



Gender Eligibility Row at Paris Olympics 2024

For Prelims: [Paris Olympics 2024](#), [International Boxing Association's \(IBA\)](#), International Olympic Committee, Disorders of Sex Development, Turner Syndrome

For Mains: Issues Faced Females in Sports, Issues Related to Women, Human Rights and Sports

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

The recent boxing match at the [Paris Olympics 2024](#) between Algeria's Imane Khelif and Italy's Angela Carini has ignited a significant controversy, particularly **concerning gender and eligibility in women's sports**.

Why did Imane Khelif's Win Spark a Controversy?

- **Background of the Controversy:** Khelif's quick victory led to a wave of criticism, with many accusing her of being a **"biological man (due to disorders of sex development)"** despite official confirmation of her gender identity as female. Critics accused Khelif of having an "unfair advantage".
- **International Boxing Association's Stance:** In 2023, Khelif and another boxer, Lin Yu-ting, were barred from competing in the [International Boxing Association's \(IBA\) World Championship](#) in New Delhi due to a "gender eligibility" test.
 - The details of this test remain confidential. However, both athletes are competing at the Paris Olympics due to the IBA's derecognition by the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)** in 2023.
 - The IOC's current eligibility criteria are based solely on the **gender stated in an athlete's passport**, which Khelif's identifies as female.
- **IOC's Response:** The IOC defended its decision, stating that all boxers in the Olympics had met the competition's eligibility criteria.
 - **The IOC criticised the IBA's decision** as "arbitrary" and expressed dismay at the abuse directed at Khelif and Lin Yu-ting, emphasizing that misleading information was being spread.

International Olympic Committee

- The IOC is a non-governmental international organisation based in **Lausanne, Switzerland** that came into existence in 1894. The IOC aims to ensure the regular holding of the Olympic Games and foster **Olympism and the Olympic movement**.
 - **Olympism is a philosophy that blends sport, culture**, education, and international cooperation, emphasizing the joy of effort, the educational value of good examples, social responsibility, and **respect for universal ethical principles**.
 - The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sports practised in accordance with Olympism and its values.

- The three main constituents of the Olympic Movement are the **IOC**, the **International Sports Federations (“IFs”)** and the **National Olympic Committees (“NOCs”)**.
- The IOC decides the rules and regulations of the Olympic Games and when and where the next Olympics event will be held.
- The IOC is a permanent organisation that **elects its own members**, with each member speaking **French or English and being a citizen of or residing in a country with a National Olympic Committee**.
 - The IOC is the final authority on all questions concerning the Olympic games and the Olympic movement.

Why is Gender Eligibility a Contentious Issue in Women’s Sports?

- **Sex and Athletic Performance:** Traditionally, sports are divided **based on sex due to physiological differences**, with men typically having advantages in muscle mass, strength, and endurance.
 - The **SRY gene on the Y chromosome** plays a significant role in testosterone production, which has been linked to these athletic advantages.
 - Studies, such as a **2017 paper in *Endocrine Reviews***, suggest that **testosterone levels are a major factor in athletic performance** differences between sexes.
- **Disorders of Sex Development (DSDs):** Some individuals with female reproductive organs may have **XY chromosomes** due to conditions like **Swyer syndrome**, one of many “Disorders of Sex Development”, or DSDs. complicating the discussion on gender eligibility.
 - There is debate on whether such athletes should be excluded from women’s sports to ensure fairness, given their **potential for higher testosterone levels and related advantages**.

Note:

- A sex chromosome is a type of chromosome involved in **sex determination**. Humans have 23 pairs of chromosomes of which 22 are identical in men and women; one, the sex chromosome, is different.
- **Females have two X chromosomes (XX) while males have one X and one Y (XY).**

What are Disorders of Sexual Development (DSDs)?

- **Definition:** DSDs encompass a spectrum of conditions where **individuals may have physical characteristics of both sexes** or atypical development of sexual characteristics. These differences **can be evident at birth, during puberty**, or later in life.
- **Examples:**
 - Individuals with **XY chromosomes but genitals that appear female**.
 - Individuals with **XX chromosomes** but genitals that **appear male**.
 - Individuals with **both ovarian and testicular tissue**.
 - Typical sex organs but with an abnormal chromosomal arrangement that affects growth and development.
- **Types of DSDs:**
 - **Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS):** A genetic condition where an individual with XY chromosomes is **resistant to male hormones (androgens)**, resulting in the **development of female physical traits** despite having male genetic makeup.
 - **Klinefelter Syndrome:** A chromosomal condition in males characterized by the presence of an extra X chromosome (XXY), leading to symptoms such as reduced testosterone levels, infertility, and physical and developmental differences.
 - **Turner Syndrome:** A chromosomal disorder **in females caused by the complete or**

partial absence of one X chromosome, resulting in short stature, infertility, and various physical and developmental abnormalities.

How do Sports Federations Address Gender Eligibility?

- **IOC's Approach:** Since 2021, the IOC has allowed **international sports federations to develop their own eligibility rules** based on an "evidence-based approach" that **balances fairness, inclusion, and non-discrimination**.
 - **Previously, testosterone levels were a primary determinant for eligibility**, but recent policies emphasize gender as stated in official documents.
- **Specific Regulations by Federations:** World Athletics, for example, still uses **testosterone levels as a criterion for athletes** with DSDs, requiring them to maintain levels below 2.5 nmol/L for at least 24 months.
 - Other sports bodies, like **Fédération internationale de natation (FINA)**, the International Cycling Union, and the International Rugby Union have instituted **varying bans on trans women athletes** based on testosterone levels, though the need for such bans across sports has been questioned given the different skill sets required.
- **Open Category Debate:** Some have proposed an **"open category" for trans athletes** to address these concerns.
 - However, the practicality of such a category is debated due to the limited number of elite-level trans athletes and the challenges of establishing fair competition standards.

Way Forward

- **Biomarkers:** Identify reliable **biomarkers that can accurately assess** athletic potential without infringing on athletes' privacy or dignity.
 - A **biomarker is an objective measurement** that can capture the state of a cell or organism at a given time.
 - **Conduct longitudinal studies on the effects of puberty blockers**, hormone therapy, and other interventions on athletic performance. Identify reliable biomarkers for assessing athletic potential.
- **Athlete Education:** Provide athletes with accurate information about sex, gender, and eligibility rules to promote informed decision-making.
- **Transparent and Inclusive Policies:** Sports federations should develop transparent and inclusive policies that balance fairness, inclusion, and non-discrimination. This includes clear guidelines on **eligibility criteria and the rationale behind them**.
- **Collaboration Among Federations:** International sports federations should collaborate to harmonise their policies and ensure consistency across different sports. This can help prevent confusion and ensure fair competition.
- **Respect for Human Rights:** Prioritise the protection of human rights, including the right to participate in sports, without discrimination.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss the challenges and ethical considerations associated with gender eligibility in sports. How do these issues impact fairness and inclusivity?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. Consider the following statements in respect of the Laureus World Sports Award which was instituted in the year 2000: (2021)

1. American golfer Tiger Woods was the first winner of this award.
2. The award was received mostly by 'Formula One' players so far.
3. Roger Federer received this award maximum number of times compared to others.

Which of the above statements are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (c)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/gender-eligibility-row-at-paris-olympics-2024>

