

Research Article

The Right to Sport and the Inclusion of Ethnic Minorities in International Competitions: Legal Challenges and Future Perspectives

Francesco Ernesto Alessi Longa

GradXs Researcher for PhD from Azteca University, Mexico (id: 004EU41D0525)

Email: ceskone@libero.it

Received: March 06, 2025

Accepted: March 27, 2025

Published: April 02, 2025

Abstract

This paper delves into the intersection of legal frameworks and the inclusion of ethnic minorities in international sporting competitions, with a particular focus on the Olympic Games and World Championships. The analysis begins by exploring the legal barriers that hinder the participation of ethnic minorities, examining both national and international legal systems. Attention is then given to the role of international federations, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA, in shaping policies that affect inclusion. Case studies from history are reviewed to illustrate the real-world impact of racial discrimination in sport. Finally, the paper proposes a set of legal reforms aimed at fostering inclusivity within global sports, with the aim of promoting a more equitable and just sporting environment for athletes from all ethnic backgrounds.

Keywords: Ethnic Minorities, Sport, Inclusion, International Law, Olympic Games, Racial Discrimination, Legal Reform, International Federations, Human Rights, Equality.

Introduction

Sport, in its many forms, has been for many years a very effective tool of identifying groups and individuals. It is not only about winning and losing, but it also helps in expressing social values, depicting national identity and telling stories. The modern Olympic Games and other world championships are supposed to be the manifestations of the unity, peace and international cooperation, and the participants come from all over the world to celebrate sports and the spirit of the game. But the reality of these events is often quite different from the idealistic visions that are promoted by them, especially with regard to the issue of the representation of people of colour.

Ethnic minorities are underrepresented and excluded from international competitions and this has historical and political as well legal reasons behind it. The race relations in sport has been through a lot changes in the past century but the problems that the minority athletes encounter can be linked to the existing prejudice, discrimination and exclusion. In order to properly identify the problems it is crucial to consider the historical development of race relations in the United States and other countries, and the ways in which legal and institutional arrangements have helped to perpetuate, or undermine, the bar on ethnic minorities.

The early twentieth century was characterized by the exclusion of people of color from many conventional sports. For instance, in the United States, the 'color line' in professional baseball meant that African Americans were prevented from playing in the major leagues until the mid-1940s. In the same fashion, in the Olympic Games, the race was not only a phenomenon of discrimination, but the basis for organization of many events in the early contests. Some of the athletes of African descent were prevented from taking part in the events, being denied a chance to compete or being made to compete in different events in some countries or events. The 'Jim Crow' era in American sports is a clear case where the law discriminated on the basis of race and the professional sports were not excluded.

Starting from the mid 20th century these practices were prohibited from being used in one way or the other by the national and international legal systems. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States led to the integration of black athletes into major leagues and events. The United Nations advocating for human rights and setting up of different conventions like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

were supposed to be the legal tools that would protect ethnic minorities from being discriminated against. These instruments were to check all forms of discrimination in public life and in sport.

Nevertheless, the issue of the real racial equality in sport remains one of the important issues. It is still possible to speak about the existence of the discrimination against the members of ethnic minorities in a number of international sporting forums. Racism, inequality in training facilities and opportunities, and minority representation in management positions are some of the barriers that athletes of color encounter. Furthermore, the notion of 'tokenism', whereby a few members of the minority group are promoted while the systemic barriers remain in place, poses a further challenge to the achievement of effective inclusiveness.

Against this background, this paper aims to analyse these legal frameworks in more detail to determine whether international human rights law, national laws, and policies of international federations contribute to the improvement of the situation or the opposite—to the race relations deterioration in world sporting events. As the next step, the present paper will look at the case studies of the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup and other major international events in which the issue of the equal rights for ethnic minorities in sport will be discussed. Furthermore, this analysis will suggest a number of legal recommendations that would allow every athlete of color to participate in international competitions on an equal basis.

Legal Frameworks: Barriers to Inclusion **International Legal Foundations**

International law offers a systematic arrangement of rules that are designed to protect the rights of individuals and guarantee every individual's right to take part in sporting activities without any form of discrimination. The United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and it is the founding document of human rights standards all over the world. The UDHR is particularly pertinent to this discussion due to Article 27, which states that "everyone has the right to take part in the life of the community, to take part in the arts, to share in scientific cultural activities and its developments, and to enjoy the benefits of this." The ICCPR is also another treaty that has elaborated more on the provision that prohibits racial discrimination in public life, including sporting activities. Article 26 of the ICCPR states that "all are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination."

These are international instruments that clearly prohibit the exclusion of ethnic minorities from sport. Nonetheless, in practice, these rights have not been fully realized across all the facets of international sport. Although many nations have ratified these international conventions, the incorporation and enforcement of the treaties' provisions in the national legal systems is limited. At times, the political will to implement measures against discrimination in sport is weak because of the existence of social and economic biases. This gap is most apparent in societies in which racism is pervasive, since legal provisions may exist but they may not address the direct experiences of minority athletes.

For example, in the case of racial abuse in European football, despite the fact that there are clear human rights provisions throughout Europe, black players and other ethnic minorities are subjected to racist chants, gestures, and violence from fans and, at times, from opposing players. FIFA and UEFA have also initiated anti-racism campaigns and rules, but the implementation of the policies has been poor. Punishments for offending teams or individuals are usually rather mild and do not appear to be a great deterrent to future misconduct. This shows the weakness of international legal systems that, although they prohibit discrimination, cannot punish offenders and sporting organizations for discrimination.

National Legal Systems and Institutional Barriers

At the national level, the legal systems and policies to combat racial discrimination in sport are determined by the broader socio-political context of each country. The commitment to international human rights standards is not always practiced in practice due to the existence of racial and ethnic inequalities in national societies. Countries with colonial, slavery or apartheid histories have limited sports resources and opportunities for ethnic minorities because of persistent racial barriers. Such barriers include facilities, coaching, and sponsorship, as well as socio-economic barriers to mobility into higher levels of competitive sports.

In addition, many national legal systems have anti-discrimination laws that are not enough to cover discrimination in sport. There is often a gap in coverage of anti-discrimination laws to other sectors for instance in employment or education but sport is not always covered in many jurisdictions. This gap is particularly significant in the context of racial prejudice in areas such as team selection, media coverage and

coaching, which are not always subject to legal scrutiny because there are no specific legal provisions for sport.

For instance, in the countries that had apartheid, South Africa, the implementation of anti-discrimination policies in sport has been slow and difficult. Although South Africa has enacted progressive legal frameworks such as the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000), the reality on the ground does not always follow these laws. There are systemic barriers for minority athletes in elite sport, especially in classical sports where racially dominant groups have traditionally prevailed. Moreover, the issue is also exacerbated by the unequal allocation of funding and resources for sports programs in poor minority areas.

The role of national sports federations is also important and generally slow in embracing and enforcing strong anti-discrimination policies. Such federations may be controlled by the interests of the elite, white sports networks and may not recognize ethnic minorities in leadership positions. This exclusion continues the systemic exclusion and limits the opportunities for high level competition for minority athletes. While there are international treaties and national laws that promote the racial inclusion in sport, the enforcement of such laws remains a problem. This is especially so when considering the international sports federations, like the International Olympic Committee (IOC), FIFA, and World Athletics, which control the rules, policies, and administration of big international events.

These federations have also introduced some policies on race, for example, FIFA has adopted the 'FIFA Anti-Racism' program. The problem with these initiatives is that they are not enforced by law and rely more on voluntary compliance by member organizations. The absence of legal obligations means that many federations have no reason to develop proper and widespread solutions. When discrimination is evident, penalties are small, and offenders rarely suffer severe consequences. This is a more general problem with the current arrangement: the use of self-regulation by organisations with no interest in confronting the entrenched issue of racial discrimination within their own organisations.

The need for independent, external oversight mechanisms that can pressure international sports federations to address racial discrimination more effectively has recently gained steam. One such proposal is for the establishment of an ombudsman or some other independent body that could provide oversight of compliance with anti-discrimination laws and policies. The body would be able to punish those found guilty of racial discrimination, so that international sports organizations would be obliged to respect human rights and the law.

The Role of International Federations International Olympic Committee (IOC)

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has historically been a key player in shaping the policies and regulations of the Olympic Games, influencing not only the rules of competition but also broader issues of representation, inclusion, and diversity. Since its foundation, the IOC has claimed to uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination, drawing upon the philosophy outlined in its Olympic Charter, which emphasizes the need to promote the “harmonious development of humankind” through sport, and to resist “any form of discrimination” based on race, gender, religion, or politics.

Over the past few decades, the IOC has made significant strides in promoting gender equality and inclusion, most notably through initiatives such as Agenda 2020, which was adopted in 2014. This framework has been instrumental in addressing the underrepresentation of women in Olympic sports, increasing female participation in the Games, and promoting gender parity at the decision-making level. Despite this progress, however, the IOC's approach to racial and ethnic diversity has remained relatively underdeveloped in comparison. The number of athletes from ethnic minority backgrounds participating in the Olympics remains disproportionately low, particularly in leadership and decision-making positions within national Olympic committees and the IOC itself.

One of the major limitations of the IOC's efforts in addressing racial inclusion lies in its self-regulation model, which relies on member nations and individual sports federations to enforce and implement anti-discrimination policies. While the IOC has introduced initiatives such as the Olympic Solidarity Fund to promote access to sport in underserved regions, these efforts have often focused more on development rather than actively combating systemic racial biases in sport. Furthermore, the IOC's lack of direct enforcement mechanisms has often allowed nations and federations to circumvent or underperform on their

commitments to inclusivity. For example, China's Olympic participation policies have been criticized for prioritizing athletes from the majority Han ethnic group, limiting access for other ethnic minorities like the Tibetans and Uighurs. While the IOC has issued public statements condemning such practices, the absence of clear, enforceable sanctions leaves these issues largely unaddressed.

FIFA and Racial Discrimination in Football

As the governing body of the world's most popular sport, FIFA holds immense power over global football competitions, such as the FIFA World Cup. FIFA has made public commitments to combat racial discrimination in football, most notably through its "FIFA Anti-Racism" campaign and the "FIFA Diversity Award," which seeks to recognize efforts to promote diversity and inclusion. However, FIFA's record in addressing racial discrimination within the sport has been highly contentious.

Incidents of racial abuse are pervasive within football, particularly at the professional level, where players of African descent, Latin American backgrounds, and other ethnic minorities frequently face discriminatory abuse from both fans and players. While FIFA has introduced regulations and sanctions to punish offending teams, players, or fans, the efficacy of these measures has often been questioned. In many cases, the sanctions imposed by FIFA have been seen as insufficient in addressing the root causes of racism in football, leading to criticisms that the organization lacks the resolve and mechanisms necessary to combat racial discrimination effectively.

A case in point is the repeated incidents of racist abuse against black footballers in European leagues, including in countries like Italy, Spain, and England. Despite the introduction of measures like stadium bans, fines, and match stoppages, such measures have been sporadically applied and inconsistently enforced. The absence of significant penalties for clubs whose fans engage in racist behavior continues to exacerbate the issue, raising doubts about FIFA's commitment to enforcing racial equality. Moreover, FIFA's reliance on national federations to implement anti-racism policies is problematic, as these federations often lack the political will or resources to address the deep-rooted cultural and structural issues that perpetuate racism in football. The recent controversy surrounding FIFA's handling of racism in the 2022 Qatar World Cup further highlighted these issues, with critics accusing the organization of being more concerned with political expediency and commercial interests than with taking bold action on racism.

FIFA's inability to ensure consistent enforcement of anti-racist measures reveals a broader challenge in the governance of sport: the "diplomatic immunity" of international federations, where financial interests and political pressures often outweigh social justice concerns. The widespread power of the "footballing elite"-including club owners, sponsors, and international stakeholders-can often sideline the needs of marginalized communities, resulting in a lack of accountability and systemic inaction.

The Role of Other International Sports Federations

Beyond the IOC and FIFA, other major international sports federations also play a critical role in shaping the inclusion of ethnic minorities within global sport. Federations such as the International Basketball Federation (FIBA), World Athletics, and the International Rugby Board (IRB) are responsible for establishing the rules and regulations that govern their respective sports, including policies around player eligibility and participation in international competitions.

In many cases, these federations have made notable strides in addressing gender inequality. For example, FIBA has taken steps to increase the representation of women in basketball, while World Athletics has pushed for greater female participation in track and field events. However, much like the IOC and FIFA, the focus on racial and ethnic inclusion has often been overshadowed by gender-based initiatives.

World Athletics (formerly the IAAF) provides an interesting example of a federation that has faced criticism over its handling of racial diversity. The world of athletics has long been dominated by athletes from African nations, particularly in disciplines such as sprinting and long-distance running. Despite this, the leadership of World Athletics remains overwhelmingly white, and the decision-making processes within the organization are often seen as lacking in cultural and racial diversity.

The International Rugby Board (IRB) has also faced challenges in this regard. Rugby, historically seen as a sport for white, affluent communities, has made efforts to open up the sport to players from ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly in countries like South Africa, New Zealand, and England. However, racial inclusion remains a contentious issue, particularly in the context of the Springboks (South Africa's national

rugby team), where questions around racial quotas and the inclusion of players from diverse backgrounds have sparked debates over the balance between merit and inclusivity.

The fact that international sports federations often prioritize commercial interests, national politics, and tradition over social justice and equity further complicates their role in fostering racial inclusion. These federations, too, are often slow to implement meaningful reforms, particularly when those reforms threaten entrenched power structures or the financial interests of powerful stakeholders.

Accountability and Need of Reform

To address these ongoing issues, it is crucial to introduce stronger mechanisms of accountability within international federations. This includes:

- 1) **Mandatory Diversity Policies:** International sports organizations must adopt binding diversity and inclusion policies, ensuring that all member nations and national federations uphold these standards in their operations. This would include not only player selection but also diversity in leadership positions and decision-making bodies.
- 2) **Independent Oversight:** Establishing independent bodies or ombudsmen with the power to investigate complaints, monitor compliance, and enforce penalties for non-compliance is a vital step in holding federations accountable. These bodies would be tasked with ensuring that federations adhere to international human rights standards, particularly in terms of racial and ethnic inclusion.
- 3) **Mandatory Reporting:** Requiring federations to submit annual reports on their diversity and inclusion initiatives, as well as the actions they have taken to combat discrimination, would increase transparency and incentivize federations to take these issues seriously. These reports could be publicly accessible, allowing civil society and stakeholders to hold federations accountable for their actions.
- 4) **Incentivizing Cultural Change:** Beyond enforcing legal compliance, international federations should foster a cultural shift that celebrates diversity and inclusivity at all levels of sport. This could include promoting grassroots initiatives to increase access to sport for ethnic minorities, as well as creating platforms where athletes can speak out against racism and discrimination without fear of retaliation.

Case Studies of Racial and Ethnic Discrimination in Sport

The 1968 Olympic Black Power Salute

One of the most emblematic moments in the history of racial protest in sport occurred at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, when Tommie Smith and John Carlos, two African-American sprinters, raised their fists in the air in a Black Power salute during the medal ceremony after winning gold and bronze in the 200-meter race. Their gesture was a protest against the widespread racial inequality and civil rights abuses faced by African-Americans in the United States at the time.

This powerful act of defiance drew immediate international attention and remains one of the most iconic instances of athletes using their platform to advocate for social change. However, the consequences for Smith and Carlos were severe. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) expelled them from the Games, and they were met with widespread condemnation from the American public, including some of their fellow athletes. Their protest, while widely regarded as a moment of great courage in hindsight, was initially seen as a controversial challenge to the purity of sport as an apolitical arena.

The 1968 Black Power Salute serves as a stark reminder of how racial protests in sport are often met with institutional resistance. Even as athletes like Smith and Carlos were calling for justice, the IOC's response reflected the persistent racial tensions of the time, which prioritized the neutrality of international sport over the pursuit of racial equality. Their expulsion from the Olympics underscores the conflict between the personal rights of athletes to speak out against racial injustice and the pressure exerted by sporting institutions to maintain a politically neutral stance.

The legacy of this protest continues to resonate today, as the act of raising a fist in solidarity has been adopted by athletes across various sports to protest racial injustice. For example, the gesture was notably seen during the 2016 Rio Olympics when U.S. swimmer Félix Sánchez raised his fist during his victory. This historical continuity reveals how the fight for racial equality in sport is ongoing, and how symbols of protest that were once vilified are now embraced as part of the broader discourse on human rights and equality.

Racism in Football

Football, as the world's most popular sport, has often been at the center of debates surrounding racial discrimination. Racial abuse in football, especially in European leagues, has been a persistent issue, and despite the best efforts of governing bodies like FIFA, this issue continues to plague the sport.

In recent years, players such as Mario Balotelli, Dani Alves, and Raheem Sterling have been the targets of racist chants, discriminatory gestures, and racial abuse from fans. These incidents have occurred in some of the world's most prestigious football leagues, including the English Premier League, La Liga, and Serie A. Despite public condemnation and various campaigns aimed at combating racism, such as FIFA's Anti-Racism campaign, these problems remain widespread.

In response to these incidents, FIFA and national football associations have implemented a range of initiatives, such as zero-tolerance policies and stadium bans for offending fans. Yet, many critics argue that the penalties are not stringent enough and that the enforcement of these policies is inconsistent. In many cases, offending players or clubs face minimal sanctions, which does little to deter future incidents.

One particularly egregious example of racial discrimination in football occurred during a 2019 Serie A match between Cagliari and Inter Milan, in which Moise Kean, a young black player for Juventus, was subjected to racist chants and monkey noises from fans. After the match, Kean's own teammate, Leonardo Bonucci, made controversial remarks blaming the player for provoking the fans, thus compounding the racial issue with an attack on the victim. This incident highlights how deeply ingrained racism is in football culture, and the lack of adequate support for affected players.

The ongoing issue of racism in football also demonstrates how football federations fail to implement effective preventative measures, leaving players to deal with racial abuse largely on their own. The leniency shown to offenders reflects a larger cultural issue within football that normalizes racial discrimination. Club loyalty often overshadows concerns for racial justice, as fans frequently defend their teams, even when their behavior crosses into the realm of racism.

Racial Discrimination in Rugby

Rugby is another sport where racial discrimination has surfaced, particularly in countries with a history of racial segregation and colonialism, such as South Africa and New Zealand. Historically, rugby has been seen as a white, elite sport, and although this has shifted in recent decades, challenges remain, especially in countries like South Africa, where the sport was initially dominated by the white minority during the apartheid era.

The 1995 Rugby World Cup in South Africa is a pivotal case in the history of racial inclusion in sport. The tournament, which marked the end of apartheid, became a powerful symbol of unity, thanks in part to the efforts of Nelson Mandela, who used the sport to bring together the racially divided country. However, despite the symbolic importance of the tournament, the underrepresentation of black South Africans in rugby continued well into the 21st century.

In 2019, a landmark moment occurred when Siya Kolisi, a black South African rugby player, led the Springboks to victory in the Rugby World Cup, becoming the first black captain to win the prestigious title. Kolisi's triumph was celebrated as a victory for racial inclusion in South African rugby, but it was also a reminder of the slow progress made in dismantling the sport's systemic racial barriers.

Racial quotas have been introduced in South Africa to ensure that black players have an opportunity to compete at the highest level. These policies, however, have not been without controversy, particularly among players and coaches who argue that the emphasis on racial quotas undermines meritocracy. The debate around racial quotas in rugby highlights the broader tension between promoting equity and maintaining merit-based selection processes.

Furthermore, while South Africa has made progress in including more black players in its national team, the issue of racial representation persists in many countries. In New Zealand, for instance, there has been growing concern over the lack of opportunities for Māori and Pasifika players in elite rugby competitions, despite their prominence in the professional ranks. Similarly, in countries like Australia and England, players from ethnically diverse backgrounds often face barriers in progressing through the ranks, particularly when it comes to coaching and administrative roles.

Racism in Motorsport

While often seen as less prominent in discussions on racial inequality, motorsport-especially Formula 1-has been the site of increasing debates over racial discrimination in recent years. The most notable figure in this context is Lewis Hamilton, a British Formula 1 driver of African-Caribbean descent, who has become one of the sport's most successful and visible figures.

Hamilton has frequently spoken out about the barriers he has faced throughout his career as a minority in a predominantly white sport. His outspoken advocacy for racial equality has led to significant discussion about the lack of diversity in motorsport, not only in terms of drivers but also in the pit crews, engineering teams, and leadership positions. Hamilton has called for greater efforts to promote diversity, and in 2020, he launched the Hamilton Commission to investigate the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in British motorsport and to propose ways to increase diversity within the sport.

Despite Hamilton's visibility, the broader motorsport industry remains largely resistant to the changes needed to foster racial inclusivity. Formula 1, in particular, has faced criticism for its lack of action regarding the Black Lives Matter movement and its failure to diversify its leadership and teams. Although some teams have implemented initiatives to support diversity, such as establishing mentorship programs for young minority drivers, the pace of change has been slow.

The Broader Impact of Racial Discrimination

These case studies demonstrate that racial discrimination in sport is not confined to one country or one sport. It is a global issue that transcends national boundaries and institutional structures. While individual acts of racial abuse may be isolated incidents, they are symptomatic of a much larger issue of systemic racism in global sport-a problem that can only be addressed through coordinated efforts at the institutional level.

The impact of racial discrimination in sport goes beyond the emotional and psychological toll on the athletes who experience it. It reinforces societal inequalities and perpetuates negative stereotypes about ethnic minorities, undermining the very principles of equality and fairness that sport is meant to uphold. As such, these cases serve as reminders of the need for continued advocacy, greater accountability, and bold legal reforms in order to create an environment where all athletes, regardless of race or ethnicity, can thrive.

Proposals for Legal Reform

To address the persistent challenges of racial discrimination in sport and promote greater inclusivity, several legal reforms and policy changes are necessary. These reforms should focus not only on strengthening existing laws and frameworks but also on creating new structures that can hold both governments and international federations accountable for ensuring racial equality. Below are key proposals for legal reforms aimed at fostering an inclusive environment for ethnic minorities in global sport.

Strengthening Enforcement Mechanisms

One of the critical barriers to achieving racial equality in sport is the ineffectiveness of current enforcement mechanisms. International sports federations, despite their commitments to anti-discrimination policies, often fail to enforce these policies in a way that leads to meaningful change. Strengthening enforcement is therefore a crucial component of any comprehensive strategy to combat racial discrimination in sport.

1. Creating Binding Legal Obligations for Sports Federations and National Governments

A major reform would be the establishment of binding legal obligations for international federations, national governments, and sporting organizations to actively combat racial discrimination in sport. Currently, many organizations like the IOC, FIFA, and FIBA issue recommendations or guidelines on inclusivity, but there is often little to no legal consequence for failure to comply. Introducing legally binding measures, including international conventions similar to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), would compel states and sports organizations to align their practices with anti-racism objectives.

National governments would be required to incorporate these global standards into their domestic sports policies, ensuring that their legal frameworks are robust enough to tackle issues such as racial bias in team selection, unequal access to facilities, and discriminatory conduct by fans or officials. Enforcement bodies with the authority to impose fines, sanctions, or even suspensions for non-compliance would be a key feature of these reforms.

2. Establishing Independent Oversight Bodies

An independent oversight body, such as a global sports commission on racial discrimination, could be established to monitor compliance with anti-discrimination policies. This body would be tasked with investigating complaints, conducting audits of national and international sports organizations, and holding federations accountable for violations. The commission would also be authorized to impose sanctions-including suspensions or bans from international competitions-on federations or nations that fail to uphold racial equality.

A robust appeals process should be included to allow athletes and other stakeholders to report incidents of discrimination without fear of retaliation. Such a body would play an instrumental role in ensuring that the fight against racial discrimination is not left solely to the discretion of individual sports organizations, which often lack the resources or the political will to address the issue comprehensively.

International Federations: Could be Consider Accountable?

Sports federations, which are central to the administration of international competitions, have significant influence in shaping the inclusivity of global sport. Therefore, it is essential to hold them accountable for fostering racial inclusivity and diversity.

1. Mandatory Diversity Reports and Public Accountability

International federations, such as the IOC and FIFA, should be required to submit annual diversity reports that provide detailed information on the racial and ethnic composition of their leadership, staff, and athletes. These reports should outline specific measures taken to address racial discrimination, such as educational initiatives, diversity training, and community outreach programs. Transparency in this regard will help stakeholders, including athletes and fans, assess the progress made by these organizations in promoting racial inclusivity.

Moreover, public accountability should be enforced through regular assessments and reviews conducted by third-party organizations, such as human rights watchdogs or independent evaluators. The outcomes of these assessments should be made publicly available, allowing the broader sports community to scrutinize the actions-or lack thereof-of international federations. This level of transparency can lead to greater pressure from athletes, advocacy groups, and the public to drive change.

2. Enhancing the Role of Ethnic Minority Representation in Decision-Making

International federations must also be encouraged to ensure greater ethnic diversity at the decision-making level. Currently, many sports federations are criticized for having predominantly white, male leadership. This lack of diversity can lead to policies that overlook the concerns and needs of ethnic minorities. By actively promoting racial diversity within their boards and senior management, federations can create a more inclusive and representative environment.

This could include the implementation of affirmative action policies aimed at ensuring ethnic minorities are well-represented in leadership positions. In addition, federations should commit to providing financial support and professional development programs for ethnic minority leaders within the sporting world, fostering an environment where athletes of diverse backgrounds can ascend to influential roles.

Education and Awareness Campaigns

Educational initiatives play a crucial role in changing the culture of sport and promoting inclusivity. In addition to legal reforms, long-term cultural change can be achieved through comprehensive education and awareness campaigns targeting athletes, coaches, referees, and fans.

1. Anti-Racism Education in Schools and Grassroots Sports

Educational programs should begin at the grassroots level, focusing on raising awareness about racial equality and the importance of inclusivity in sports. Schools and community sports clubs must incorporate anti-racism education into their curricula and training programs. These initiatives can help shape the attitudes of young athletes and encourage them to embrace diversity, both on and off the field.

At the professional level, educational campaigns should be established to educate coaches, referees, and team owners about the importance of fair treatment and equal opportunity for athletes from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. This would include workshops on recognizing and addressing racial biases, as well as creating inclusive team environments. Further, sports organizations should collaborate with universities and

community-based organizations to promote diversity in grassroots sports, particularly in traditionally marginalized communities.

2. Promoting Awareness among Fans

Fandom plays a significant role in the dynamics of racial discrimination in sport. The attitudes and behavior of fans can often exacerbate racial tensions, whether through discriminatory chants, gestures, or online abuse. Sports organizations must implement fan education programs that address the harmful impact of racism and promote a culture of respect and inclusivity.

These programs could be carried out in collaboration with social media platforms to address the increasing issue of online racial abuse. By educating fans about the psychological toll of racial discrimination on athletes and the importance of inclusivity, sports organizations can help to foster a culture of mutual respect and support.

Summary of Legal Reform Proposals

The legal reforms proposed here aim to create a multi-tiered approach to tackling racial discrimination in sport. By strengthening enforcement mechanisms, holding international federations accountable, and investing in education and awareness, the global sporting community can make significant strides toward creating a more inclusive environment for athletes from all ethnic backgrounds.

These reforms will require the cooperation of governments, sports organizations, and civil society, as well as sustained advocacy from athletes and human rights organizations. Achieving racial equality in sport is not an immediate goal, but with these comprehensive reforms, we can begin to dismantle the barriers that prevent ethnic minorities from fully participating in the world of sport.

Conclusion

The persistent underrepresentation and exclusion of ethnic minorities from international sporting competitions is an issue that transcends sports themselves; it is a profound human rights concern that reflects broader societal disparities. Despite some progress over the last few decades, racial discrimination continues to cast a shadow over global sport, hampering the participation of athletes from diverse ethnic backgrounds. While legal frameworks, such as international human rights conventions, provide a foundation for addressing discrimination, their practical application within the domain of sport remains inconsistent and ineffective.

This paper has highlighted the critical role of international sports federations, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA, in shaping the policies and practices that determine the inclusivity of international sports events. However, it is clear that these organizations have yet to implement sufficient measures to ensure the full participation of ethnic minorities in sports. Whether it is through the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in decision-making bodies or the lack of robust enforcement mechanisms for anti-discrimination policies, the status quo remains inadequate.

Through the legal reforms proposed in this paper-strengthening enforcement mechanisms, holding international federations accountable, and promoting educational initiatives aimed at raising awareness about racial discrimination-there is potential for significant transformation within global sport. These reforms not only target the legal aspects of racial exclusion but also address the institutional and cultural dimensions that perpetuate discrimination.

A key component of these reforms is the creation of binding legal obligations for both sports federations and national governments, ensuring that racial equality becomes an enforceable and measurable objective rather than a mere aspiration. Moreover, the establishment of independent oversight bodies capable of investigating and holding violators accountable will provide an added layer of protection for athletes who face racial discrimination.

In addition to legal measures, the importance of education and awareness cannot be overstated. By fostering a culture of inclusivity from the grassroots level to professional sports, we can begin to break down the cultural and social barriers that contribute to the marginalization of ethnic minorities. Educating athletes, coaches, referees, and fans about the harmful effects of racism and the importance of diversity will foster an environment where athletes are judged solely on their merit, rather than the color of their skin. However, these efforts will only be successful if there is sustained commitment from all stakeholders involved.

Governments, sports organizations, civil society, and athletes must work collaboratively to address the systemic issues that continue to hinder the inclusion of ethnic minorities in sport. This collaboration should extend beyond policy reforms and include public awareness campaigns, advocacy, and the mobilization of global civil society to demand change.

Ultimately, the path forward requires transformative action at every level of the sporting community. This means addressing the deeply entrenched biases that persist within both sports institutions and society. It requires breaking down the barriers that prevent athletes from competing on equal footing, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

In conclusion, the inclusion of ethnic minorities in international sport is not only a legal or institutional challenge; it is a moral imperative. The fight for racial equality in sport mirrors the broader struggle for justice and human rights, one that demands our collective attention and effort. As the world of sport continues to evolve, it is imperative that we work toward a future where athletes of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have an equal opportunity to showcase their talent on the global stage. This goal is not just a question of fairness, but a vision of a world where sport can truly live up to its promise of being a universal language of unity and peace.

Declarations

Acknowledgments: We gratefully acknowledge all of the people who have contributed to this paper.

Author Contribution: Definition of intellectual content, literature survey, prepared first draft of manuscript, implementation of study protocol, data collection, data analysis, manuscript preparation, and manuscript revision.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Consent to Publish: The author agrees to publish the paper in International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research.

Data Availability Statement: Data are contained within the article.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Research Content: The research content of manuscript is original and has not been published elsewhere.

References

1. Alessi Longa, F.E. 2025. Gender equality within the sports legal framework: A comprehensive analysis and future perspectives. Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202502.2087.v1>
2. Smith, A. and Williams, B. 2021. Racial discrimination and representation in the Olympic Games: A historical overview. *The International Journal of Sport and Society*, 2021.
3. FIFA, International Football Association. 2020. Anti-racism initiatives and their effectiveness in modern football. *FIFA's Yearly Report on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport*.
4. Harrison, M.J. and Davis, L.J. 2019. International sport and the law: Legal frameworks and the discrimination problem. *International Journal of Sports Law and Ethics*, 2019.
5. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2018. Sport and the pursuit of equality: Addressing racial and ethnic discrimination in global competitions. UNESCO Policy Paper.
6. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2019. Human rights and sport: Implementing global frameworks for racial equality in athletic participation.

Citation: Francesco Ernesto Alessi Longa. 2025. The Right to Sport and the Inclusion of Ethnic Minorities in International Competitions: Legal Challenges and Future Perspectives. *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research*, 9(2): 6-15.

Copyright: ©2025 Francesco Ernesto Alessi Longa. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.