

# **WORLD ATHLETICS**

## **GENDER LEADERSHIP STRATEGY 2025-2027**



**WORLD  
ATHLETICS™**



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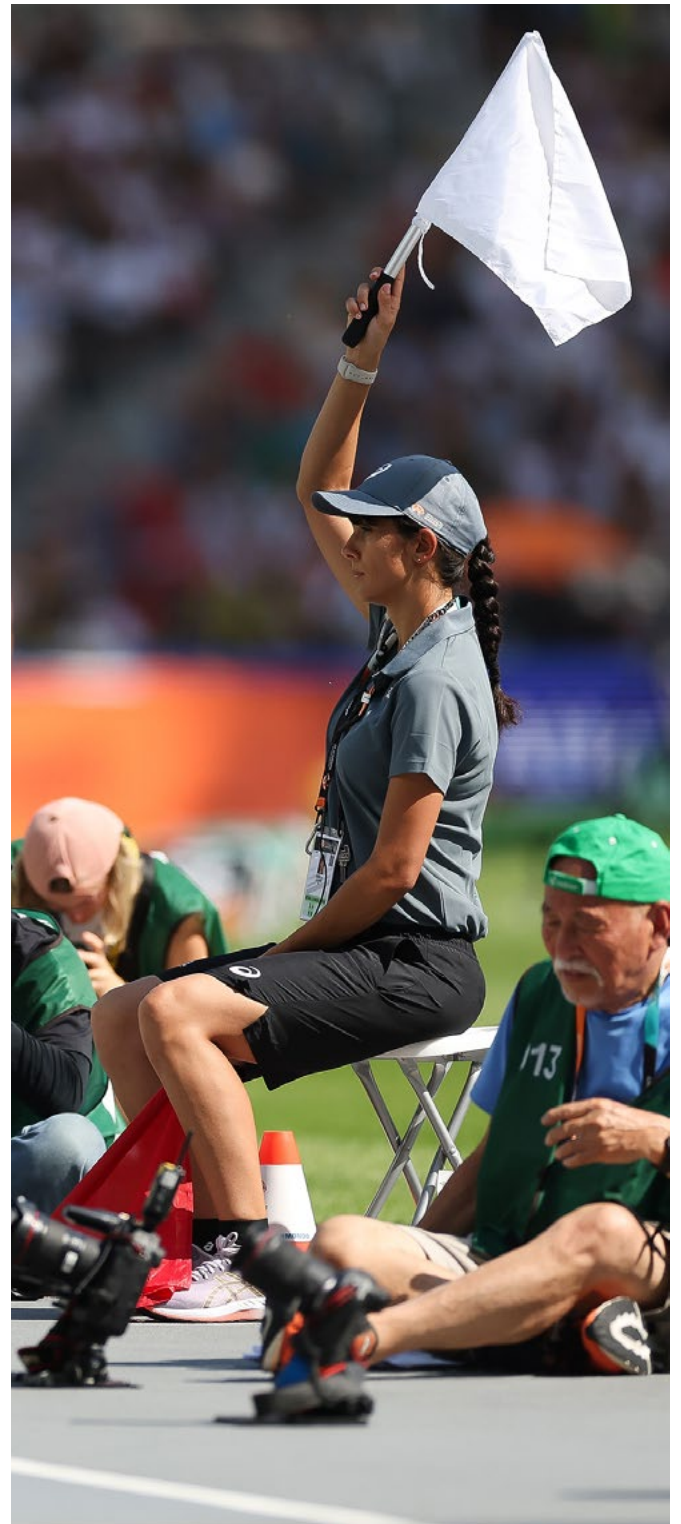
# INTRODUCTION & RATIONALE: THE CASE FOR CHANGE

World Athletics aims to be a role model organisation, a recognised voice and champion of gender inclusivity and equity at all levels of the sport. Athletics has gender parity in elite participation on the field of play and World Athletics aspires to reflect this off the field by empowering women and girls with equality of opportunity in leadership and decision-making roles across all facets of the sport. This is not about advocating for one group over another but achieving a more balanced representation across the World Athletics family.

Athletics has gender parity in pay and participation at our World Athletics Series events, and in 2023 achieved gender equality at the global leadership level at our World Athletics Council – the first Olympic sport to do so (50% female representation from 22% in 2016). All World Athletics bodies (commissions, committees, taskforces etc.) also now benefit from a minimum of 40% female representation (was 15% in 2016).

However, this has not yet been equalised in leadership positions throughout the World Athletics membership.

This is evidenced by just a 4% increase in the number of female World Athletics Member Federation (MF) Presidents over an eight-year period from 2016 to 2024, while representation among MF Vice-Presidents (+11%) and General Secretaries/CEOs (+6%) have seen only slightly more favorable increases. Advances have been made in female representation at the six World Athletics Area Association Councils (average female representation up from 16% to 34% level) but there is no female among the six Area Association Presidents. These statistics show there remains much to do to continue to promote gender equity in leadership roles in athletics worldwide.





## World Athletics female representation – administration leadership positions

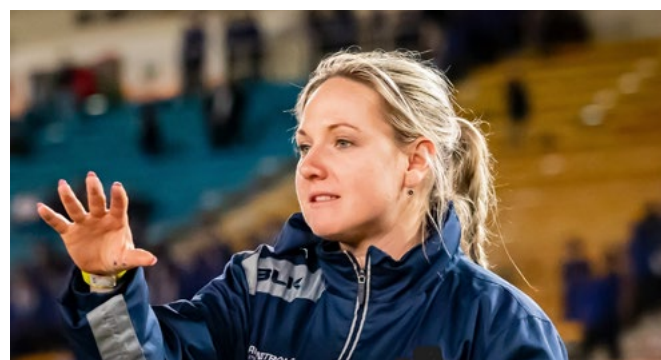
Leadership Position	2016	2024
MF President	9%	13%
MF Vice-President	13%	24%
MF General Secretary/CEO	20%	26%
Area Council (ave. across the 6)	16%	34%
World Athletics Council	22%	50%

## World Athletics female representation – coaching/officiating leadership positions

There has been progress but there also remain challenges in achieving equitable gender representation among our coaches and referees/technical officials.

There was 40% female representation across our International Technical Officials (ITOs) at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. Changes in World Athletics policy and approach (a revised World Athletics Referee Education & Certification System (WARECS) pathway, online courses/exams and minimum gender course requirements) have facilitated progression in female representation among referees. This is reflected by the WARECS Silver Level exam, which saw an increase in female participation from 19% to 40%, with the WARECS Bronze Level exam also witnessing a similar level of increase to 36%. The overall level of female representation in WARECS exams is currently 33%, so this has helped to significantly broaden the pool of qualified female referees at national, regional and international competitions; however, there is still more work to be done in this space notably supporting progression along the pipeline as at WARECS Gold level, of the 152 referees just 27% are female.

In terms of coaching, female coach representation at our World Athletics Championships was only 11% in 2023 (this is representative of other sports – at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games only 13% of all coaches were female). At the World Athletics U20 Championships female coach representation is higher at around 20% but given the gender parity we witness on the field of play this is a disproportionately low figure, and a focus remains on increasing the number of female high-performance coaches at major athletics events.



# BACKGROUND – THE GENDER LEADERSHIP TASKFORCE

# GOALS & OBJECTIVES

A key principle of World Athletics' (then IAAF) governance and integrity reforms in 2016 was to ensure diversity and achieve gender equality through the empowerment of women and girls, both on and off the field of play. To help achieve this, a Gender Leadership Taskforce (GLT) was established in 2017 with a mandate to:

- Ensure a robust pipeline of female leaders throughout athletics
- Ensure the mandated gender provisions regarding the World Athletics Constitution were filled (50% in 2027 on Council and phased through 2019 and 2023).

As outlined above, there have been notable achievements and progress under the guidance of the GLT<sup>1</sup>, but a focus remains on 2027 and driving forward the strategies to address the inequalities in gender representation and ensure gender equity is fully embedded across all levels of the sport.

The GLT therefore continues to promote awareness, provide advice and strategic oversight, support education, and ensure accountability in World Athletics achieving its gender-based vision and objectives, which are set out as follows.

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1 A summary of the key GLT achievements and outcomes to date is provided at Appendix A.

The key challenge is to change mindsets, which is why it is important to mainstream and incorporate gender equity into policies and frameworks. It is clear opportunities remain more restricted for women in sports administration, coaching and officiating. The diversity and difference of pace across the globe in terms of culture and readiness to embed gender equity means that we cannot create a one size fits all solution. For some the pace can be too fast, for others too slow.

As a result, our gender-based objectives remain focused on promoting awareness, initiating policy change, and implementing education to support progression and growth of the pool and pipeline of female leaders aligned to defined targets.

- **Increase gender equity across administrators, referees and coaches to achieve the following global targets**

#### ***Administrators:***

- Ensure the mandated gender provisions regarding the World Athletics Constitution are filled (50% in 2027 on Council) as well as the minimum gender provisions in the Area Association Constitutions

## VISION

**Strengthen, grow and sustain  
an environment for female  
leaders, to create access and  
opportunities and to contribute  
to the growth of World  
Athletics.**



#### **Referees:**

- 50/50 gender balance in ITOs at the World Athletics Championships Beijing 2027
- 50/50 gender balance in ITOs at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games

#### **Coaches:**

- Achieve minimum of 40% female representation in team coaches at the 2030 World Athletics U20 Championships (phased approach with interim goal of 30% by 2028 and 25% by 2026)
- Achieve minimum of 25% female representation in team coaches at the 2029 World Athletics Senior Championships (phased approach with interim goal of 20% by 2027)
- **Sustain and grow the pipeline of female leaders for decision making positions throughout athletics**

#### **Administrators:**

- Achieve minimum of 40% female representation on Member Federation Executive boards by 2029 (phased approach with current mandatory minimum of 20%)

#### **Referees:**

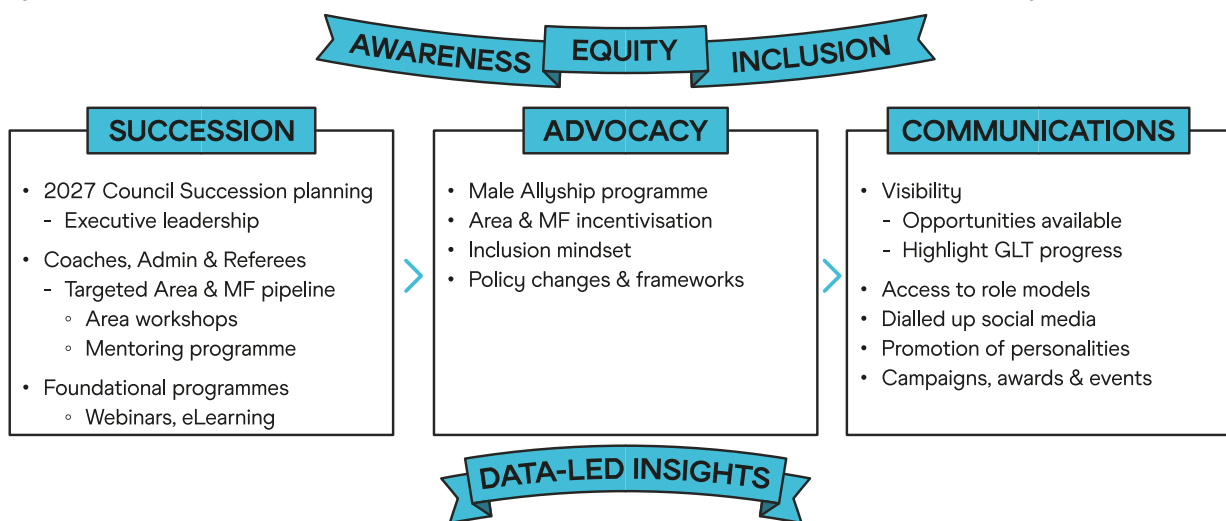
- Achieve minimum of 40% female representation across all WARECS exams (Bronze, Silver, Gold) by 2027

#### **Coaches:**

- Achieve minimum of 40% female representation for CECS Level 1 coaches by 2029 (phased approach with interim goal of 35% by 2027) & 30% female representation for CECS Level 2 coaches by 2029 (phased approach with interim goal of 25% by 2027)
- **Strengthen governance frameworks and initiate policy to embed gender equity**
  - Introduce recommended minimum levels of gender representation at MF executive level and within World Athletics course participation aligned to our gender equity targets (40% minimum)
- **Continue to raise awareness and promote gender equity through engagement and advocacy with supporting programmes and campaigns**
  - Implement the GLT Communications Strategy including the annual International Women's Day promotion
- **Develop gender leadership and equity-based education programmes and initiatives (aligned with the World Plan for Athletics)**
  - Increase the number of participants benefiting from World Athletics courses and programmes e.g. mentoring
- **Monitor progress and feedback through data-led insights**
  - Report annually.

# CORE PILLARS

Three core pillars underpin implementation of this Strategy and successful delivery of the objectives: Succession, Advocacy and Communications. Under each pillar, actions have been identified to support delivery.



## Succession

Ensure a pipeline of leaders to fill the mandated gender representation requirements at the World Athletics Council & Executive Board in 2027 and at the Area Association and Member Federation executive boards.

### Actions

- Launch the Gender Leadership Academy in 2025, offering tailored education and mentoring
- Expand Area-level workshops and targeted initiatives to empower Member Federations to address inequalities and deliver targeted recruitment plans to meet local needs and support building the pool and pipeline
- Introduce programmes to increase the number of female referees and high-performance coaches
- Upgrade current eLearning modules to include leadership, governance, and diversity
- Conduct gender leadership webinars with topics targeted at audiences based on this strategy.

## Advocacy

Engage men (male allyship) as advocates for gender equity through structured programmes.

### Actions

- Change policy frameworks by promoting and enforcing minimum gender representation standards across Member Federations, and within World Athletics frameworks (e.g. participation on funded courses, quotas for technical officials etc.)
- Identify and address regional and cultural barriers through bespoke strategies and incentives
- Conduct annual audits to monitor implementation and progress.



## Communications

Increase visibility through campaigns to showcase GLT initiatives, role models, and progress stories globally. Position World Athletics as a leading voice on the issues of gender equity and female empowerment.

### Actions

- Organise global conferences at the World Athletics Championships in 2025 and 2027
- Introduce awards recognising outstanding contributions to gender equity
- Utilise social media platforms, including the 'Empowering Women in Athletics' Facebook page, to build global community, amplify community efforts and engage participants
- Use campaigns like **#WeGrowAthletics** to raise awareness of gender equity
- Create a global network for women in athletics to share resources, insights and share success stories.



# IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING

The actions set out under each of the three core pillars will all be initiated in 2025, with some delivered in 2025, and others requiring longer-term implementation and phasing through to 2027.

Budget has been allocated in 2025, where needed e.g. for upgrading the online eLearning content and delivery of the gender leadership global conference during the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo. Many of the actions require time and commitment, as opposed to financial resource, and advocacy to ensure policy change is initiated and to support ongoing engagement and awareness of World Athletics as a leader of gender equity will be important.

The GLT will continue to meet monthly to provide oversight of the delivery of this Strategy and the identified actions and objectives. The GLT will report to the World Athletics Council on progress as well as to the membership through the published annual report. Additionally, to inform our monitoring and evaluation, there will be an increased focus on data collection and analysis to better understand data insights and track progress so intentional actions can be taken to support achievement of the vision and 2027 targets.



# CONCLUSION

World Athletics is committed to fostering gender equity across all aspects of the sport. The 2025-2027 Gender Leadership Strategy provides a clear roadmap to empower women, promote sustainable change, and position athletics as a global model for equity and inclusion. Through collaboration, innovation, and data-driven initiatives, this strategy aims to ensure lasting progress for women in athletics.







# APPENDIX A: ACHIEVEMENTS

There have been notable achievements and considerable progress made by the Gender Leadership Taskforce since it was formed in 2017. The GLT strategy has led to the implementation of various initiatives to promote female leaders in our sport and we have already seen tangible outcomes at a global level.

## Administration

- In 2023, the World Athletics Council became the first gender equal council in sport (in 2017 it was 22%) and the Senior Vice-President (as elected by Council in 2023 on the recommendation of the President) is for the first time female.
- In 2019 World Athletics elected its first ever female Vice-President, Ximena Restrepo, who also became the first ever female Senior Vice-President in 2023.
- World Athletics now has over 40% female representation on its Commissions, Committees and Panels – previously it was c. 15%.
- All six Area Associations have now amended their Constitutions to include minimum gender requirements and five Areas elected a female Vice-President in 2023. Average female representation has increased from 16% to 34%.
- Gender equity objectives and targets were embedded into the World Plan for Athletics 2022-2030.

## Referees

- There was 40% female representation across the Athletics International Technical Officials at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.
- Female representation for the National Technical Officials at the 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest was 47%.
- There has been considerable progress in building the pipeline of female referees, reflected by the WARECS Silver Level exam in 2024, which saw an increase in female participation from 19% to 40%. The WARECS Bronze Level exam achieved female representation of 36% for the first edition in 2024 and the overall female representation across all WARECS exams stands at 33%.

## Coaches

- Regarding coaching, there has been limited progress in increasing the number of female high-performance coaches at major athletics events, where on average, female coach representation is 20% for the World Athletics U20s Championships and 11% for the World Athletics Championships. Increasing female representation among coaches remains a priority.



## Education

- To support the delivery of the objective to build a sustainable pool and pipeline of female leaders, the GLT developed a Gender Leadership Seminar in 2019 with course material through a trainer the trainer model which can be rolled out globally. Gender leadership seminars have been held in each of the Areas since the end of 2019 either face to face or online. Each Area is required to deliver at least one gender leadership seminar per year, with approx. 300 women benefitting each year.
- The World Athletics Gender Leadership eLearning course was launched in Nov 2021, using the material developed for the original Gender Leadership Seminar <https://elearning.worldathletics.org/>. Over 1,200 users have signed up to the programme.
- Gender Leadership Conferences have been held every two years at the World Athletics Championships since Doha 2019, with over 200 attendees at each edition.
- World Athletics also takes part in two global gender equity programmes in partnership with the IOC.
  - WISH (Women In Sport High-Performance) which provides leadership training for elite female coaches with the potential to go to major Championship events.
  - ASOIF (Association of Summer Olympic International Federations) who provide opportunities for women in leadership positions within the Member Federations, to take part in online high-level leadership courses.

## Communications

- A dedicated social media platform: Empowering Women in Athletics was established post the 2019 Congress as a way for women in athletics to share information, material and experiences. There are now over 1,200 members and the content covers a wide range of topics: Volunteering, Coaches and Technical Officials, Overcoming Discrimination & Stereotyping, Improving Confidence, Elective Success, Leadership, Pathways etc. [Empowering Women in Athletics Facebook Page](#)
- Each year, World Athletics launches a campaign to coincide with International Women's Day on 8 March. In 2021, World Athletics launched **#WeGrowAthletics**, a campaign designed to build on the strides the sport has taken towards greater gender equality. As part of the launch, World Athletics made pledges to commit to further advance the role of girls and women in athletics in three core areas of the sport: empowering women in leadership positions, breaking with traditions and shining a spotlight on women's stories across its platforms.
- Through **#WeGrowAthletics** World Athletics reviewed the age-old traditions around the presentation of women's performances and achievements to emphasise the importance of women's competition. For decades it was standard practice to end major World Athletics Series events on men's disciplines. Since Oregon 22, the World Championships now close with the women's 4x400m relay.

