



**International
Handball
Federation**

Selection of Technical Officials and Referees (Indoor Handball)



Introduction

The International Handball Federation (IHF) aims to appoint the most competent and well-prepared referees and technical delegates to its competitions. The nomination process combines performance evaluation, structured education, continuous monitoring and geographical and gender representation to ensure the highest officiating standards while promoting the sustainable development of handball worldwide.

The responsibility for the development and assessment of referees and technical delegates as well as their nomination to IHF events lies with the IHF Playing Rules and Referees Commission (PRC), which carries out these activities in accordance with the applicable IHF Regulations governing international referees, referee education and official competitions.

Through transparent regulations, structured education programmes, continuous monitoring and targeted development initiatives, the IHF strives to ensure that every nomination reflects sporting excellence, integrity and professionalism.

The nomination process combines objective performance evaluation with progressive referee development, ensuring that international officiating continues to improve across all continents.

Particular emphasis is placed on creating sustainable pathways for talented young referees and increasing the representation of women among referees and technical delegates. By combining education, mentoring, performance management and equal opportunities, the IHF seeks to build a diverse, highly qualified and future-oriented community of international officials capable of meeting the demands of the highest level of handball competitions.

1. Preconditions to Become an IHF Referee or Technical Delegate

Referees

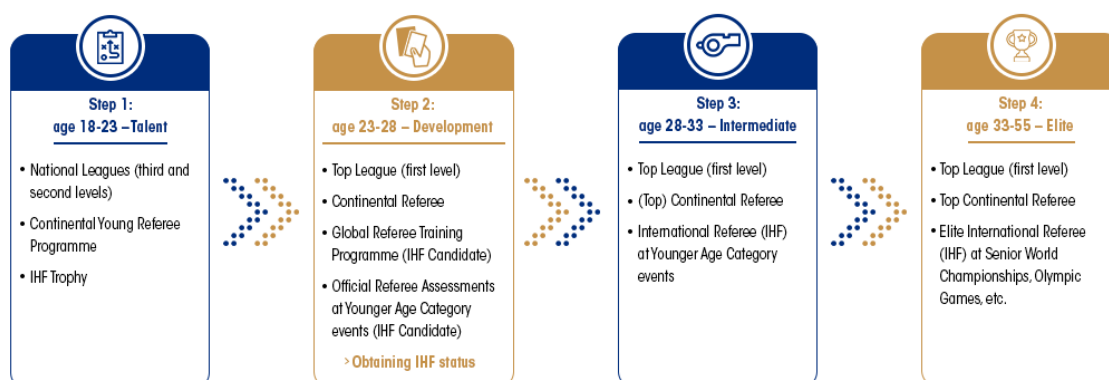
- A referee couple must hold continental referee status.
- In general, a minimum of two years' experience at the continental level is required.
- The maximum age for obtaining IHF referee status is 40 years, with candidates expected to have gained several years of refereeing experience at a high level (please refer to the graphic below for further details).
- Candidates must successfully complete the Global Referee Training Programme (GRTP), or an Official Referee Assessment (ORA) in accordance with the relevant IHF Regulations.

Referee Development Pathway



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From Talent to Elite International Referee



Note: The ages indicated are average values and may vary on an individual basis. Exceptional referee talents may obtain IHF status at a younger age.

Technical Delegates

- Technical delegates should hold continental status and actively officiate in their top national league.
- A fast-track promotion may be applied for former elite IHF referees or former international players whose experience and competencies justify accelerated process.

2. Recruitment and Scouting

The IHF has established a worldwide scouting network consisting of referee experts who continuously observe referee couples holding continental status during domestic and continental competitions.

Promising referee couples are entered into a long-term talent database administered by the PRC. Their performances are continuously monitored and evaluated over several seasons. Based on their development, referee couples may be invited to participate in the **Global Referee Training Programme (GRTP)** or an **Official Referee Assessment (ORA)**, which represent the standard pathways towards obtaining IHF referee status under the applicable IHF Regulations.

The recruitment philosophy is based on identifying long-term potential rather than isolated performances. Continuous observation enables the PRC to support referees throughout their development and to prepare them for future appointments at IHF competitions.

3. Development Projects

IHF Trophy

The IHF Trophy provides referees with continental or national status the opportunity to officiate international matches between emerging national teams under the supervision of experienced IHF PRC lecturers.

Besides contributing to referee education, the competition serves as an important platform for talent identification, particularly for referees from developing handball nations and non-European National Federations.

Advanced Referee Training Programme (ARTP)

The Advanced Referee Training Programme offers promising non-European IHF referees and IHF candidates the opportunity to spend at least fourteen days in European countries to officiate at least six matches in the domestic leagues of those countries.

Participants officiate matches in professional leagues under the supervision of experienced IHF PRC lecturers and elite referees.

The objective is to accelerate the development of talented referees by exposing them to the highest level of competition and coaching.

The programme has proven highly successful. Several participants have subsequently been nominated to the final stages of senior World Championships, demonstrating its effectiveness as an important component of referee development.

Referee Coaching Programme

The Referee Coaching Programme focuses on the factors that distinguish elite referees beyond technical knowledge. Through practical coaching, video review and individualised feedback, referees develop the confidence, authority and other soft skills required to manage matches consistently at the highest international level.

Together, the IHF Trophies, the ARTP and the Referee Coaching Programme form a structured long-term development framework that complements technical education and supports referees throughout their international careers.

Promotion of Female Referees and Technical Delegates

The increased participation of women in officiating handball matches has become one of the strategic priorities of the IHF.

The IHF has established an Expert Group on Female Refereeing, which focuses on topics including leadership development, career progression, maternity-related challenges and the return to elite officiating following childbirth.

These and other initiatives have already resulted in a significant increase in female appointments at major IHF competitions, including the bronze-medal match at the 2023 IHF Men's World Championship. The continued objective is to establish a sustainable pathway towards increased female representation at future World Championships and Olympic Games while maintaining the principle that all appointments remain merit-based and performance-driven.

The three-referee system

The IHF introduced the three-referee system as a pilot project to keep pace with the faster gameplay and increased complexity of actions on the court. Instead of the traditional two referees ("four eyes"), this approach involves three referees ("six eyes"). The system was first tested at the 2022 IHF Men's Super Globe and has since been expanded into youth and emerging nations championships to improve accuracy and minimise the number of incorrect decisions.

The integration of a third referee allows for better court coverage, specifically targeting common blind spots. Besides this, nominating single referees into trios provides for greater flexibility and opportunities regarding the inclusion of female referees or continental representation. In all Emerging Nations and U16/U17 World Championships, in which the three-referee system has been used, the match officials of the final matches included at least one female referee and saw increased continental diversity.

4. Preconditions for Nomination to an IHF Event

To be nominated to any IHF competition, referees must meet a number of objective performance requirements.

These requirements include:

- fulfilment of the IHF fitness requirements by achieving the required performance standards in the relevant fitness tests;
- fulfilment of the IHF rules knowledge requirements by achieving the required score in the relevant written rules tests;
- regular submission of physical training data;
- positive performance evaluations;
- demonstrated consistency over a longer period of time.

The referees' fitness is continuously monitored through an external service provider. For senior World Championships and the Olympic Games, referees are required to complete additional physical testing prior to the competition.

Knowledge of the Rules of the Game is verified before each major event, while experience, teamwork, communication, game management and current refereeing form are also decisive criteria.

5. Nomination Process for World Championships and Olympic Games

Administrative Process

The list of nominated referees and technical delegates is proposed by the IHF Playing Rules and Referees Commission and approved by the IHF Executive Committee.

Reserve officials are also nominated to ensure operational continuity in case replacements should become necessary.

Following approval, the referees, technical delegates and their respective National Federations and Continental Confederations receive official notifications, after which the nominations are published by the IHF.

Selection Philosophy

The nomination process balances sporting excellence with the long-term development of international officiating.

The primary criterion remains the quality and consistency of performance.

Additional considerations include:

- neutrality
- experience
- age (in case of younger age category events)
- geographical representation
- gender representation

The IHF aims to ensure that all continents are appropriately represented among match officials while maintaining the highest possible officiating standards.

Neutrality remains an essential principle throughout all competitions. Whenever possible, referee couples from the same continent as one of the participating teams or sharing the same language as one of the participating teams are not appointed to those matches.

Road to the Olympic Games

Olympic nominations are based on a continuous four-year evaluation process rather than a single tournament. Immediately following each Olympic Games, the PRC begins identifying referee couples with Olympic potential.

The long list of potential referees is established after the last senior World or Continental Championships before the upcoming Olympic Games. This long list forms the basis for nominations to the Olympic Qualification Tournaments, which serve as the final evaluation stage before the selection of referees for the Olympic Games.

This systematic approach ensures that only the highest-performing referee couples are selected for the Olympic Games.

The IHF also continues to promote increased female representation throughout the Olympic cycle by providing additional development opportunities and appointments at youth and senior events, thereby creating a sustainable pool of candidates for future Olympic Games.

In the current Olympic cycle (2024-2028), the IHF intends to further promote and increase female referee and technical delegate representation in its different events, starting from the first ever Women's U16 World Championship where 52% of the nominated match officials will be female. The IHF plans to continue to adapt this trend to the other events in the upcoming two years which can serve as a pathway for these women to establish themselves as clear candidates for the LA2028 Olympic Games.

6. Monitoring and Performance Feedback

Every nomination at an IHF event contributes to the long-term performance profile maintained by the PRC.

Throughout each competition, referee observers and IHF officials evaluate both referees and technical delegates using qualitative and quantitative assessment criteria.

Following each event, every referee couple receives detailed written feedback, highlighting strengths, areas for improvement and priorities for future development.

These evaluations form an integral part of the nomination process for future IHF competitions and ensure that development remains continuous throughout an official's international career.