

2023 WORLD CUP IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

The 2023 edition of the Women's World Cup moves to the Oceania continent, with Australia and New Zealand co-hosting the tournament. Capitalizing on the rapid growth of women's football, [FIFA expanded the field in 2023 to 32](#) teams - with [UEFA](#) (Europe) adding 3 slots to its allocation, [CAF](#) (Africa), [CONCACAF](#) (North/Central America, Caribbean), and [CONMEBOL](#) (South America) gaining a single guaranteed slot, an extra slot for the co-host format, and an expanded inter-confederation playoff tournament to decide the final 3 participants. The [new playoff format](#) provided an extra 2 opportunities for [AFC](#) (Asia), CAF, CONCACAF, and CONMEBOL, with [OFC](#) (Oceania) and UEFA potentially adding an additional national representative to the tournament field. Previously only 1 playoff match was played between CONCACAF and CONMEBOL. As a result, [opportunities for qualification](#) have expanded globally - although the European presence increased to a potential 12 of 32 slots in 2023 (37.5%) compared to 8 of 24 in 2019 (33%). In fact, [Portugal](#) earned one of the "second chance" slots, with CONCACAF members [Haiti](#) and [Panama](#) taking the additional two positions in the 2023 field. However, representation of the [Global South](#) has expanded from 37.5% (9/24) to 43.75% (14/32) at the 9th Women's World Cup.

[FIFA selected the joint Australia and New Zealand bid](#) to host this expanded 2023 Women's World Cup over Colombia in June 2020. Despite early interest from several nations across the globe to organize the tournament, only the Oceania and Colombian bids remained in the formal process. After originally preparing separate bids Australia and New Zealand [joined forces to co-host](#) despite being members of different confederations. Although the largest nation within Oceania, Australia [moved from the Oceanian Football Confederation into the Asian Football Confederation](#) in 2006. From Australia's perspective, switching to the AFC provided better competition and an opportunity to rise in the FIFA rankings. For OFC members, the removal of Australia created newfound pathways to qualify for international tournaments - with the OFC typically allocated, at best, a single slot for major competitions.

The decision to award the 2023 tournament to the southern hemisphere, with significant time zone differences to Europe and the Americas, [raised some concerns](#) within FIFA. Interest generated in Europe with the [success of the UEFA Euro tournament in 2022 in England](#) (with the hosts winning), as well as the increasing popularity of the Champions League and domestic leagues (WSL), some felt, should be capitalized on. Instead, games for the 2023 World Cup will be televised in Europe and North America - another significant consumer of women's football - at [less-than-ideal times for viewership](#). Subsequently, FIFA's move to separate commercial and broadcast

partnerships between the Men's and Women's events has been, some suggest, less than overwhelming. In an [interview with the Sports Business Journal](#), marketing consultant Ricardo Fort surmised that "for a tournament that happens in a time zone which is not friendly for Europe or North America, a tournament that lasts a month, that really gets exciting halfway through, the price that FIFA has been charging is probably frightening some potential partners". Disappointed with low bids from European broadcasters to televise the tournament, FIFA President Gianni [Infantino threatened a blackout](#). Despite these challenges, however, FIFA still hopes to [break viewership records](#) during the 2023 tournament, with [increased interest in Asia](#) potentially offsetting declines in live Global North audiences.

Football is increasingly relying on Asia – specifically the Arab Peninsula – for investment in the highest levels of the game. Sovereign wealth funds connected to the states of the [United Arab Emirates](#) (Manchester City), [Qatar](#) (Paris St. Germain), and [Saudi Arabia](#) (Newcastle United) have all purchased globally recognized football clubs in recent years. Considered [acts of "sportswashing"](#) by many in the Global North, the Middle Eastern petroleum and gas giants argue their investment in elite football – as well as mega sport including [Formula 1 Racing](#) and [professional golf](#) – helps [diversify their economies](#) for a post-carbon future. Although these nations often face criticism for the [treatment of women](#) and [LGBTQ+ communities](#), Manchester City and PSG are among the best resourced women's team in football. One month before the start of this year's Women's World Cup, [Newcastle United announced](#) a significant investment in their women's program, transforming into a fully professional outfit.

Despite the vast resources and clear interest in football, however, Arab Peninsula nations trail behind in the development of domestic women's football. Saudi Arabi is currently ranked 170 out of 188 nations in [FIFA women's football](#), with the UAE 113th. [Qatar, recent host of the FIFA Men's World Cup](#) in 2022, is currently not ranked in women's football – with the squad not active enough to generate points. There are signs, however, of [investment in women's football infrastructures](#). And in addition to the support of club football, more attention to the women's game commercially (politically?) is apparent. In January 2023, weeks after the conclusion of the Men's World Cup, a deal for [Visit Saudi](#) – the state's tourism arm – to sponsor the Women's event neared agreement. A backlash from human rights groups, players, and Australian and New Zealand organizers eventually led to [FIFA President Infantino backing away](#) from the deal – while still confirming a desire to [bring Saudi money](#) into the women's game.

At the same time, FIFA continues to promote its global social role, formally [aligning with the United Nations](#) during the World Cup to promote [gender equality](#) as outlined in [Sustainable Development Goal #5](#). One controversy related to SDG5 (Gender

Equality) heading in to the 2023 Women's World Cup has been compensation for women footballers. FIFA announced prior to the start of the tournament that [prize money would be tripled](#) from the 2019 fund - up to 152 USD. National FAs will receive money based on advancement in the tournament - with the champion allocated 4.3 million USD. However, FIFA also announced that - despite earlier promises - individual players were not guaranteed to receive the expected funds. [National FAs, without any accountability to FIFA](#), will be able to distribute the money as they see fit. Considering the number of current controversies related to [pay equity](#) and infrastructure support limitations playing out amongst teams and FA's [competing at the World Cup](#) (e.g. [Canada](#), [England](#), [Jamaica](#), [Nigeria](#), [Spain](#), and [South Africa](#) - to name a few) and beyond, trust that earned prize money would reach the players is tenuous. The United States Women's National Team's long and public fight for financial equity has now become a global issue that [extends beyond football](#).

Relatedly, a [rash of ACL \(knee\) injuries](#) to prominent players expected to play major roles for their national teams at the Women's World Cup has similarly generated broader discussions. Top players including England captain Leah Williamson, along with teammate Beth Mead, Netherlands' Vivianne Miedema, Canadian Janine Beckie, and Marie-Antoinette Katoto of France are just a few [sidelined by ACL injuries](#). Although reasons for women suffering ACL injuries in higher proportion to men are complex, more research and [gender-focused sport science is required](#).

But despite the challenges faced by Australian and New Zealand organizers, the 2023 Women's World Cup promises to be a spectacular sporting mega event. Women's football has grown exponentially in the past decades both on and off the pitch - at least in some areas of the world. While female footballers are household names in many countries in 2023, other nations continue to invest little into their women's programs. Subsequently, a growing divide between the haves and have nots widens globally - although a [larger pool of competitive nations](#) have qualified for this year's World Cup. And while the women's game expands its commercial, and social, reach, fights for fair compensation, infrastructure, scientific and medical support, and player safety reveal the work still required.

To help document this important global mega sporting event from a "beyond sport" perspective, the World Cup and Global Politics project hopes to leverage the 2023 tournament to raise awareness of gender issues within and through football.