

These race guidelines have been created by [SheRACES](#), with input from [Pro Trail Runners Association](#) and elite road runners, as well as triathletes.

These are particularly important for races that have elite or professional runners, but every race is different, and not all guidelines are relevant for every race. They are designed to be read and activated in conjunction with the wider [SheRACES guidelines](#), which address issues that affect all women within a race.

Why are these guidelines necessary?

Women belong on the start line and deserve to race in an equal and equitable competition.

We acknowledge that steps are being taken to resolve some of the most transparent problems, such as equal prize money for both male and female winners. However, many of the issues faced by female athletes are long-standing and remain unaddressed.

From a mixed start line, where it's harder to discern the women's race, to less overall coverage of the female athletes during the event; through to differing finish-line experiences for the winners. Most of the time, the impact of these is not deliberate or intended by event organisers, who do believe in equality for their female competitors.

These guidelines seek to support event organisers to ensure equality in their event, by highlighting issues that can arise that deny women an equal and fair competitive race experience. We actively welcome and would be grateful for feedback from event organisers and athletes alike to improve them.

Please email hello@sheraces.com with any comments.

Race entry process

Equality for female competitors starts at the very beginning, with the process for entering a race. For race organisers who want a competitive event, with a strong women's field, they need to ensure that the entry process encourages elite runners, which includes support for those returning to racing after pregnancy.

> Free or supported places

Where race organisers are looking to encourage a high level of competition at the top end of their events through the offering of free, supported or reserved places for elite athletes, these should be equal for both women and men. This means an equal number of available places, with relevant criteria set in order to achieve this, as well as equal appearance fees and travel support (where relevant).

> Pregnancy deferral policy

Women should not be penalised for having a child, or pressured to race before they are ready due to a limited pregnancy deferral policy. For elite and professional runners, this follows our standard fair deferral policies for all women, which states that deferrals for those already entered in an event should be for a minimum of two years. There should also be the option for a one-year deferral for partners where an event falls close to the birth of a child, as well as for those adopting.

Race organisers should also ensure that female athletes returning to competition are considered based on their pre-pregnancy performance for rankings and eligibility (within three years of their return).

As per our standard guidelines, athletes breastfeeding their children should be encouraged to contact the Race Director to consider what support can be put in place either before, after or during the race.

> **Encourage competition depth**

In order to ensure there is a high level of competition within an event, a review should be undertaken prior to the event of competitive depth, in good time. In cases where the women's field is low in numbers, race organisers should consider actively reaching out to female athletes to enhance the field and build a strong competition.

Media and race coverage

Coverage of races is not always balanced. Race media needs to ensure that equal coverage is given to both men's and women's fields, as should all post-event coverage. This is important to help promote the sport among all female athletes, which will help to push the sport forwards. Equal coverage is also essential to ensure that female elite and professional athletes are able to secure equal sponsorship as male athletes, where fair visibility is required.

All coverage, whether via the media or on social media, should ensure that the language used is inclusive, fair and respectful of the female athletes. It should always be clear that there are two distinct races for women and men. These should be treated as two separate races, with two separate winners, rather than suggesting an 'overall' winner. Those responsible for media coverage or social media posts should be briefed about this in advance.

> **Pre-race**

Pre-event coverage should give equal space to both men's and women's fields, previewing the athletes, the competition and the potential outcomes. This can include pre-event interviews, profiles and commentary.

Social media coverage should be equal across both races – with a clear distinction that there is a women's race and a men's race.

> **During the event**

The women's and men's fields should be covered as equally as possible during the race. This means ensuring that any camera or drone coverage is the same for both fields, making it easier for spectators to distinguish the two races and current standings. Commentary for both fields should be given equal airtime, and show that an equal level of background athlete research has been conducted for both fields to ensure the same level of depth. While there may be time constraints on coverage, this should be continued as far as possible to ensure that the depth of the women's race can be shown finishing.

Male athletes should be briefed pre-race to ensure a clear path for any lead bikes/motorbikes following the front of the women's race, so as not to compromise the female athletes' opportunity to compete fairly and their visibility on coverage.

Online tracking systems should be split by the women's and men's fields, so that it is easy to see the frontrunners in both fields and follow the competition in the women's race. The default has typically been for the male field to be shown first, so we would encourage the female field to be the new default to support our competition.

> **Post-event**

Post-event coverage should give equal space to both men's and women's fields, including a review of the competition, a review of the top athletes' performances and the overall outcome. Post-race interviews should be equal in number from each field, and the time given for these interviews. Interviewers should be briefed to focus on women as athletes and their performance, and to avoid questions that wouldn't typically be asked of a male athlete, such as appearance, relationships or clothing choice!

Prize-giving ceremonies should not take place until all female podium athletes have finished, and had the opportunity to prepare, for example to collect relevant sponsor clothing to wear for the prize-giving.

Social media posts should again be equal in number and coverage. It's important to ensure that the language used is correct, holding the winner of the women's race in the same regard as the winner of the men's race. Where a woman crosses the line first, this can be highlighted as being an outlying exceptional performance, as she has overcome the approximately 12% physiology gap to finish in advance of all men.

Race logistics

Race organisers should give consideration to ensuring a competitive race on the course for women, as well as men. In events where women and men race together, the women's race is often less visible than the men's, which can make it more difficult for female athletes to see their competition and adapt their performance or race strategy.

> Start pens

Try to ensure visibility at the front for female athletes where both races start together. Use a split start with women one side of the tape and men the other. This gives women the opportunity to see their competitive field clearly, and also allows media coverage to more easily highlight the women's field.

There should be an equal number of female athletes given prime start pens as men to ensure that the women's field is not split into different start pens, preventing a fair competition. We have seen situations in which start pens have been split based on expected finish time or points rankings only, across both men and women. This means that women who might be challenging for the podium are held up at the start in a secondary pen, preventing a clear start and fair competition.

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> **Athlete support**

Time checks or placings to be provided on course where possible, so women are aware of their position to enable them to adjust their race strategy. This is often more difficult on course for female athletes, as there are male runners around the leading women. Athletes should be informed of where these timing checks will be during race briefings.

Elite athlete support should be given to an equal number of female and male athletes. This support could include transport to the start line, points for specific nutrition, or car passes for a crew to follow an athlete, for example.

> **Race design**

For longer races, consider the likely finish times of the female race, ensuring that this remains within a prime viewing period or consider an earlier start time.

Value for athletes

It's important that female athletes feel valued and rewarded in the same way as male athletes. This ensures that events are more competitive, building an exciting women's field.

> **Prizes**

Prize money should always be equal, with the same number of age categories and prizes available, no matter the depth of the field.

Physical prizes should be identical or of equal value, and not altered based on gender, except where relevant (eg clothing). We'd like to highlight the mountain race that gave the male winners a set of steak knives and the female winners a manicure set as an example of what to avoid!

> **Podium placing**

The podium placings highlighted should be of equal size to the men's podium, regardless of the depth of the field. These should be equally featured, covered and visible.

> **Female category**

World Athletics policy states that for competitive fairness, only those with female sex are eligible for the female category (detailed policy [here](#)). This should be clearly stated in each race's rules to avoid any confusion.

We believe every athlete should be welcomed to the start line, and so encourage races to consider an Open category (instead of Men's), which can then feel inclusive to all athletes not qualifying for the Female category, or that do but would prefer to race in it. This includes any gender identity, such as non-binary. (We have referred to men's/male race throughout this document for clarity, as this is the current standard category split). To ensure competitive visibility to other athletes, an athlete that qualifies for the female category should be asked to compete there if they wish to be eligible for sex-based awards such as qualification to other events.

We are currently working with diverse communities to understand further ways in which races can make every athlete feel welcome, from sign-up and race-day experience, to celebration of results. We will update this, and our standard guidance as we have further recommendations.

Conclusion

In events where men and women compete side by side, there are many things that can, and should be done to ensure that both races are equally supported. This is important not only for fairness, but to support the growth of our sports.

As we have noted at the start, not all of these suggestions apply to all races. We encourage race directors to speak to female athletes to understand where improvements could be easily made.

We are a non-profit and rely on donations to continue our research, advocacy and support for races. If you feel these guidelines have been helpful, [please support our continued work](#) or consider partnering with us.