

COMMITTEE: ILO - Working conditions

ISSUE: How to ensure a stable professional career for top athletes, including social protection, gender pay equity, career transition rights, while guaranteeing their mental and physical health?

CHAIRS: Grégoire Oury, Harriet Wright Onyango, Said Zamora Inzunza

CHAIR'S PRESENTATION



Hello dear delegates!

My name is Grégoire Oury, I am 16 years old and I am a student at the International High School of Ferney-Voltaire. I joined FerMUN last year as a logistics admin, with the desire to contribute to the smooth running of the conference.

Passionate about skiing and sailing, it seems relevant to me to address the issue of working conditions for high-level athletes. It is essential that they can benefit from a stable career, including appropriate social protection as well as a genuine right to career transition, so that women can benefit from pay equity. These measures are essential to preserve their mental and physical health throughout their journey.

It is up to us to carry this debate with conviction, in order to identify concrete solutions that will guarantee high-level athletes the living and working conditions that their exceptional commitment deserves. I am looking forward to meeting you in January to discuss this. In the meantime, good luck with your research!

KEY WORDS

Stable professional career: activity carried out under decent working conditions involving job stability to encourage employers to invest in employee training, income regularity to guarantee pay even during sick leave or injury, social protection and decent income. It is therefore a combination of stable and sustainable employment, income regularity and decent work.

Social protection: set of measures designed to guarantee all individuals economic security and protection against social risks that may arise during life, such as illness, aging, unemployment, or work accidents.

Pay equity: principle according to which men and women occupying the same functions or positions of similar value must receive identical salary for work of equal value, without any discrimination based on sex.

Career transition: process by which a worker changes profession, sector or professional activity to adapt to their aspirations or labor market developments. It involves acquiring new skills or training to practice another profession.

Decent salary: remuneration sufficient to cover the essential needs of a person or household, such as housing, food, health and education. It allows living with dignity, without resorting to social assistance, and participating in social and cultural life. This salary takes into account the cost of living in a given region and guarantees fair working conditions.

Mental health: state of psychological and social well-being, in which an individual can work productively, cope with normal life tensions, in a work or life environment that minimizes psychosocial risks, protects from violence or harassment, and promotes safety and well-being.

GLOBAL OVERVIEW

1. Which measures to guarantee athletes decent work?

a. Guarantee universal and adapted social protection

Sport exposes athletes to high risks, although social coverage varies greatly according to countries and disciplines. Some are affiliated with solid health systems, others are completely . Encouraging the creation of transnational social protection mechanisms for national athletes, implementing universal collective insurance co-financed by leagues, sponsors and federations, or integrating athletes into national safety nets (health insurance, retirement, unemployment), regardless of their discipline or contract, could guarantee appropriate social protection against the risks faced by high-level athletes.

b. Guarantee pay equity between women and men in sport

Guaranteeing pay equity between women and men in sport represents a major challenge of social justice and merit recognition. Despite comparable performances, female athletes often receive remuneration well below that of their male counterparts. This inequality weakens their career, limits their visibility and perpetuates gender stereotypes. Promoting fair remuneration requires proactive policies from federations, sponsors and public institutions. Ensuring pay equity is not only a right, but also a lever to enhance women's sport and inspire future generations.



c. Specific contracts and statuses

In many countries, especially outside Western Europe or certain developed nations, there is no specific legal status for high-level athletes, leaving them without guaranteed salary, social coverage, or retirement rights. Even in countries where sport is highly professionalised, only athletes under contract with clubs, leagues or federations have relative protection, while independent or high-level amateur athletes remain very vulnerable, particularly in case of injury or premature career end. Many do not contribute to retirement, have no access to quality healthcare, or do not receive any compensation in case of temporary or permanent disability.

2. How to assure athletes' professional careers internationally?

a. Anticipate from the beginning of the career

Athletes should be encouraged to guarantee professional security in case of injury or performance decline, athletes have the possibility to develop a dual career pathway: combining their athletic career with studies or a profession. This could involve university or professional training, followed in parallel by preparation for career transition from the beginning of their journey, or participation in distance learning programs.

b. Professional and financial support

High-level athletes often benefit from insufficient support, both professionally and financially. It is essential to act in this area to guarantee them stability during their career, but also at retirement. They must therefore learn to manage their income, savings and expenses. For this, several solutions are available: seeking help from former athletes reconverted into consulting or management, establishing partnerships with banks, accountants or financial coaches, subscribing to appropriate insurance, or integrating existing programs dedicated to athlete support and financial management.

c. Structure career transition support

Few athletes have access to structured support at the end of their career. The risk of unemployment, precariousness or psychological distress is high. Creating international career transition funds managed by federations and global organisations, deploying career guidance

programs in continental federations, or promoting networks of former athlete mentors to accompany career transitions, could help athletes in their career transition. Athletes can leverage their image, leadership skills, discipline and teamwork in other sectors: coaching, communication, entrepreneurship or sport-related professions. Continuous training programs, skills assessments and professional bridges are then essential to facilitate this transition.

d. Strengthen regulatory framework and partnerships

It is essential that sports federations, sponsors and public authorities cooperate to establish policies favoring athletes' dual careers. This could involve implementing adapted employment contracts, reinforced social protection, scholarships and financial aid, as well as mentoring or professional coaching programs, to ensure a transition to a sustainable future after an athletic career.

The example of Allyson Felix well illustrates these issues. Renowned American sprinter, she made athletics history between 2000 and 2022 by winning 31 major international medals (including 21 gold, 6 silver and 4 bronze). Most decorated athlete in World Championships, men and women combined. May of 2019, she spoke out against the unfair treatment she faced when Nike reduced her contract by 70% after her pregnancy. This statement highlights the persistent inequalities in the sports industry, still largely shaped by masculine norms. After signing with Athleta brand, she pursued her commitment by launching her own clothing and shoe line, Saysh, then participating in creating the first Olympic nursery, operational for the 2024 Paris Games.

e. Reduce inequalities between disciplines and world regions

The most media-covered sports and wealthiest countries offer incomparable living conditions with those of the Global South or marginal disciplines. Implementing financial solidarity between disciplines via cross-contributions, developing international sports equity funds to support athletes from low or middle-income countries, or promoting equity in distribution of television rights and global sponsors, would help to reduce these inequalities.

3. How to guarantee the physical and mental health of high-level athletes in a demanding and stressful environment?

a. Mental health in high-level sport

Media pressure, isolation induced by training, performance and competition constraints, as well as financial and identity stakes, constitute major vulnerability factors for high-level athletes. These determinants favor the emergence of mental disorders, particularly anxiety, depression and burnout, whose prevalence is reported at a level more than twice that observed in the general population (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39720148/>). According to the systematic review "Occurrence of mental health symptoms and disorders in current and former elite athletes" (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39720148/>), approximately 34% of current elite athletes present anxiety or depression symptoms, compared to about 26% among former athletes. These disorders are closely linked to factors such as serious or repeated injuries, career transition, professional dissatisfaction, lack of psychosocial support, income uncertainty, and pressure for public performances, which act as triggers or exacerbators. Globally, these data confirm that high-level athletes are particularly vulnerable to mental disorders.

b. Athletes in danger: preventing performance excesses

The relentless pursuit of records pushes many athletes to adopt dangerous practices, such as doping, overtraining or self-medication. These excesses weaken their mental and physical health, while compromising their long-term career. Sports authorities therefore have the responsibility to implement protective rules, including regular medical assessments and mandatory rest periods. Promoting a culture of sustainable performance respectful of athlete integrity becomes a major challenge for sport's future.

ILO TREATIES AND MAJOR EVENTS

10/12/1948

The "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" is a fundamental document universally recognized as the basis of a coherent set of human rights. Both a moral promise and legal reference, it remains an essential tool for fighting oppression and injustice worldwide.

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

29/06/1951

The Equal Remuneration Convention is one of the main international instruments to guarantee pay equity between sexes. It stipulates that workers, men and women, must be remunerated equally for work of equal value, and that remuneration systems must be defined to avoid any discrimination. [C100 - Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951](#)

20-22/01/2020

The "Global Dialogue Forum on Decent Work in the World of Sport" conference constituted a turning point: it institutionalized recognition of athletes as workers in the ILO sense and formulated concrete recommendations to improve their conditions, whether legal, organizational or health-related. The adoption of the Point of Consensus marks a strong commitment, now carried by the ILO and its members to promote an equitable and sustainable sports world.

<https://www.ilo.org/meetings-and-events/global-dialogue-forum-decent-work-world-sport>

11/06/2024

The "Reflect, Act, Learn: Making Sports Safer for Women and Girls" conference highlighted the urgency of combating gender-based violence in sport by acting on several levels: mindset change, training, institutional tools and responsible governance. It also illustrated the strength of direct dialogue between athletes, survivors, institutions and NGOs to drive real change.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/reflect-act-learn-making-sports-safer-women-and-girls>

04/2025

In this briefing note titled "Professional athletes and fundamental principles and rights at work," the ILO recognizes professional athletes as full workers, subjecting them to the same fundamental rights and protections: clear contract, fair remuneration, health, safety, freedom of association and protection against any form of exploitation. The document then calls for voluntary and systematic commitment from stakeholders (federations, clubs, states...) to transform these principles into realities on the ground

.
https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/Athl%C3%A8tes%20professionnels%20et%20principes%20et%20droits%20fondamentaux%20au%20travail_o.pdf

16/7/2025

In the "Decent Work and Responsible Event Hosting in Women's Sport" conference held on July 16, 2025 in Geneva, several important themes were discussed. Among these, we retain the evolution of work in women's sport, decent work and women's rights.
<https://www.sporhumanrights.org/events/decent-work-responsible-event-hosting-in-women-s-sport/>

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Encourage governments to create standard contracts to prevent exploitation and guarantee decent conditions for all professional athletes. Governments should also accept negotiations or special requests from athletes via unions for example;
- Adopt and enforce standards to allow athletes to live properly, i.e., ensure them a decent salary (even in case of injury), preserve their mental and physical health and reduce inequalities between sexes;
- Create a standardized national status for high-level athletes;
- Create anonymous and accessible channels to report any type of abuse and guarantee zero tolerance in all sports institutions or clubs;
- Create a global platform for listening and providing psychological support for athletes;
- Train coaches and supervisors in mental and emotional health;
- Integrate sports psychologists into national teams and clubs;
- Creation of support funds by sports authorities to secure transition periods;

→ Condition public and private funding on commitments regarding pay equity, support a global charter for pay equity in sport with monitoring and sanctions, or even increase media visibility of women's sport via international partnerships.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

1. Does your country/organization/NGO guarantee safe and equitable access to social protection for all high-level athletes, and if so, what actions are implemented to achieve this?
2. Is this protection sufficient?
3. Do they have access to decent income during retirement?
4. Does your country offer career transition assistance?
5. Do women and men earn the same salary and bonuses for the same level of performance, in the same activity?
6. Is the mental and physical health of your athletes good? If not, what measures can you implement?
7. Have you implemented means to improve your athletes' quality of life?
8. Is your country/company favorable to creating laws guaranteeing a decent professional career for all high-level athletes?
9. Do high-level athletes have access to psychologists?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Articles :

- [Sports federations urged to do more to safeguard athletes](#)
- [Male footballers could have twice the risk of dying from cardiac issues compared to men of similar age](#)
- [Five things to know about women and sport | UN Women – Headquarters](#)
- [Gender equality | International Labour Organization](#)
- [Decent work | International Labour Organization](#)
- [Wages | International Labour Organization](#)
- [Paris 2024: Une Charte sociale olympique pour un travail décent | International Labour Organization](#)
- https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/Athl%C3%A8tes%20professionnels%20et%20principes%20et%20droits%20fondamentaux%20au%20travail_o.pdf

Videos :

- https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Protection+sociale+des+sportifs+de+haut+niveau
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZpyJwevPqc&t=101s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oCqNKTS5Gw&t=144s>