-south-american-country-to-host-the-womens-world-cup-in-2027/6098/>.

who is the president of the Colombian federation, also is a part of the FIFA Executive Council and Vice President and Chair of Finance for CONMEBOL. Corruption runs deep throughout the football federations, and that leaves the Colombian female players with limited sources of help and the risk of further worsening their team conditions or jeopardizing their careers. Even if a player was brave enough to make a complaint to FIFA or CONMEBOL about their national federation, members like Jesurun have the influence to sway any decisions made or interfere with any action taken.¹¹⁷

Without an independent governing organization to oversee these national federations without internal conflict, there is no way to fully protect and help these players when these inexcusable incidents occur. Therefore, any player is at risk, but the female players are in a more disadvantaged position with a smaller fan base, fewer resources and funding, and gender stereotypes and attitudes throughout their community and federations that work against them. Daniela Montoya was one of the players who spoke out against the Colombian federation and the treatment of female players. Montoya scored the first goal for Colombia during the 2015 World Cup and helped her team advance to the 16th round, which they had never done before. However, later that year, she reported that none of the players received compensation for their participation and claimed that this was not the only problem they were facing from the federation. Then, when the roster for the Rio 2016 Olympics was announced, Montoya was unexpectedly not included in it. Another player and reporters argued that this was solely because of her publicly speaking against the federation, but she was not welcomed onto the team again until the 2018 Copa America.¹¹⁸

Numerous other issues of women's football in Colombia were outlined. Natalia Ariza, another national team player, said that many athletes who speak out about the federation receive insults about their physical appearance or threats of rape. Carolina Rozo, a previous physical trainer of the Under 17 (U17) national team spoke out against the team coach

Didier Luna for sexual harassment and attempted assault. Instead of Luna being properly removed from the federation and legally punished, Rozo was fired and received numerous threatening phone calls. Hence, the fellow staff members of the federation are just as worried about speaking out against the federation, as the athletes are. Previous efforts to build up the professional women's league in Colombia failed when the men's clubs would not agree to support or partner with them. This ruined any chances to further establish women's football in the country, allow more opportunities for future players, and funnel more resources into the national team.¹¹⁹

Outside the national federation, it is equally bad. Owners of the football academy Club Besser, Pedro Ignacio Rodriguez and Sebastian Esteban Rodriguez, were charged with grooming and sexually assaulting underage girls. Pedro previously coached the U17 and U20 women's national team. Jesurun and other officials have been under investigation by the Colombian government for illegal sales and financial behavior, however, the justice system in Colombia has not fully recovered from civil wars and political instability. Thus, when cases of gender violence and inequality come forward, there are limited resources to seek justice and amend these systems. The International Federation of Professional Footballers (FIFPRO) is an organization of player associations and is working to protect women football players and their labor rights. They have been focusing on collecting resources and funds for their female players, but as an international organization they have minimal oversight and say over national governments and federations.¹²⁰ The success of the Brazilian team and its female players deserve the full support and recognition from the sports world. Additionally, the failures of the Colombian federation and employees deserve the full amount of punishment for their corruption, mistreatment, and abuse against their female players. Both in the sports world and through proper legislative actions by local or national governments. This is not the only case in women's football, much less women's sports, and with extra detail and investigation, numerous cases of this inexcusable behavior towards female athletes can be identified

117 Brenda Elsey, "Colombian Women's National Football Team in Crisis," *Global Sport Matters*, June 28, 2023, <https://globalsportmatters.com/culture/2023/06/28/colombian-national-womens-football-team-crisis/>.

118 Elsey, "Colombian Women's National Football Team in Crisis."

119 Elsey, "Colombian Women's National Football Team in Crisis."

120 Elsey, "Colombian Women's National Football Team in Crisis."

but are not always properly resolved.

Women's football, specifically in South America, has come a long way. During the 2019 Women's World Cup, the viewers in Brazil doubled to 108 million compared to previous years.¹²¹ With fan and global support rising, it is estimated that the support and interest in the sport, both on the player and watcher side, will only increase. However, women's football is still not recognized or respected as much as men's football in South America more than in other regions of the world. Regardless of the continued fan interest or successes of the female players, the national and international clubs and federations need to reform. The lack of gender equal funding, resources, and abuse is hindering both the sport and the players. For women's football and players to flourish, better infrastructure and domestic support is required.¹²² Opportunities for women must be established on a local and youth level, professional and international. Sexist and discriminatory behavior towards female football players must cease and be discouraged. This puts both the female players' mental and physical health at risk. If an employee or member is seen acting in such a manner, a proper reporting and legislative system must be in place so that they can be held accountable and removed from these environments. Lastly, female athletes must have full and equal access to compensation and any additional resources, so that they may continue and focus on their athletic career. Copa America has opened several doors for women's football and its players. It has given these athletes a field, a platform, and a chance of being a professional athlete and performing at the top level of football. Several other organizations and federations have followed in its footsteps and further established the sport. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there is no work left to be done and that female football players no longer face inequality.

Sustainable Development Goals

Within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets were established and agreed upon by all member states. The SDGs and targets prioritize five areas of importance for our world: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. The overall goal of the agenda is to establish a universally peaceful and equal world. Eradicating poverty and ensuring human rights are some examples of the goals and targets that were established in hopes of creating a sustainable economy, society, and environment as the world continues to develop.¹²³ In reference to gender inequality and women's sports, two SDGs are specifically applicable to this topic.

Starting with Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality. Some of the targets that have been outlined for this goal include ending discrimination, eliminating gender violence, ensuring equal rights and leadership opportunities, and providing sexual and reproductive health.¹²⁴ In the world of sports, this has not always been the case. In 2016, two gymnasts came forward claiming they had been sexually assaulted by Larry Nassar, a USA Gymnastics national team physician. Following this report, more than 150 women came forward with similar allegations against Dr. Nassar creating a country-wide scandal. Dr. Nassar was convicted in 2018 and sentenced to 175 years in prison. Despite these women seeking previous help from authorities, it took several years for Dr. Nassar to be properly convicted and punished. This failure in proper accountability and legislation allowed Dr. Nassar to continue to treat patients and assault more women.¹²⁵ Sports can be a demanding environment, where success and money are prioritized over the health of its athletes. Female athletes are not excused from this risk and are subjected to further threats of discrimination or gender violence from their peers, doctors, or trainers. On average, 21 percent of females

121 Matias Pinto, "The Audience for Women's Soccer Is Slowly Growing in South America. Now They Need the Funding," *Americas Quarterly*, July 17, 2023, <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/the-audience-for-womens-soccer-is-slowly-growing-in-south-america-now-they-need-the-funding/>.

122 "How South America's First Women's World Cup Could Help Grow the Game in the Region," *The New York Times*, May 18, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5500137/2024/05/18/south-america-womens-world-cup/>.

123 "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," United Nations, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

124 "Goal 5," United Nations, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>.

125 Mark Alesia, Tim Evans, and Marisa Kwiatkowski, "Former USA Gymnastics Doctor Accused of Abuse," *IndyStar*, September 12, 2016, <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2016/09/12/former-usa-gymnastics-doctor-accused-abuse/89995734/>.

experience sexual abuse at least once in their childhood as an athlete. This is twice as much as male athletes.¹²⁶

Another struggle for some female athletes that male athletes do not face equally is testosterone, a sex hormone that women and men both produce. However, men commonly have higher levels of testosterone than women. Testosterone has many roles in the body and impacts the body's muscle mass, bone mass, production of red blood cells, and fat distribution.¹²⁷ Recently, many female athletes have been questioned or suspended from competitions for having high testosterone levels. Two Namibian sprinters, Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi, were not allowed to compete in the women's 200 meters for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics because their natural testosterone levels were too high. There is limited medical research to support claims that a higher testosterone level gives an athlete an unfair advantage. World Athletics is focused on protecting female classifications and female athletes in sports when it comes to sex development. However, both women were born and classified as female. In 2018, World Athletics ruled that if a female athlete has an out-of-range testosterone level, she must take medication to reduce the hormone level to an approved competitive range.¹²⁸ A woman's hormone levels, such as testosterone, fluctuate throughout her life and during her menstrual cycle. Having testosterone levels that are too high or too low can have numerous health effects. This can include infertility, limited production of red blood cells, or obesity.¹²⁹ More importantly, taking medication to artificially interfere with the amount of testosterone your body is producing, without a medical reason, can lead to further health concerns. This not only poses a danger to female athletes' sexual and reproductive health, but it also can create more gender barriers and discrimination for certain female athletes. While it is important to ensure a fair and level playing field amongst all female participants, creating these forms of

testing and requirements for women and not men is unfair and can lead to unforeseeable risks.

Another applicable goal is Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. This goal outlined several targets, including equal access to justice, inclusive representation and decision-making, enforce non-discriminatory laws, and strengthen involvement from developing countries.¹³⁰ When looking at the number of medals earned by every country in the Olympics, it is no coincidence that the most developed countries in the world have the highest number of medals earned. Up until the 2020 Games, the US, Russia, China, Germany, and Great Britain have won the most medals. With other developed countries, like Japan and France closely behind.¹³¹ Countries that are less developed, may have other hindrances such as political instability or lack of public freedoms. Therefore, athletes do not have as many opportunities or resources as their competitors from more developed countries. This means that they could have limitations in their training, less equipment, lack of coaching or medical treatment, or their country may not have the funds to send them to international competitions.¹³²

This further excludes developing countries from the international landscape, but not in the sports sector. Athletes, both male and female, are not experiencing the same opportunities that a professional athletic career can provide. These interested individuals may not have the opportunity to participate in sports at all. Moving forward, athletes from developing countries must be given extra consideration and support from organizations to combat this inequality amongst female players. Female athletes from developing countries are not the only way women are excluded from sports. There is also a lack of women in leadership and decision-making positions. While numerous organizations or sports clubs have improved opportunities for women to work in the sports

126 "Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in Sport," United Nations, 2023, https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/3343_unwomen_unesco_vawg_handbook_6a_singlepage.pdf.

127 "Testosterone," Cleveland Clinic, September 1, 2022, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/24101-testosterone>.

128 Oriana Gonzalez, "Namibian Female Athletes Disqualified from Olympics Due to Naturally High Testosterone Levels," AXIOS, July 3, 2021, <https://www.axios.com/2021/07/03/namibia-disqualified-naturally-high-testosterone-olympic>.

129 Kiara Anthony, "High Testosterone Levels in Women," Healthline, February 6, 2023, <https://www.healthline.com/health/high-testosterone-in-women>.

130 "Goal 16," United Nations, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>.

131 Alan Kronenberg, "The Countries with the Most Olympic Medals," U.S. News, August 1, 2024, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/the-countries-with-the-most-olympic-medals>.

132 Wladimir Andreff, "Sport and Economic Development," Play the Game, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.playthegame.org/news/sport-and-economic-development/>.

field, it is still a male-dominated field. A survey by the Sport Integrity Global Alliance showed that women only fulfill 26.9 percent of the executive positions for international federations collectively.¹³³ If female athletes are to be treated more equally and respectfully, female employees in the sports fields must also be treated the same. Women should be included in the organizations and be welcomed in the rooms that make the decisions and protocols for women's sports. When focusing on building peaceful, strong, and just institutions, the equality of women should also be considered. Many of the sports institutions across the world have a long, established history, but it is not a history that was founded with women included. Hence, these institutions must readjust themselves to be considered truly equal and fair.

Establishing gender equality in women's sports is part of the 2030 Agenda in many ways, and achieving this goal can lead to many other targets. Gender equality is still a major concern throughout society, and sports is no exception. Female athletes need to have access to the same resources, funding, and support from fans, coaches, and fellow players that their male counterparts receive. Additionally, these organizations must not forget that female and male athletes have different needs and bodily functions. The current sports sector is still heavily designed to suit male athletes, which may not always apply to female athletes. Thus, moving forward it is important to achieve both equal and flexible environments that can ensure all athletes of either gender can perform to their fullest physical ability. Many sports, organizations, and events are accessible to athletes, however, not all athletes have equal access to them, such as athletes from developing countries or female athletes. These injustices must be corrected, so that everyone has an opportunity to perform in the sport of their choosing. Achieving gender equality in women's sports can uplift and develop societies and communities while improving the economic and social welfare of women around the world.

Bloc Analysis

Points of Division

The conditions for female athletes vary from country to country. As previously outlined, female athletes face multiple challenges in the world of athletics. These challenges range from having proper equipment, equal access to weight training facilities, or the ability to compete in sports at all. Additionally, considering the context of a country's government and economic status also plays a big role in an athlete's opportunities. Female athletes may be able to compete or attend international sporting competitions, but their country may not have the funds to fully support them due to corruption or lack of development. There are numerous ways that an unequal environment may be created for a female athlete to endure. In pursuit of gender equality in women's sports, all these risks must be considered. The status of women's sports, both internationally and nationally, must be evaluated and resolved.

A thorough understanding of a country's history and the progression of women's sports is highly recommended. One should consider when female athletes were first allowed to compete in sports, what legislation there is to support or bind them and evaluate how female athletes have progressed throughout the years. Additionally, it is beneficial to look at how female athletes are currently being treated in professional leagues or events, the standard of living or income they receive, their health, and general wellbeing throughout their careers. With careful research, one might discover certain professional or amateur athletes who have not been treated properly, which may be generally hidden by the media or government. Regardless of how advanced or successful a country or its female athletes are, the full situation needs to be taken into consideration to ensure all athletes are treated fairly and appropriately.

To identify where a country falls in the progress and treatment of female athletes, the best place to start is considering how many women currently participate in sports. Considering if this has increased or not over the past few years is also

¹³³ Nuno Perestrelo, "Women Remain Underrepresented in Sports Leadership, despite Some Progress – Siga Survey," Sport Integrity Global Alliance, March 7, 2023, <https://siga-sport.com/press-releases/women-remain-underrepresented-in-sports-leadership-despite-some-progress-siga-survey/>.

important. A university in Germany evaluated professional sports, and the gender equality and participation observed in each country. Using this data, the amount of sport disciplines that female athletes competed in per country were identified from 2001 to 2019. Therefore, four blocs are created: high participation with no change, high participation with increase, low participation with no change, and low participation with increase. The article specifically mentioned the region of South America and the Islamic Republic of Iran for having the most growth in participation.¹³⁴ Please note, that this study is not a complete measure or indicator of gender equality in women's sports for that country. It only measures one factor of women's sports, the ability to participate in sports and multiple types of sports. It does not mean that female athletes are treated fairly and respectfully, but it indicates how likely or how much a woman can engage in sports. This is only one part, the first step, for female athletes in sports. Hence, this is only the first step in identifying the status of women's sports in your country.

High Participation in Sport Disciplines with a Recorded Increase

The scale for the graph from 2001 and 2019 uses a range of zero to twenty sports disciplines. Depending on the color of a country, this represents the number of sports that women were able to participate in. Countries that fall in this category, are member states that displayed an increase in the amount of participation in 2019 compared to previous years. Therefore, these countries most likely had a low or middle level of participation and have since achieved a high status. This increase could mean several things for women's sports and female athletes. Along with increasing the number of sports that female athletes compete in, these countries may have also increased the average number of female athletes, the duration of their athletic season, or the amount of sporting events attended or hosted.

Some of the countries that fall in this category include

Argentina, Chile, Croatia, Ecuador, Iran, Luxembourg, and Peru. All these countries had a recorded participation in 2001 of six or fewer disciplines. In the year of 2019, all these countries had a recorded participation of fifteen or more disciplines. The country with the highest recorded increase was Ecuador, which went from two disciplines to 19 disciplines in 2019.¹³⁵ This shows that the access and availability to multiple sports in Ecuador has improved but does not mean that the female athletes experience equality. For example, in the Rio 2016 Olympics, only 39 percent of Ecuador's athletes were female. While the involvement of women in sports throughout South America has increased in the past 20 years, the gap between male and female athletes is still significantly wide for most countries in that region. The amount of recognition and media coverage that the female Ecuadorian athletes receive was also minimal compared to the men. Thus, many successful female athletes are not fully known or recognized by the public.¹³⁶ The countries in this category have established opportunities for female athletes, but the treatment and recognition of these athletes may still need improvement.

High Participation in Sport Disciplines with No Recorded Increase

Most of the developed countries with competitive athletic performance fall into this category. These are countries that have had a high level of participation in women's sports disciplines since 2001. Thus, there was no necessary improvement needed since female athletes already have access to all or most types of sports. Gender equality is a concern for women's sports everywhere, but these countries most likely have the most progressed conditions for female athletes. Some of the countries that fall in this category include Australia, Canada, Great Britain, France, Russia, Spain, and the US.¹³⁷

When considering the US, they were included in this category and are one of the most competitive countries in the world. However, that does not mean that there are not any inequalities in US women's sports. Issues of gender violence

134 Henk Erik Meier, Mara Verena Konjer, and Jorg Krieger, "Women in International Elite Athletics: Gender (in)Equality and National Participation," *Front Sports Act Living* 3 (August 27, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2021.709640>.

135 Meier, Konjer, and Krieger, "Women in International Elite Athletics."

136 Dennys Jordan Correa, Tatiana Farias Bohorquez, Perla Leon Lopez, and Andrea Ocana, "Female Empowerment in Sport, Analysis of Its Narrative and Treatment in the Media," *Centro Sur* 6, no. 1 (October 23, 2021): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.37955/cs.v6i1.236>.

137 Meier, Konjer, and Krieger, "Women in International Elite Athletics."

and differences between college sports funding for men and women have already been outlined. Based on 2022 statistics, the gender wage gap between men and women in the US sits at 82 percent.¹³⁸ When looking at the professional basketball athletes on US teams, the median wage for a female player is USD 102,751 while the median wage for a male player is USD 8.5 million.¹³⁹ Some countries did not increase because they already had a full range of 20 recorded sports disciplines. Some countries still have a high level of participation in women's sports, but had a small decrease in the number of disciplines that women compete in. Russia, for example, had recorded 20 disciplines in 2001 but lowered them in 2019.

Low Participation in Sport Disciplines with a Recorded Increase

Most of the countries that fall within this category are from the African region, with a few outliers in other regions. These are countries that have experienced a slight increase in their participation in more sports disciplines, but still have a low participation overall. Some of the reasons why this is the case could be policies restricting women from doing certain 'masculine' sports or lack of funding and development of the sports sector where women only have opportunities in a small handful of sports. Some of the countries that fall in this category are Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Egypt, Libya, Mongolia, and Zambia.¹⁴⁰ Gender Equality in the DRC is an extreme humanitarian issue. The DRC is one of the largest and most resource dense countries in Africa, but it remains an extremely poor and unstable country. Due to this instability and political corruption, poverty and armed conflicts have led to its civilians, specifically women, being abused and mistreated regularly on a wide scale. More than one million cases of rape have been reported and women occupy less than 10 percent of decision-making positions in the country's government.¹⁴¹ The status of women and gender inequality in most of these countries is a serious issue.

When evaluating the opportunities and treatment of female athletes in these regions, one should also consider how sports might bring equality and peace to women and that country if possible.

Low Participation in Sport Disciplines with No Recorded Increase

The countries with low participation and no increase or a recorded decrease include Burma, Cambodia, Chad, Gabon, Madagascar, and Tanzania.¹⁴² These are countries with a small political and economic landscape, and therefore, also have minimal involvement in sports. Any investment or expansion in sports that these countries may have considered, would have most likely been given to male athletes rather than female athletes. In Gabon, the labor participation rate for women was recorded at 39 percent for 2023. Only 56 percent of the young girls complete secondary school, and 91 out of every 1,000 girls between the ages 15 to 19 gave birth in 2021.¹⁴³ When considering these statistics, the situation in Gabon and the lack of participation in women's sports can be understood. These limitations and struggles of women in less developed countries need to be addressed so that they will have equal access to education, healthcare, and sports if they wish. Sports can provide many developmental benefits to both the athletes and the countries that facilitate it. Madagascar and Tanzania are examples of countries that had low participation in 2001 and 2019, but decreased participation even lower within that period.¹⁴⁴ Why these countries' decreased participation should be explored, and finding solutions and supporting arguments for raising their participation would be ideal for the country's advancement and development.

Committee Mission

The Commission on the Status of Women is an international

138 Carolina Aragão, "Gender Pay Gap in U.S. Hasn't Changed Much in Two Decades," Pew Research Center, March 1, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/03/01/gender-pay-gap-facts/>.

139 "WNBA vs. NBA: What Are the Differences Between Them?" Pro-Tuff Decals, November 14, 2022, <https://www.protuffdecal.com/blog/wnba-vs-nba>.

140 Meier, Konjer, and Krieger, "Women in International Elite Athletics."

141 "Democratic Republic of Congo," United Nations, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/west-and-central-africa/democratic-republic-of-congo>.

142 Meier, Konjer, and Krieger, "Women in International Elite Athletics."

143 "Gabon," World Bank, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/gabon>

144 Meier, Konjer, and Krieger, "Women in International Elite Athletics."

governmental body, established to encourage gender equality and empower women. CSW is a functioning component of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and was created in 1946 through ECOSOC resolution 11 (II). In this resolution, ECOSOC outlined the importance of women's rights, recognizing women throughout society and history, and how women should be treated moving forward. CSW is responsible for upholding these values, reporting on the progress of women, and in 1996 became responsible for also implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Every four years, there are 45 member states elected for membership in the CSW, split up among several regions around the world. In 2024, CSW held its 68th committee session focusing on resolving poverty issues, uplifting institutions, and financing gender equality and women's empowerment.¹⁴⁵ In 2011, the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) combined. They became commonly known as UN Women, the Secretariat of the CSW.¹⁴⁶ Currently, UN Women is focusing on multiple initiatives to help women around the world. Some of these initiatives include economic empowerment, peace and security, women and girls with disabilities, HIV and AIDS, and the political participation and leadership of women.¹⁴⁷

UN Women have identified women's sports as a catalyst for change and promoting gender equality. In 2020, they hosted a panel called, Sport for Equality.¹⁴⁸ During this event, the UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, emphasized the utility of sport in displaying the capabilities and leadership that women and young girls possess in and

outside of sports.¹⁴⁹ In 2023, UN Women released a report detailing suggestions and tactics for policymakers to abolish violence against women in sports. They characterized sports as a reflection of society, and that by uplifting and protecting women's sports, these ideals can be transcended into other aspects of society.¹⁵⁰ Also in 2023, UN Women and the IOC teamed up and passed an agreement, which highlighted the importance of women's sports and how it can be used to advance gender equality.¹⁵¹ Gender equality in women's sports is still a difficult and complex issue. While women have experienced mistreatment, discrimination, and abuse through sports, they have also been encouraged, prioritized, and recognized as capable and equal individuals in comparison to male athletes. The potential and power of women's sports for all of women should not be underestimated or ignored. Women's sports can define rather than reflect society, with the right people and motives in charge.

145 Dag Hammarskjöld Library, "Gender and the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW): A Quick Guide," United Nations, May 3, 2024, <https://research.un.org/en/CSW>

146 "A Brief History of the Commission on the Status of Women" UN Women, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history>

147 "What We Do," UN Women, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do>.

148 "Sport for Generation Equality," UN Women, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/events/2020/10/event-sport-for-generation-equality>.

149 "Remarks by Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, at the UN Women Sport for Generation Equality Event," UN Women, October 15, 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/10/speech-ed-phumzile-sport-for-generation-equality-event>.

150 UNESCO, UN Women, and Spotlight Initiative, "Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in Sport."

151 "Press Release: The International Olympic Committee and UN Women Sign New Agreement to Advance Gender Equality Through Sport." UPress release, UN Women, September 18, 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2023/09/press-release-the-international-olympic-committee-and-un-women-sign-new-agreement-to-advance-gender-equality-through-sport>.

Research and Preparation Questions

Your dais has prepared the following research and preparation questions as a means of providing guidance for your research process. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

Topic A

1. How can the gender gap be balanced by the equal presence of women and men in the digital sector?
2. How can your country increase digital in wake of such a rapidly changing technology sector?
3. Considering the geographical and socioeconomic circumstances of your country, what are the main factors impacting on one's access to digital literacy?
4. What policies has your country's government put into place to increase digital literacy? Are these policies gender inclusive? If not, what could your country do to make these policies more inclusive?
5. Which UN resolutions already exist that address this problem? Are they being included in your country's national legislation?
6. How can your delegation assist developing countries so that they can afford technological devices to increase literacy? Which countries deal with this problem?

Topic B

1. How are women's sports limited and/or supported in your country?
2. What treaties, organizations, governmental bodies, or significant events are held within your country?
3. How have issues in women's sports been reported in your country, and what issues are they?
4. Are there barriers keeping women's sports from achieving equality in comparison to men's sports? If so, what are the barriers and how can they be resolved?
5. Are your country's controlling powers in favor of supporting women's sports and achieving gender equality?
6. How has women's sports improved over the past five years, and what else needs to be achieved?
7. Is your country capable of accomplishing what is needed to achieve equality? What can they do for women's sports internationally?

Important Documents

Topic A

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