

For Immediate Release



Lausanne, 02.02.2023

Global Sport Actors Convene in Lausanne to Strategize on Inclusive Gender Equality in Sport

The Global Observatory for Gender Equality & Sport (GO) hosted their inaugural international event with the theme *Open Fields, Open Questions: Inclusive Gender Equality in Sport*. The event was comprised of a Strategy Meeting on 31st January and an international conference on 1st February.

“I want to know, whether the science is clear on DSD athletes. If not, why do Federations propose invasive medical procedures? Should you not first find the science and then regulate our bodies? Because I don’t want more young women to go through what I went in(through)” Annet Negesa, Athlete Activist

Sport needs to embrace internationally respected human rights norms and include women in all of their diversity, heard over 100 delegates at the first conference convened by the Global Observatory for Gender Equality & Sport.

The 1 February conference, opened by Lausanne Mayor Grégoire Junod, brought together academics, activists, athletes, lawyers, athlete agents, policy makers, regulators, researchers, and more. Participation was drawn from Europe, Americas, Africa, and Asia. Organisations present included UNESCO, OHCHR, the Council of Europe, the Centre for Sport & Human Rights, the International Olympic Committee, 19 international sporting federations, international women’s sport organisations like IWG Women & Sport, Women Win, Women Sport International & academics from universities across the world. Diverse perspectives were shared on issues of inclusion, fairness, and gender-diversity in sport. The conference was convened in the spirit of facilitating collective learning and collective action.

While the first half of the event focussed on discussing an idea of inclusive gender equality by initiating panel discussions on the exclusionary history of women’s sport, and the lack of understanding regarding intersectionality of gender, race, class, geographical location, disability, religion, homophobia etc, the second half of the day drew attention to the issue of inclusion of women athletes with innate variations in sex characteristics and also to the issue of transgender women’s inclusion in high performance sport.

Discussions included athletes' experiences in sport, and also panels involving experts discussing the notion of competitive advantage, available scientific evidence and why a holistic and comprehensive approach that includes human rights, legal and scientific engagement is crucial to sport policy formulation, implementation and research.

On the question of sporting eligibility of women with innate variations in sex characteristics and transgender women, Professor Roger Pielke in his closing remarks summed up that where there is a lack of scientific evidence of a significant performance advantage, the default should be inclusion. Without such an approach, there is no justifiable basis for exclusionary regulations in the face of disproportionate harm to marginalised people. This was sharply highlighted by Annet Negesa’s

elaboration of the damage caused by medical procedures performed on her under the guise of eligibility in the women's category of athletics.

“We have been concerned about the disconnection of sport authorities and stakeholders from athlete experiences. The GO aims to foster a culture of gender sensitive policy making to ensure inclusion” Dr Payoshni Mitra, CEO of the Global Observatory

The Global Observatory Research & Action Think Tank met for the first time at the strategic meeting on 31st January 2023 will endeavor to work collaboratively on further, research, engagement and capacity development.

The conference and strategy meeting discussed:

- Accountability of regulating bodies for the policies they develop and the impact of these regulations on athletes across the sports landscape, from elite athletes to community participation
- Access to justice for athletes subjected to regulatory policies and procedures that affect their participation and wellbeing
- Open data regimes that are accessible to researchers with data that is representative in the way it is generated, analyzed and distributed, delegates noted with concern the limitation of current data and research process that did not take an intersectional approach
- Ongoing education on regulations and rights for athletes and the duty bearers that make decisions impacting them including officials, medical personnel, administrators, and policy makers.

Delegates recognized the lack of available data measuring athletic performance in athletes with innate variations in sex characteristics and transgender women athletes. However, preliminary results were presented from two separate studies focused on transgender women athletes overseen by Blair Hamilton of the University of Brighton and Joanna Harper of Loughborough University in a panel which included Professors Eric Vilain (University of California, Irvine & Centre National de la recherche Scientifique) and Alun Williams (Manchester Metropolitan University).

Other key outcomes of this event included:

- the start of the GO's Research and Action Think Tank (REACT) on Inclusive Gender Equality in Sport an initiative that mobilises expert researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to conduct research, supports networks, and provides education and advice to sport organisations.
- the development of a roadmap for stakeholders to collaborate on actions towards inclusive gender equality in sport
- appreciation of the intersections of race, disability, class, and gender in engagement on the topic of inclusive gender equality

The conference deliberations on the intersections of race and gender are timely as 1st February marks the start of LGBTQ+ History and Black History month, and therefore an opportune moment for the Global Observatory's inaugural event. Delegates working on themes including racial discrimination (FARE Network), inclusion of LGBTQ+ people (Pride House UK), and inclusion of all populations (TAFISA) provided their insights to contribute to collective learning, advocacy, and research agenda setting. Delegates urged all stakeholders to act diligently on current issues at the intersection of nationalist politics, sport and culture. Haifa Tilli of Les Hijabeuses called for policy and research to result in action: “Deliberations are great, action is even greater!”.

State action remains a key requirement in enabling an inclusive sport environment. UNESCO highlighted the important role of policy frameworks to support governments to foster inclusive participation informed by research and insights from across the world as planned in the Fit for Life initiative that the GO is a collaborator on.

“Inclusion is about respect for humanity and to give respect to those that want to participate and have earned the right to participate, without discrimination” said Muditambi Ravele, Founder and Chair of the South African Women and Sports Foundation.

The Global Observatory for Gender Equality & Sport is a global convenor and repository of research and expertise on gender equality and sport, physical education, and physical activity – or sport+ for short. Creating a knowledge pool on women & gender related issues and bringing together diverse actors in sport in order to tackle them is why the Global Observatory for Gender Equality in Sport was established in July 2021. In collaboration with UNESCO, the Swiss Confederation appointed the City of Lausanne, the Canton of Vaud and the University of Lausanne to ensure the conditions for its creation, as recommended in the Kazan Action Plan adopted in 2017 by the International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport. Headed by Dr. Payoshni Mitra, it aims to overcome global and systemic inequalities to achieve gender equality and empower girls and women in all their diversity in and through sport.

Ends/

For more information:

info@genderequalitysport.org <https://genderequalitysport.org/en/> Twitter: @GOGESport