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Paris Olympics throw spotlight on needs of athlete mothers The support being provided at the Paris Olympics for athletes who are also parents is just part of a larger trend, as the rise of women's sports puts greater emphasis on maternity and parental needs.

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The support being provided at the Paris Olympics for athletes who are also parents is just part of a larger trend, as the rise of women's sports puts greater emphasis on maternity and parental needs.

In France, a nursery is available for athletes' children in the Olympic village for the first time and private rooms will be provided by organisers for nursing mothers, but the Olympics aren't alone.

FIFA — football's global governing body — recently added new policies that expanded on groundbreaking regulations adopted in 2020, giving athletes access to at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave. The new rules expanded benefits to coaches, and gave periods of paid leave to adoptive parents and non-biological mothers.

Likewise, USA Track and Field has unveiled a programme that gives athletes greater financial support and insurance coverage in working their way back from giving birth.

For athletes in other sports, the US Olympic Committee has introduced the USA New Family Fund, which distributes grants to help parents with things like childcare, infant supplies and feeding support.

Casey Krueger: A personal investment

US national soccer team defender Casey Krueger welcomed the greater attention sports was paying to both pregnancy and the needs of athletes who are parents of young children.

For Krueger, it's personal. When she's competing in France, beginning this week, she'll have a place to nurse her son.

"I just actually had a conversation with the coaching staff and US Soccer, because they've been in contact with FIFA, just trying to get some logistical things figured out," said Krueger. "I'm still breastfeeding my son, so he comes to the stadium with us.

"They've been very accommodating, and they're making sure he has a room and I'm able to [nurse] before the game, so I felt incredibly supported."

By and large, however, efforts to accommodate parental needs both within domestic leagues and at large international events like the Olympics are piecemeal, differing between both sports and the nations represented.

Because FIFA oversees the largest women-only global sporting event — the Women's World Cup — and sets the standards for the game internationally, it is in a unique position compared to other sports to set standards for its athletes.

Women's World Cup — nannies and carseats

The Women's World Cup last year in Australia and New Zealand gave FIFA a chance to introduce new policies for tournaments that require athletes to be away from home for weeks at a time. Among the changes were allowances for nannies in travelling contingents and even the availability of child car seats in official transport.

FIFA's new guidelines also require teams to allow time off for issues that might arise during menstruation. Additionally, player transfer rules were changed to give teams greater flexibility to sign players in the event of an athlete's pregnancy or leave.

"If we want to include women in football, we have to include them in every aspect of the game," said FIFA women's football chief Sarai Bareman, "We need to ensure that they are protected from a labour perspective, that they can earn a living playing football and that they're not penalised if they want to start a family, whether that be biologically, whether they want to adopt, whether they are the biological mother or not.

"If we want more and more women around this planet to be playing the game and earning a living playing the game, these measures are absolutely necessary in order to ensure that."

For most athletes, the landscape for navigating maternity and childcare can be confusing and daunting — it can often hinge on their country's laws or lack of them. Many athletes in Olympic sports aren't covered by traditional labour contracts.

Track athletes have traditionally been supported by corporate sponsorships.

In 2019, former sprinter Allyson Felix, an 11-time Olympic medallist, called out Nike for the company's treatment of her when she was pregnant. She eventually parted ways with Nike, but pushed the shoemaker to change its policies.

Hurdler Christina Clemons, a new mother who competed recently at the Olympic trials, said she felt supported by USATF and the USATF foundation, as well as corporate sponsor Doritos, but the experience hasn't always been positive.

"I was with adidas 12 years, had a baby and they didn't re-sign me, but I'm one of the best hurdlers in the world, so how does that make sense? For what reason?

"The only thing we can look at is that I had a child."

Maternity leave and child care have long been a part of the collective-bargaining agreements that women have had with the US Soccer Federation. The players' landmark agreement for equal pay with the federation in 2022 included a provision that gave fathers child care during matches and camps.

Other nations, including Australia, have similar provisions in their labour agreements.


The National Women's Soccer League and the WNBA have also recognised the needs of parents in their labour agreements. The WNBA's collective bargaining agreement in 2020 adopted fully paid maternity leave, as well as a stipend for childcare.


Serena Williams changed tennis rankings


Often, reforms are driven by the players themselves, as was the case with Felix. Serena Williams' return from pregnancy spurred the WTA to adopt a new ranking rule that didn't penalise women for absences while having children.

England's Rugby Football Union gives athletes a full 26 months of paid maternity leave.

In many parts of the world, however, such policies have yet to be adopted. That's what makes efforts like FIFA's important.


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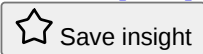
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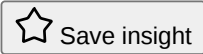
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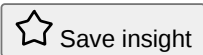
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