

Visibility Counts:

LGBTQ+ Equality and the Tokyo Olympics 2020



About Out Leadership

Out Leadership is the oldest and largest global LGBTQ+ business advisory. We partner with the world's most influential companies to build business opportunities, cultivate talent, and drive LGBTQ+ equality forward. We believe that LGBTQ+ inclusion positively impacts business results, and that including LGBTQ+ people at the most senior level of executive leadership builds business. We call this idea Return on Equality.™

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Foreword by Fabrice Houdart, Managing Director, Global Equality Initiatives, Out Leadership

I remember being asked on the occasion of the Paris Gay Games (during an interview in the France24 studio) why the LGBTQ+ community felt the need to develop separate games in 1982. I reminded my interlocutor that for the longest time, LGBTQ+ people were not welcome at the Olympics.

In fact, as this paper reminds us, in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, only 15 athletes out of the 10,708 participants were openly gay, lesbian or bi. Let that sink in for a minute: **only 13 years ago less than 0.2% of athletes at the Olympic Games were openly LGB.** A statistical aberration and an unmistakable sign of pervasive discrimination in the identification, selection and preparation of LGBTQ+ athletes everywhere.

The situation has been gradually improving over the years: at least 163 out of the 11,238 expected participants in these Tokyo Summer Olympics are openly LGBT, by far a record. Yet this representation is abysmal: lower than what we observe in politics or the Boardroom,



two bastions of conservatism. In addition, this handful of courageous LGB athletes all come from a small number of countries in the Americas and Europe where social attitudes have improved substantially. There is an important exception though, that of Indian sprinter: Dutee Chand, whose story is a reminder of the heartbreaking experience of LGBTQ+ people outside of the most tolerant areas.

Recent events during the UEFA European Football Championship illustrated the fact that sport, including in these more tolerant countries, is the next frontier when it comes to inclusion. It has been for a while too.

Not only for ethnicity, race or gender. According to 'Out on The Fields' - the 2015 international study on the experiences of LGB people in sports - 80% of the nearly 9,500 participants said they witnessed or experienced homophobia in sports.

And yet, the opportunity of being out in sport is crucial. Because openly LGBTQ+ athletes remind their immense fan base that we are part of the common human spirit and share the same aspirations: an appetite for freedom, dignity, belonging and opportunities.

Unfortunately for most LGBTQ+ people today, these remain elusive goals. It has been the case for centuries. And today, once again, we are witnessing a proliferation in hate speech and human rights abuses of LGBTQ+ people. A trend the United Nations Independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity once described as "a vortex of violence and discrimination". One explanation is that the steady advances that we have witnessed over the past decades in most parts of the globe have led to resistance to further change. As the light gathers, so does the darkness. In other parts of the World, like Japan, a G-7 country where the Games take place this year, we are also witnessing a slowdown of the pace of much-needed social change. This is a sign of the weaning commitment of governments to the Human Rights framework of 1947.

What LGBTQ+ people need today is global social change as the gap between the most and least tolerant areas become unsustainable. That means not only achieving legal changes, but fostering a true revolution in hearts and minds. And sport has a key role to play. The recipe for social change is complex, but what we know for sure is that visibility is a key ingredient.

The talent, resilience and creativity of LGBTQ+ people has always been the silver lining to their suffering. Centuries of persecution has provided this community with courage and an immense appetite for success. LGBTQ+ athletes show us how they excel at turning their personal hardship into the precursor to beauty and triumph. Thanks to them for being there, for being visible and for their service to our community.



Dutee Chand
2016, 2020 Olympics

“ At last, we have the Olympics. This year's Games are unprecedented in many ways, not the least of which is the presence of more than 160 out LGBTQ+ athletes, according to Outsports. That is more than all the previous Summer Olympics combined. The Mizuho Pride group is delighted to celebrate such a happy and welcome milestone.

In the lead up to the Olympics, Mizuho Pride was excited to partner with Out Leadership in presenting "Trans Athletes Redefining Gender Norms and Finding Success from Court to Field" as part of our Pride Month festivities. It was a great event, well-attended by members and allies alike, that prompted a multifaceted discussion on identity and opportunity.

We salute all the athletes and praise everyone in the Olympic ecosystem who helped so many bring their true selves to the games. It is another inspirational moment that will reverberate throughout the boardrooms, classrooms, and training rooms around the world. ”

- **Rob Cordell**, Executive Director & Counsel, Mizuho Group



“ We need more Out LGBTQ athletes like Carl Nassib, the first openly gay, active player in the NFL, to be visible role models for aspiring young LGBTQ athletes. Many still feel unsafe in sports, especially with the political attacks on transgender athletes.

LGBTQ youth are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers. To mitigate that, we need our LGBTQ youth to feel like they belong. On the court, in the field of play, in their home, and in their communities. ”

- **Beth Brooke**, US Olympics Committee, Board Advisor, Out Leadership



“ I think in watching other people be themselves and watching other people's journeys—especially when you're a little kid—that has a profound effect. You're able to see yourself in different ways and discover other parts of yourself and gain confidence with those parts, rather than push them away because you don't see anybody else like you. ”

- **Sue Bird**, U.S., Women's Basketball
2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, 2020 Olympics



“ I still, to this day, have people coming up to me or writing to me or whatever it may be, thanking me or saying I'm the reason they felt OK with themselves, or I'm the reason their family was OK... They see a future for their children that isn't just all about the stereotype that you hear, which is how hard life is to be gay. ”

- **Megan Rapinoe**, U.S., Women's Soccer
2012, 2016, 2020 Olympics

“ ...you see how open-minded many parts of the world are. But there are also many parts of the world where being gay is punishable by death, punishable by jail time. It's a new world, and it's also not, and I think that the only way to change perception is through visibility, through representation, and the more that we have that, the more normalized queer becomes, the easier it is for people to wrap their heads around it, and I think that the more we'll see positive change. ”

- **Gus Kenworthy**, U.S. & England, Freestyle Skiing
2014, 2018 Olympics



“ There was never a thing of like, 'We need to vocalize coming out. What we're about is just being authentic and being true to who we are. You get heterosexual couples posting photos of each other on Instagram and social media. That's all we're doing: sharing our life on Instagram. ”

- **Megan Jones and Celia Quansah**, England, Rugby
2020 Olympics



A Word on Covid-19 and Tokyo 2020

The 2020 Olympics, delayed to 2021 due to the global pandemic, are taking place despite criticism from the Japanese public, more than 80% of which disapproves of the Olympics taking place, and caution being urged by the World Health Organization.

While an estimated 80% of athletes attending the games are expected to be vaccinated, estimates range from 8 to 30% vaccination rates for the general population of Japan. Prior to the start of the Olympics, Japan had seen a relatively small amount of cases and deaths caused by Covid-19, but there is a fear that an influx of foreign athletes, support staff, and press could bring

higher case numbers to the country.

The increasing number of athletes testing positive for Covid-19 since arriving in Japan, and the increase in cases globally due to the ongoing pandemic, have both cast a shadow over the Games and amplified questions about the decision to hold the Games before the coronavirus pandemic had been controlled. This shadow has begun to impact sponsorship, as Toyota - a major sponsor of the 2020 Olympics - announced that it would no longer run ads within Japan.



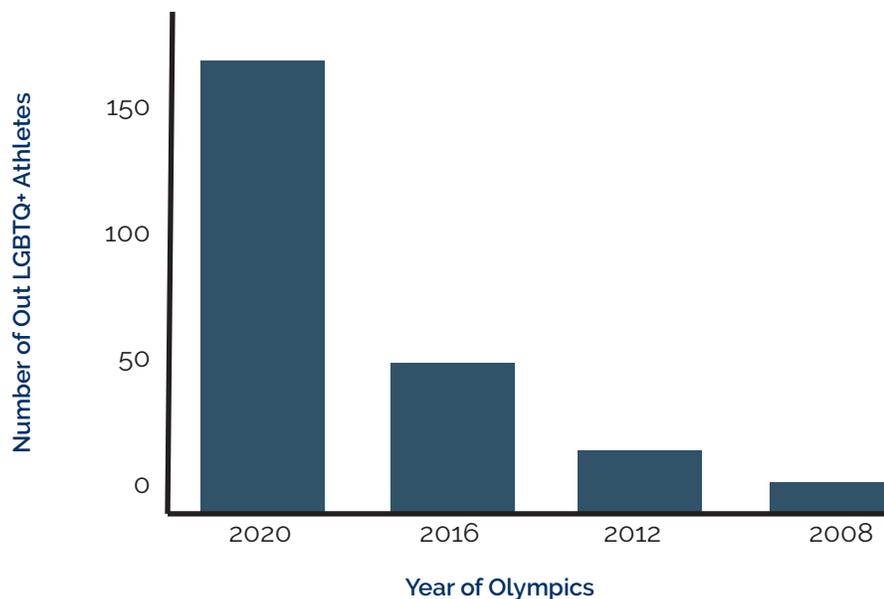
LGBTQ+ Visibility at the 2020 Olympics

Despite the Covid-19 risks around the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, these Olympics mark the highest ever levels of visibility for LGBTQ+ athletes, with **an estimated 163 openly out gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender athletes from 26 countries**, including the first ever transgender competitors. This total represents more than double the number of out LGBTQ+ athletes that were present

at the previous Olympics in Rio De Janeiro in 2016. Despite this increase, this number still represents less than 1.2% of the total athlete population at the competition. It does, however, imply a trend of gradually increasing visibility that is hopeful for LGBTQ+ athletes at future Olympics and other global sporting events.

Year of Olympics	Location	Number of Out LGBTQ+ Athletes	Total Number of Athletes	Percentage of LGBTQ+ Athletes
2020	Tokyo	163	11,238 ²	1.45%
2016	Rio de Janeiro	56	11,237 ³	0.50%
2012	London	23	10,500 ⁴	0.22%
2008	Beijing	11	10,942 ⁵	0.10%

Number of Out LGBTQ+ Athletes by Year of Summer Olympics



LGBTQ+ Trailblazers

The first openly LGBTQ+ athlete to compete at the modern Olympics was American equestrian competitor Robert Dover, who came out during the 1988 Olympics.⁶ The earliest known LGBTQ+ athlete to compete is considered to be Otto Peltzer, a German runner who competed in the 1928 and 1932

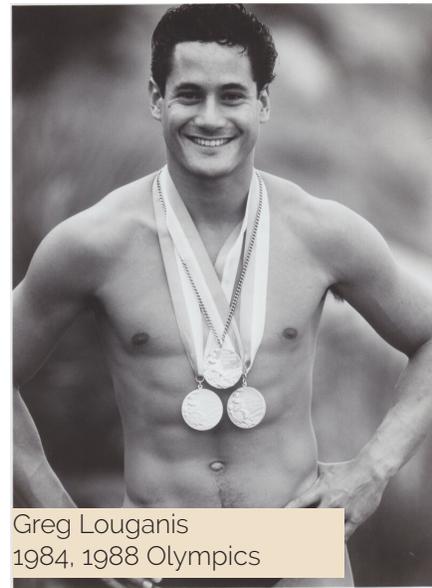
Olympics but who was not publicly LGBTQ+ and was later persecuted for his sexuality.⁷ Even as recently as the 1990's, many LGBTQ+ athletes waited until retiring from professional sports before coming out to retain their sponsorship deals and to avoid homophobia.



Otto Peltzer
1928, 1932 Olympics



Billie Jean King
1996, 2000 Olympics



Greg Louganis
1984, 1988 Olympics



Caster Semenya
2012, 2016 Olympics



Adam Rippon
2018 Olympics



Robert Dover
1984, 1988, 1992, 1996,
2000, 2004 Olympics

First Ever Trans Olympians

This year, the first ever transgender athletes will be competing at the Olympics: New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard and Canadian soccer player Quinn.⁸

Laurel Hubbard, as the first trans woman to qualify for the Olympics, was required to meet strict guidelines set by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Transgender women must meet strict limits that includes keeping testosterone levels below 10 nanomoles per liter for at least 12 months before competing.⁹

Quinn, competing in the Canadian women's team as a trans, non-binary athlete faced no restrictions on competing. The official rules decided by the International Olympic Committee Consensus Meeting in 2015 states: "Those who transition from female to male are eligible to compete in the male category without restriction."¹⁰ There are no rules for non-binary people competing on women's teams.

While Hubbard's participation is controversial to some, the International Olympic Committee is backing her participation, with the IOC President Thomas Bach saying: "The rules for qualification have been established by the International

Weightlifting Federation before the qualifications started. These rules apply, and you cannot change rules during ongoing competitions."¹¹

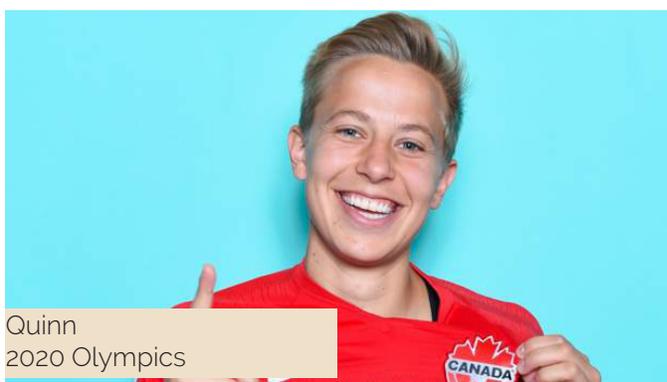
Transgender athletes have been allowed to compete in the Olympics since 2004, but as the first trans people to qualify, both Hubbard's inclusion on the New Zealand team and Quinn's inclusion on the Canadian team are groundbreaking.

In the U.S., current estimates are that roughly 1.4 million adults, or **1 in every 200 adults, identifies as transgender**, while as many as **1 in 50 youth (ages 13-17) identify as transgender**. Assuming a similar percentage in the global community, the Olympics are far from being representative of the global transgender population.

"I feel sad knowing there were Olympians before me unable to live their truth because of the world. I feel optimistic for change. Change in legislature. Changes in rules, structures, and mindsets. Mostly, I feel aware of the realities. Trans girls being banned from sports. Trans women facing discrimination and bias while trying to pursue their olympic dreams. **The fight isn't close to over... and I'll celebrate when we're all here**". - Quinn



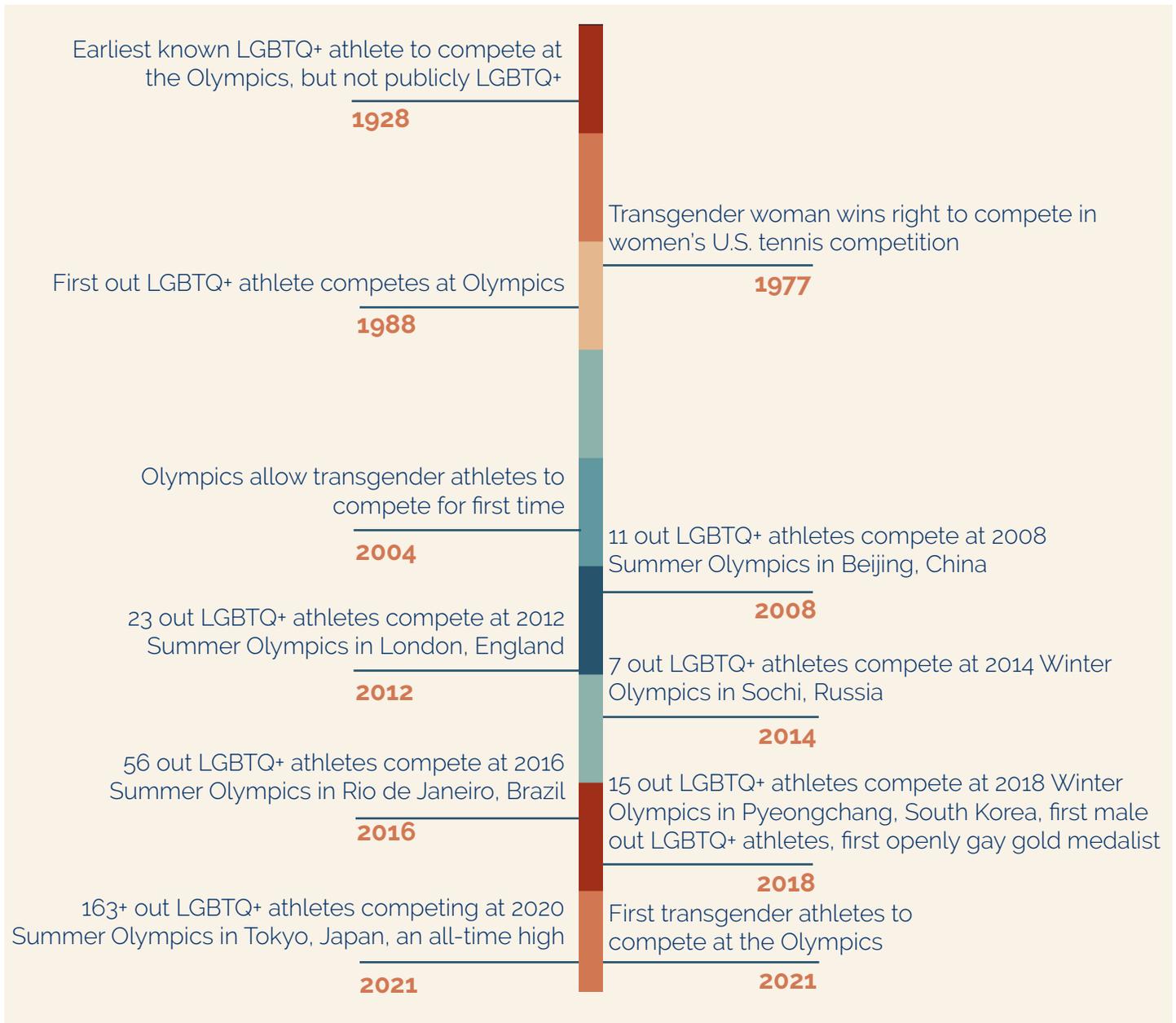
Laurel Hubbard
2020 Olympics



Quinn
2020 Olympics

LGBTQ+ People in Sports Timeline

In June 2021, Out Leadership published the [Business Leader's Guide to Trans Equality](#) in the U.S., a first-of-its-kind guide intended to help business leaders better understand and support the trans community and trans employees. The guide highlights many of the biases that are held against trans people participating in sports and underscores the importance of including trans athletes.



The Business Case for Equality

The business community has long known that discrimination is bad for business, which is why business continues to be a driving force for equality.

With the increasing size of the LGBTQ+ marketplace and what Out Leadership has coined "The Ally Marketplace," there is strong demand from stakeholders for organizations to show their values through advocacy on a variety of social issues, including trans rights.²⁴ (Read more about the Ally Marketplace in our research [AllyUP](#))

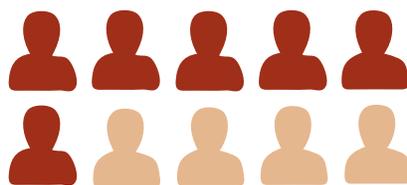


Why diversity and inclusion are good for business:

- Recruit and retain top talent in a competitive market
- Generate innovative ideas by drawing on a greater breadth of perspectives, characteristics, and lived experiences
- Attract and better serve a diverse customer base
- Increase productivity among employees who experience their workplace as a place where they are valued and respected.

The evolution of trans acceptance and inclusion:

Similar to the broader acceptance of LGBTQ+ equality in society, views towards equality for transgender people have also shifted rapidly, with **six in ten Americans saying that they are more supportive of transgender rights now than five years ago**.¹²



Businesses Case for Supporting LGBTQ+ Athletes

Businesses have long played a role in supporting and elevating the status of athletes through sponsorship deals. Sponsorships provide a level of financial support that ensures athletes the financial freedom to continue pursuing their passion, which is helpful given that many sports, especially women's sports, are underfunded. Sponsorships also provide a level of year-round visibility that can otherwise be hard to achieve outside of a major sporting event, with advertising campaigns across mediums and regions that can make an athlete a household name.

This level of visibility for an out LGBTQ+ athlete provides role models for young LGBTQ+ people and helps "normalize" LGBTQ+ people for those who would otherwise not know any out LGBTQ+ people and fall back on outdated stereotypes about the LGBTQ+ community.

Until recently, coming out was likely to result in the loss of sponsorships for LGBTQ+ athletes. Groundbreaking LGBTQ+ athletes of the past such as Martina Navratilova and Billie Jean King lost endorsement deals when they came out or were outed against their will. Thankfully, that is no longer the case in the U.S. and other Western democracies.¹³

As more athletes have come out as LGBTQ+ it has become clear that LGBTQ+ people are in the top tiers across all sporting disciplines, as individuals and as members of teams. Major companies are now not only supporting LGBTQ+ athletes, but in the case of companies like Adidas, also

explicitly ensuring that athletes will not lose sponsorship deals if they come out publicly. In 2016, Adidas introduced a clause in its sponsorship contracts stating that athletes "will neither be terminated nor modified in case the athlete comes out to the public as a member of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community."

Businesses Supporting LGBTQ+ Equality Globally

Business has been a driving force for LGBTQ+ equality globally. The expanded visibility of the Olympics propels brands into the hearts and minds of a world-wide captivated audience. Out Leadership member firms Coca-Cola, Dow, P&G, Visa, Nomura, Mizuho and EY Japan are among the businesses who are sponsoring the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

Out Leadership member firms that sponsor the 2020 Olympics:



Businesses Supporting LGBTQ+ Equality Globally

Out Leadership Member Firm Case Study: Nike

Out Leadership member firm Nike also has a long history of supporting top athletes across sports and have actively supported out LGBTQ+ athletes in the U.S., with campaigns in particular for the U.S. women's soccer team and basketball team that each have many out LGBTQ+ players. Nike also focuses visibility on many out LGBTQ+ athletes through campaigns such as their "Play New" campaign which features out athletes including Breanna Stewart, Diana Taurasi, Sue Bird, Megan Rapinoe, Brittney Griner, and Tierna Davidson.

Other companies have likewise chosen to support LGBTQ+ athletes and amplify their visibility on the world stage. Examples of this support are U.S. basketball player Sue Bird who is sponsored by QuickBooks, Facebook App, and eBay, and U.S. soccer player Kelley O'Hara who is sponsored by Heineken, Under Armor, Got Milk, Jaybirds and more. Companies have also thrown their support behind athletes not competing at the 2020 Olympics, increasing the visibility of those LGBTQ+ athletes which in turn paves the way for more athletes to come out.



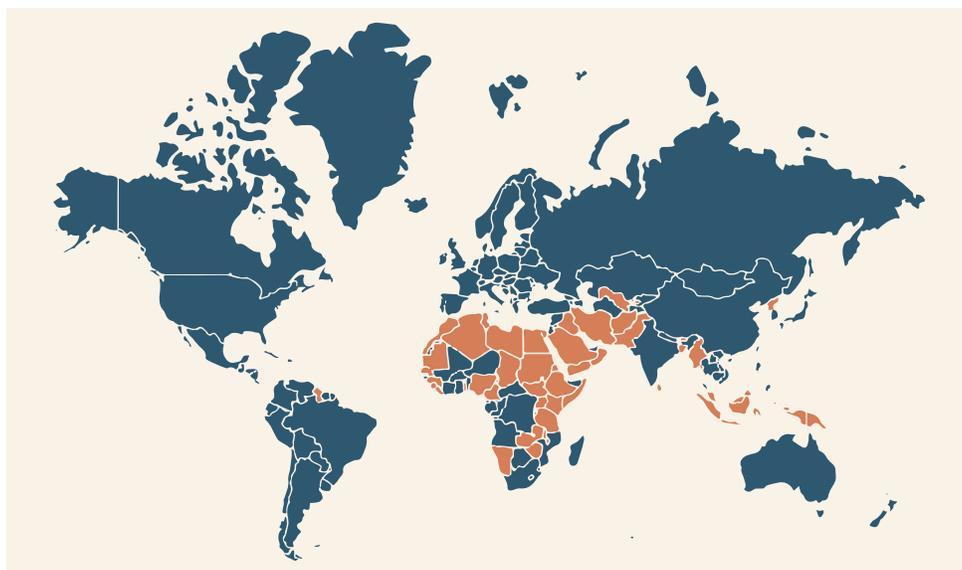
Changing Attitudes Towards LGBTQ+ People

Much of the increase in openly LGBTQ+ athletes at this Olympics can be attributed to changing attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people in many countries around the world. As LGBTQ+ people continue to be visible in every part of a society, public perception and policies move toward protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ people, leading to more athletes feeling safe to come out.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of athletes who are openly LGBTQ+ are representing countries which are generally considered to be more accepting of LGBTQ+ people and offer the most protections against discrimination, with the most athletes coming from the U.S. (33), Great Britain (15), the Netherlands (13), Canada (12), New Zealand (10), and Australia (9). On the other

hand, countries that do not offer protections for LGBTQ+ people, and the 69 countries that still criminalize LGBTQ+ people, were unsurprisingly represented by only a handful of out LGBTQ+ athletes at the last Olympics.

Each year Out Leadership releases CEO Country Briefs which score countries based on the status of LGBTQ+ equality and the risks associated with businesses operating in those countries. The Briefs assign an overall LGBTQ+ Business Climate Score based on individual scores for Brand Risk, Client Risk, Talent Risk, and Marketing Risk. The largest numbers of LGBTQ+ athletes at the 2020 Olympics represent countries that scored 5 or more out of 10, with the vast majority from countries that scored at least 7.5 out of 10.



Countries that currently criminalize LGBTQ+ people: Afghanistan, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Barbados, Bhutan, Brunei, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Cook Islands (non-independent jurisdiction), Dominica, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Guyana, Indonesia (certain provinces), Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine (Gaza only), Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

CEO Country Briefs & LGBTQ+ Representation

In the below table, the LGBTQ+ Business Climate Score ranges from 10 (highest) to 0 (lowest), while the risk categories range from 1 (lowest risk) to 5 (highest risk).

Country	Business Climate Score	Brand Risk	Client Risk	Talent Risk	Marketing Risk	Out athletes at 2020 Olympics
United States	7.5	1	1	2	2	35
Australia	8.5	1	1	1	1	12
Brazil	7.5	3	2	3	2	12
India	5	2	2	4	3	1
Italy	8	2	1	2	2	3
Mexico	7.5	2	2	3	2	2
Philippines	5	3	4	4	3	1
Bermuda	7	2	2	3	1	0
China	4	2	2	3	2	0
Chinese Taipei	8.5	2	3	3	2	0
Hong Kong	6	2	1	2	2	0
Indonesia	2.5	4	4	4	5	0
Japan	5.5	1	1	3	2	0
Malaysia	1.5	4	4	5	5	0
Nigeria	1.5	5	5	5	5	0
Russia	3.5	4	5	4	5	0
Saudi Arabia	1	5	5	5	5	0
Singapore	4	4	2	3	4	0
South Africa	8.5	1	2	3	2	0
South Korea	6	4	1	3	3	0
Thailand	7.5	2	3	2	2	0
Turkey	4	3	2	3	3	0
Uganda	1.5	5	5	5	5	0
United Arab Emirates	2.5	5	4	5	5	0



Japan: Marriage Equality

Japan currently ranks second to last in gay and transgender rights among the nearly 40 wealthy nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).¹⁴ Many LGBTQ+ people had hoped that the visibility of the Olympics, along with the influx of foreign interest in the country in the lead-up and during the event, and the Olympics' self-proclaimed goal of ending discrimination would help move public opinion and even policy in Japan toward becoming more inclusive and supportive of the LGBTQ+ community. This, however, appears to not be the case.

According to LGBTQ+ activists in Japan, politicians are failing to address the pressing needs of the LGBTQ+ community. Out

Leadership's AllyUP Asia report found that on the marriage equality front, **Japan lags behind other G7 countries as the only country in the group without any legal recognition of same-sex relationships.** Despite recent surveys showing that up to 80% of people in Japan support marriage equality, paired with considerable support from corporations and private sector entities, conservative attitudes and government policies function as barriers to widespread LGBTQ+ equality. The country must also reform its legal recognition procedure for transgender people which today warrants a psychiatric evaluation and sterilization contrary to global human rights standards. ¹⁵Gon Matsunaka, head of Pride



“ Seeing the progress made internationally, the LGBT community here is gradually becoming more visible – in large part due to committed leaders as well as phenomenal allies and ambassadors...LGBT people may feel it is easier to be more visible if such visibility is accepted by society and protected by law. ”

- Alexander Dmitrenko
Counsel and Head of Asia Sanctions at Freshfield
Co-Founder LLAN

House Tokyo, stated that “there are lives lost because of the lack of legislation” due to the discrimination and prejudice suffered by LGBTQ+ people in Japan.¹⁶

Conclusion

While the Olympics provide a substantial platform for LGBTQ+ visibility on a global scale, further progress is needed in order to shift social and political attitudes towards LGBTQ+ equality in Japan.

Nonetheless, Japanese athletes are taking action to bolster LGBTQ+ equality through visibility. **Although there are no publicly out athletes representing Japan at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, athletes like Shiho Shimoyamada and Fumino Sugiyama are paving the way for LGBTQ+ visibility.**

Shimoyamada, who in 2019 became Japan’s first openly gay professional athlete, wanted to create a safe environment for athletes to come out - “I want to spread the message that I didn’t face any backlash, athletes don’t need to be scared to come out.” And Sugiyama, a former fencer for the Japan women’s national team and the first transgender board member of the Japan Olympic committee, asserted that **“When you are excluded from sports, it means you are also excluded from society. I believe sports and society are closely intertwined and if I can change sports, I can change society.”** Hopefully, increased LGBTQ+ visibility from the Tokyo Olympics will translate into concrete policies that advance LGBTQ+ equality in the coming years.

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