

Committee: *International Olympic Committee (IOC)*

Delegation: *Italian National Olympic Committee*

Topic: *Harnessing Sport Diplomacy for the Advancement of Democracy and Human Rights*



Founded in 1914 and recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1915, the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) provides regulation and management of sport activities in Italy. As a founding member of the European Union and a proud signatory of all major human rights conventions, Italy has historically used sport as a tool for democratic process and international cooperation. The legacy of 1960 Rome Olympics¹ symbolizes post-war renewal and continued to define Italy's belief in sport, not only as a competition, but also as a tool for peace and diplomacy.

Today, CONI handles, the proliferation of sports in Italy and upholds the principles of Olympic Charter by promoting equality, inclusion, and dialogue, as it positively impacts Italian society and youth (for example projects like Sport di Classe, CONI Centre, Sport e Integrazione² etc). In collaboration with institutions, organizations, and partner companies, CONI supports the development of social integration policies through sport, combating forms of race discrimination and intolerance.³

Sport diplomacy directly connects with Italian foreign policy priorities by emphasizing multilateralism and intercultural engagement. Italy's strategic view of sport as a diplomatic tool is supported by Italian leaders and the present government. Italy is proud to host the 2026 Winter Olympic Games in Milano-Cortina, where hospitality, sustainability and the Olympic Spirit will come together. The theme of the Opening Ceremony is "Harmony", as it will be first edition of Games with a polycentric model, which means the competition will be spread across multiple cities⁴. Marco Balich, a Creative Lead of the Opening Ceremony, noted that "from Ancient Greek, harmony means 'bringing together'", he described how the idea of peace between two cities, between man and nature, between cultures, people and the acceptance of different ways of thinking, stand out as the core principles of this concept. A positive

¹ International Paralympic Committee. (2019). *Rome 1960*. <https://www.paralympic.org/rome-1960>

² Italian National Olympic Committee. (2023). *Performance Plan*. CONI Performance Plan, 2018-2020. <https://www.coni.it/it/coni/amministrazione-trasparente/performance/piano-delle-performance.html>

³ Italian National Olympic Committee. (2017). Sustainability Report. *Sport, Passion for All*. https://www.coni.it/images/BilancioSostenibilita2017/BdS_CONI_2017_eng_-_Low.pdf

⁴ International Olympic Committee. (2025). *Harmony(Armonia): the vision that will unite the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina*. <https://www.olympics.com/en/milano-cortina-2026/news/harmony-armonia-vision-theme-opening-ceremony-olympic-winter-games-milano-cortina-2026>

multilateral approach was adopted, while the vision behind it is that of a world moved by harmony across differences, creating space and momentum for dialogue. Prime Minister Georgia Meloni stated, “the Olympics and Paralympics are a great opportunity to show the world who we are. The Games are a way to turn the world’s spotlight onto Italy”⁵.

Italy stands for strengthening diplomatic relations through sport to help foster democratic engagement and human rights. CONI understands that through sport diplomacy states can promote not only the nation, but also democratic values and peaceful standards of coexistence, tolerance, and respect. We believe sport to be a necessary antidote to the risk of conflict, helping to build bridges and understandings across nations and cultures, and channel competition into the healthy domain of sports.

As challenges of sport diplomacy come to the center of the discussion, CONI believes that neutrality in sport must not justify oppression and abuse. Our priority is safeguarding our athletes and ensure inclusion and sustainability in compliance with the fundamental principles of Olympicism. Any kind of resolution on the issue of combating ‘sportwashing’ in mega-sporting events must be done in full compliance with the Olympic Charter.

CONI’s Statute (Art.4) on the principles of sport autonomy states that “while safeguarding its autonomy from political, religious, economic interference, in accordance with the principles established by the Olympic Charter, CONI maintains collaborative relations with international organizations, the European Union, the Regions, the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, and local authorities, and cooperates with public authorities in programs for the promotion and support of sport.”⁶ Hence, through multilateral cooperation, the promotion of sport can imply greater responsibility and shift in collective values among IOC members, helping to build a better and more cooperative world grounded in human rights and democratic principles.

⁵ Italian National Olympic Committee. (2023). News Archive. *Milano-Cortina 2026, Meloni: “Opportunity to show the world who we are”*. Malagò: “Sport is a vehicle for inclusion”. <https://www.coni.it/en/news/milan-cortina-2026,-meloni-%E2%80%9COpportunity-to-show-the-world-who-we-are%E2%80%9D-malag%C3%B2-%E2%80%9Csport-is-a-vehicle-for-inclusion%E2%80%9D.html>

⁶ Italian National Olympic Committee. (2023). *CONI Statute*, Article 4, Principles of Sport Autonomy.

Committee: *International Olympic Committee (IOC)*

Delegation: *Italian National Olympic Committee*

Topic: *The inclusion of transgender, intersex, and non-binary athletes in competitive sport*



As a proud member of the Olympic family, the Italian National Olympic Committee's (CONI) mission is to promote the fundamental principles and values of Olympicism in Italy. We advocate for the full compliance with the Olympic Charter and encourage the development of high-performance sport as well as sport for all. As a National Olympic Committee, CONI has a direct responsibility for taking actions against any form of discrimination and violence in sport. CONI also has a right to preserve its autonomy and resist any political, religious, and legal pressures which may prevent our compliance with the Olympic Charter.⁷

One of the core principles of Olympicism, as enshrined in the Olympic Charter, is that the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.⁸ CONI believes that all persons, regardless of their sex or gender, must have access to sport and has been promoting inclusion, fairness, and integration through sport across Italian regions (e.g. "Sport and Inclusion" conference⁹).

In the context of transgender, intersex, non-binary sportspeople, the IOC framework does not refer specifically to non-binary athletes, but increasing numbers of people in sports are now identifying as non-binary¹⁰. It is important to consider that these groups are not homogenous, therefore their rights require advocacy in a 'non rigid' or overgeneralized framework. Each case is unique and deserves a special approach, grounded in scientific evidence. Moreover, we must take into consideration the specificity and nature of each sport (endurance sports, strength sports, skill-based or coordination sports etc.) and any kind of policy must be adopted with these considerations in mind.

In 2026, Italy will host the Winter Olympic Games in Milano-Cortina, and the IOC's eligibility policy on the issue of intersex, transgender and non-binary athletes must be developed in a

⁷ International Olympic Committee. (January 2025). *Olympic Charter*, chapter 4, article 27, pg 60.

⁸ International Olympic Committee (January 2025). *Olympic Charter*, Fundamental Principle of Olympicism, pg.9

⁹ Italian National Olympic Committee. (2025). "Sport and Inclusion": A Conference Against Discrimination on March 27th. <https://www.coni.it/it/news/%E2%80%99Csport-e-inclusione%E2%80%99D,-il-27-marzo-al-coni-convegno-contro-le-discriminazioni.html>

¹⁰ International Olympic Committee. (2024 edition). *Portrayal Guidelines Gender-Equal, Fair and Inclusive Representation in Sport*, pg 27.

transparent and consistent manner. In November 2025, the first Italian edition of IOC's Portrayal Guidelines was published. The document provides important information on gender-equality and fairness in all sport contexts, including the annex on fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory portrayal of transgender sportspeople and athletes with sex variations. The release of the document is step forward for the Italian sports movement, adapting the international guidelines to the national context and to the specific features of the Italian language¹¹.

CONI stands for inclusivity, yet it also stands for fairness and transparency, these two cannot be contradictory to each other. Our priority is safeguarding athletes and ensuring their well-being. In addition to that, the Italian Federation of Winter Sport (FISI) adopted a Safeguarding policy¹² approved by Emergency Resolution of the President in August 2023, which states that none of our members shall be a subject to abuse and discrimination, including any conduct that has discriminatory effect regarding gender, sexual orientation and one's physical characteristics.

As principle 4.1 of the IOC 'Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity and Sex Variations' suggests, sports organizations are responsible for the drafting of eligibility criteria for men's and women's categories for a given competition and these must be confident that no athlete within a category has an unfair and disproportionate advantage (namely advantage gained by altering one's body or one that disproportionately exceeds other advantages that exist at elite-level competitions)¹³.

CONI advocates for policies that are respectful for the dignity of our athletes and their eligibility rights, grounded in scientific evidence and co-designed with international specialists and federations. We believe in best practices that promote the safety and well-being of our national sports team and other competitors. We encourage state members to collaborate on creating a consensus initiative that is not contradictory to the principles of Olympic movement and aligns with IOC's Charter. IOC is meant to bring together all nations under the Olympic flame, not for dispute but to unite and play fair together. It is our collective responsibility to ensure the fairness of the game and Italy, through CONI, stands ready to play its part.

¹¹ International Olympic Committee. (9 November 2025). *Milano Cortina 2026: the Winter Olympic Games for a future of equity and inclusion*. <https://www.olympics.com/en/milano-cortina-2026/news/milan-cortina-2026-the-winter-olympic-games-for-a-future-of-equity-and-inclusion>

¹² Italian Winter Sports Federation. (2023). *Regulation for Safeguarding Policy of all Members*, article 8.

¹³ International Olympic Committee. (2021). *Fairness, Inclusion and on-Discrimination in Olympic Sport*. <https://www.olympics.com/ioc/human-rights/fairness-inclusion-nondiscrimination>