

Challenges after being inscribed as the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: Turkish Traditional Archery

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Introduction

In the early 20th century, with the end of the institutional activities of Istanbul Okmeydanı Archers' Lodge, traditional Turkish sports archery fell into a long sleep. After this date, the traditional archery heritage lived among individual bearers for a long period of time and could not find the widespread and centralized support it was looking for. In 1937, a revival attempt that lasted only two years failed due to lack of resources and the difficulties brought about by the conjuncture of the period. However, a period of successful revitalization had begun by the 2000s.

The second revival of Traditional Turkish Archery in 2004 began with the efforts of traditional archery enthusiasts who came together through their individual endeavors. Eager and persistent in revitalizing the heritage, this group's efforts led to a series of successive achievements. Subsequently, the *Okçular Vakfı* (The Archers Foundation), which began its activities in 2013 at the Istanbul Okmeydanı Archers' Lodge - restored with the support of the central government - quickly became the leading institution for Traditional Archery in the country. [1] Driven by this progress, Traditional Archers, numbering in the thousands by 2017, united under various associations and unions to advocate for the inclusion of Traditional Turkish Archery in the UNESCO ICH Representative List.

Another desire of Traditional Archers is to have a national sports federation like other sports branches in the country. In this way, it might be possible to spread the traditional archery heritage throughout the country and transfer it to future generations in the right way, and it will also become sustainable. On the other hand, it will also be possible to solve the identity problem arising from the fact that it has been seen as a cultural and folklore activity since the beginning of the 20th century and therefore has not found a place among the federated sports branches. This centuries-old expectation of Traditional Archers was fulfilled with the establishment of the Turkish Traditional Archery Federation (TTAF) in 2019 [2]. At the 14th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee hosted by Colombia in December of the same year, Türkiye's application was discussed, and it was decided to register "Traditional Turkish Archery" in the UNESCO ICH Representative List [3]. This decision was of course recorded as one of the milestones of Traditional Turkish Archery heritage.

Turkish Traditional Archery Federation is one of the institutions that will follow up on the responsibilities and duties brought about by being on the UNESCO ICH list. In accordance with the principles of UNESCO, the Federation started to work to spread Turkish Archery throughout the country without discrimination of any race, color, gender, language, religion,

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political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, etc. In this context, committees consisting of experts have been established, regulations for training, competitions, clothing, etc. have been formed and published. The most important of these is to revive the Traditional Turkish Archery sport, which had no women representatives in history, by establishing regulations and supporting initiatives that ensure equal participation for women today. Subsequently, coach training courses, referee courses and seminars, and competitions were organized across the country. The total number of athletes, coaches and referees in the country as of August 2024 and their gender distribution are given in the table below:

Table 1: Turkish Traditional Archery Federation sportsperson numbers (August 2024)

	Women	Men	Total
Licensed Archer	9,871 (45 %)	12,112 (55 %)	21,983
<i>Active (Renewed Lic.)</i>	<i>4,289 (47 %)</i>	<i>4,811 (53 %)</i>	<i>9,100</i>
Trainer (Level I & Level II)	449 (36 %)	799 (64 %)	1,248
Referee / Umpire	147 (36 %)	262 (64 %)	409

Traditional Turkish Archery is basically practiced in two areas: “Target Archery” and “Long Distance Shooting” [4]. The rules and principles governing these competitions are organized to ensure age and gender equality. TTAF carries out the regulation of Traditional Turkish Archery in the country by using the powers granted to it by law.

Basically, there are several main reasons why different conditions are set for men and women in sports and why age categories have emerged: Physiological differences between men and women or between age groups, such as muscle mass, body structure, and endurance; health and safety risks caused by competition conditions that are not suitable for the physiological characteristics of the athlete's age and gender; and performance differences that may arise due to biological factors are some of them. [5] The main goal here is to reveal the ability and performance required by the sport without limiting the potential of the athletes according to their age and gender.

I. Regulations for Target Shooting

In target shooting competitions, the categories are divided into four: children, junior, youth and adult [6].

Table 2: Traditional Turkish Archery, outdoor target shooting categories.

	CHILDREN			JUNIOR	YOUTH	ADULT	
Age	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18 and above	
Distance (m)	25	30	35	40	50	60 (Female)	70 (Male)
Qualification shot	7A x 7rnd			9A x 7rnd			
Elimination shot	-		7A	9A			
Point	Hit or miss						
Target size (cm)	110H x 77W x 20D						

* A: number of arrows shot, rnd: round, series of shot.

As can be seen from the table, parameters such as shooting distance, target size, scoring, etc. are the same for men and women in the U18 categories and gender distinction only emerges in the prize distribution.

In the 18 and above category, men shoot at a distance of 70 m while women shoot at a distance of 60 m in the outdoor. It is a fact that strong bows will be needed to shoot the arrow at the ideal speed and trajectory to hit targets at this distance in outdoor competitions. Due to the physiological and biological differences depending on gender, shortening the distance for adult women by 10 meters seems to be in line with the principle of equality. When the rules were first enacted, few number of female athletes who could shoot an arrow accurately at a distance of 70 m made such a regulation necessary.

In indoor target archery competitions, the distance is 18 meters for all age and gender groups.

II. Regulations for Long Distance Shooting:

In the history of Traditional Turkish Archery, the competition branch that has set records has been flight shooting. It is noticeable that today's competition regulations in this field are handled very sensitively. This is because long-distance shooting requires special consideration of gender and age groups, as it demands both muscle strength and advanced motor skills in the drawing and releasing stages.

The aim of the regulations is to ensure equality in the performances of adult male and female archers and age groups, while safeguarding the traditional characteristics of the sport. In this direction, it is noteworthy that the first classification in flight-shooting is based on the weight of the bow and therefore the muscle strength to draw them.

Unlimited draw-weight category

It is a category where archers can compete with a bow of any strong draw-weight. For this reason, in order to prevent any sports injuries and health problems, young and elderly archers were excluded from the category, and only adult women and men were allowed to compete.

A second classification was made according to the material from which the bows were made and divided into two as "Composite Bows" made of organic components and "Synthetic Bows". In the "Unlimited Organic Composite Bows" category, no distinction was made between male and female athletes. The fact that the number of athletes competing in this category is quite low is thought to be the main factor in not making such a distinction. However, requests and suggestions from female archers suggest that a separate classification should be made for women in this category, where it is impossible for them to compete with male athletes.

The Unlimited Synthetic Bow Category is separated for male and female archers. This ensured equal access to the prize & recognition. Although it is sometimes observed that female archers shoot their arrows at much better distances than male, men have longer shot distances due to their physiological structure in this category, where muscle power is naturally important. As of

August 2024, the distance record in this category for men is 571.84 m, while the record for women is 470.62 m.

Limited draw-weight category

This category is a classification in which the draw-weight of the bows used during shooting is limited to a specified value. The force measurements of the bows are taken after the full draw of the arrow to be shot by each competitor, that is, after the arrow-point is draw to the back of the grip. In the measurement made in this way, the bow force should not exceed 35 lb for aged 13 and under, and the bow force should not exceed 50 lb for aged 14 and above. Competitions with 50 lb limited bows are further divided into three age groups:

- Limited 35 lb draw-weight
 - 13 age and above
- Limited 50 lb draw-weight
 - Between 14 and 17 age
 - 18 age and above adults
 - 50 age and above veterans

The physiological and biological differences that male and female athletes may encounter during shooting are balanced by limiting the bows' draw-weight. This is because these bow weight values are around, and sometimes even below, the bow used by archers in target shooting. Hence the distance that the arrow will reach is determined by the equipment and especially the performance of archery, which includes technical and motor skills. For these reasons, all of the limited bow-weight categories are mixed in which male and female athletes can compete together and there is no gender discrimination.

This mixed category structure in traditional archery is especially preferred and emphasized by female athletes because it is a branch where both genders can compete under equal conditions and women can win medals ahead of men.

Equality Debate

Although the distinctions in competition regulations aim to establish a physical balance between male and female athletes, they have also brought about debates on equality. Equality does not always mean applying the same conditions; sometimes it is necessary to apply different conditions to ensure a fair competition environment. However, while the physical differences of female athletes are taken into account, it is also essential to ensure that these do not limit their potential.

Despite increasing opportunities for women to participate in sports, it is also common and well-known fact that they remain underrepresented in leadership positions at all levels [7] [8]. This issue is particularly important to discuss when revitalizing Traditional Turkish Archery.

Materials and Methods

Survey on Gender Equity in Opportunities

A Gender Equity in Opportunities survey was studied with a group of Traditional Turkish Archery athletes, coaches, referees and enthusiasts. In the online survey, the participants were asked to select the most appropriate choice. Open-ended responses were also collected on certain aspects. In the profiling section, demographic information such as age, gender, city and their professional relationship with traditional archery were collected for analysis. No identifying information was kept, and feedback was processed anonymously.

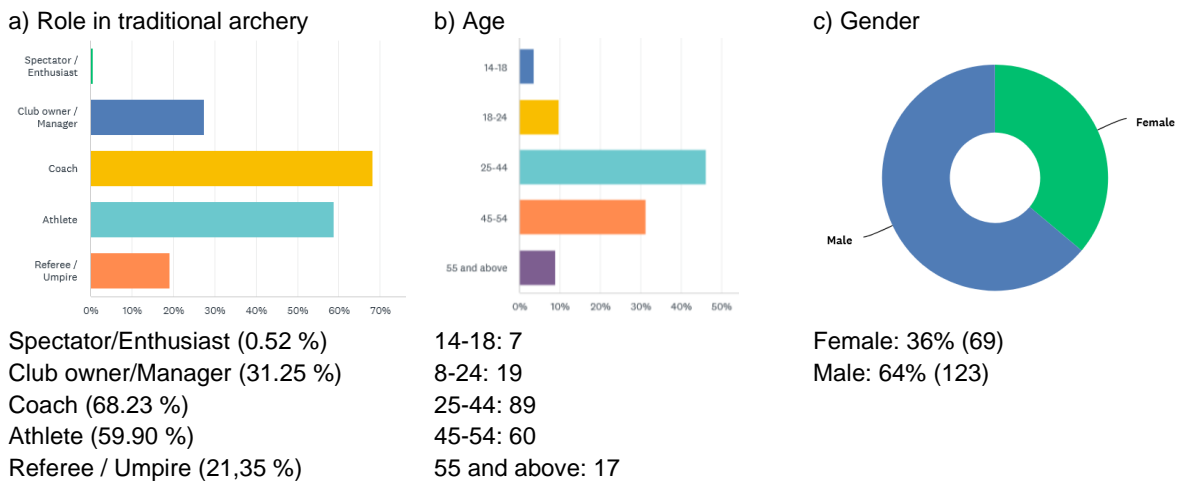


Figure 1: Respondents' roles in archery (a), age (b) and gender (c) distribution.

A total of 192 people participated (F: 69, M: 123) in the survey, with a predominance of age between 25-54 years (77.6 %), 64% male and 36% female. In the "role in traditional archery" section, where more than one selection could be checked, the respondents were predominantly coaches and athletes (~60%), indicating that the target group was reached. Geographically, the participants are distributed in 48 provinces across the country.

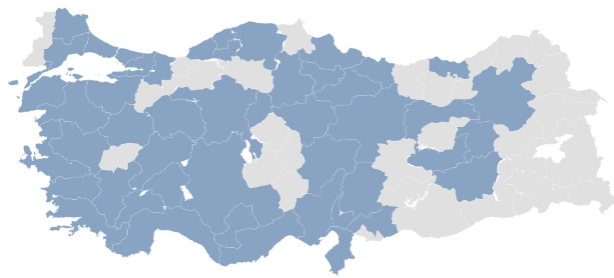
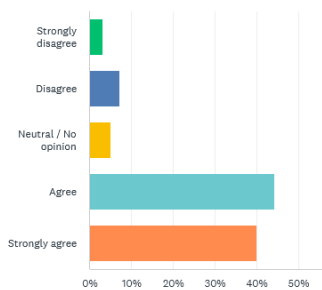


Figure 2: Geographical coverage of respondents. Blue regions: Cities of the respondents.

Results

The survey aimed to understand the extent to which the regulations in Traditional Turkish Archery provide gender equity in opportunities, and to determine how the establishment of TTAF and the listing in UNESCO ICH affect gender equality. For this purpose, the perceptions and experiences of key actors were gathered.

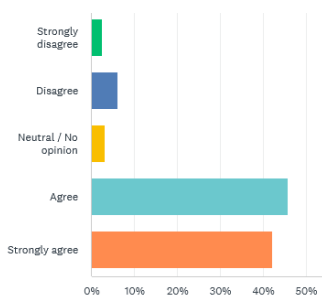
Q1: “Women are provided with sufficient opportunities and facilities to practice Traditional Turkish Archery”



	RESPONSES		
	TOTAL	FEMALE	MALE
Absolutely disagree	3% (6)	4% (3)	2% (3)
Disagree	7% (14)	10% (7)	6% (7)
Neutral / Irrelevant	5% (10)	7% (5)	4% (5)
Agree	44% (85)	54% (37)	39% (48)
Absolutely agree	40% (77)	25% (17)	49% (60)

A significant 84% of respondents agree with this view. Women are 9% less likely to agree compared to men (79%-88%). The role in archery did not result in a significant difference in responses. The rate of those who expressed a negative opinion is around 10%.

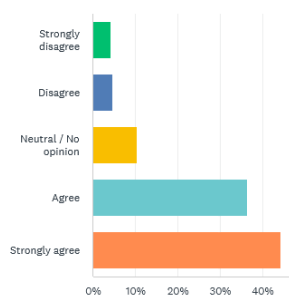
Q2: “Traditional Turkish Archery competition regulations are such that women can compete on equal terms”



	RESPONSES		
	TOTAL	FEMALE	MALE
Strongly disagree	3% (5)	4% (3)	2% (2)
Disagree	6% (12)	6% (4)	7% (8)
Neutral / No-opinion	3% (6)	3% (2)	3% (4)
Agree	46% (88)	58% (40)	39% (48)
Strongly agree	42% (81)	29% (20)	50% (61)

The average level of agreement with this view is also significantly high at 88% (F: 87%; M: 89%). The fact that there is no significant gender difference in responses suggests that this view is overwhelmingly supported by both male and female respondents.

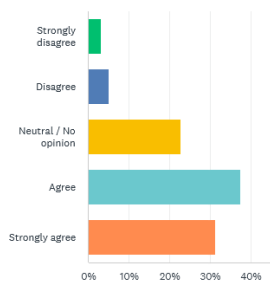
Q3: “Turkish Traditional Archery Federation (TTAF) makes a POSITIVE contribution to women's access and equal participation in traditional archery”



	RESPONSES		
	TOTAL	FEMALE	MALE
Strongly disagree	4% (8)	4% (3)	4% (5)
Disagree	5% (9)	6% (4)	4% (5)
Neutral / No-opinion	10% (20)	9% (6)	11% (14)
Agree	36% (70)	49% (34)	29% (36)
Strongly agree	44% (85)	32% (22)	51% (63)

Consistent with the first two responses, 80% (F: 81%; M: 80%) of respondents agreed that the influence of the TTAF, responsible for regulations, is positive. Similarly, female participants showed a 9% lower level of agreement with this argument.

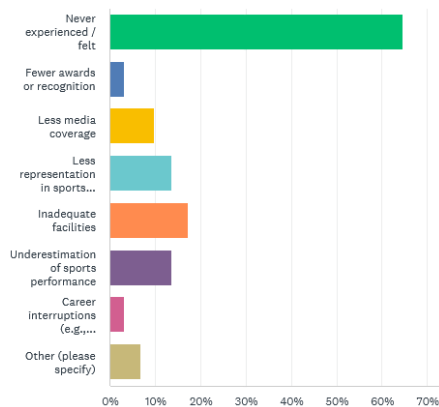
Q4: “The inclusion of Traditional Turkish Archery on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity has contributed **POSITIVELY to women's access and equal participation in traditional archery”**



	RESPONSES		
	TOTAL	FEMALE	MALE
Strongly disagree	3% (6)	3% (2)	3% (4)
Disagree	5% (10)	3% (2)	7% (8)
Neutral / No-opinion	23% (44)	25% (17)	22% (27)
Agree	38% (72)	42% (29)	35% (43)
Strongly agree	31% (60)	28% (19)	33% (41)

The responses to this argument, which aims to measure the perception of the impact of the UNESCO ICH listing, are slightly different from the previous ones. While the average rate of agreement was around 69% (F: 70%; M: 68%), an interesting point is that about ¼ of the respondents had no opinion on this issue.

Q5: Have you ever experienced / felt **NEGATIVE discrimination in Traditional Turkish Archery because of your gender? If yes, in which areas? (You can mark more than one)**



	RESPONSES		
	TOTAL	FEMALE	MALE
Never experienced / felt	65% (124)	54% (37)	71% (87)
Fewer awards or recognition	3% (6)	3% (2)	3% (4)
Less media coverage	10% (19)	7% (5)	11% (14)
Underrepresentation in sports management	14% (26)	25% (17)	7% (9)
Underestimation of sports performance	14% (26)	20% (14)	10% (12)
Career interruptions (e.g., pregnancy, military service)	3% (6)	6% (4)	2% (2)
Other (please specify)	7% (13)	12% (8)	4% (5)

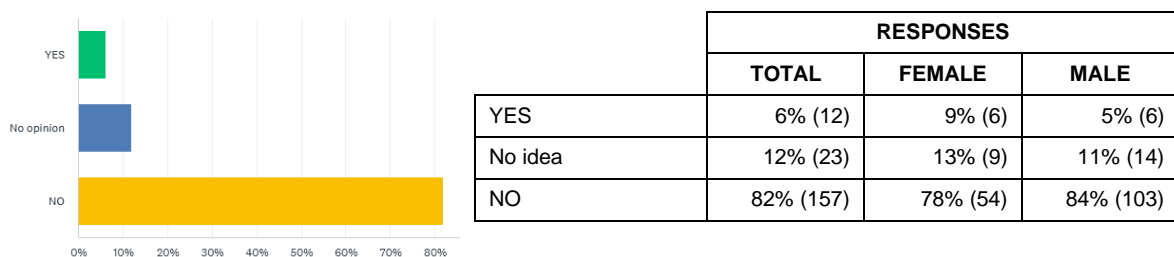
A significant majority of the participants reported that they had never been subjected to/felt negative discrimination because of their gender (65%).

The issue where women reported experiencing discrimination the most was underrepresentation in sports management (25%). This was followed by the complaint that their sports performance is underestimated (20%).

The open-ended issues specified by the women respondents in the "Other" section are; the local sports administration's preference to work with mostly male coaches, the clubs' composition of the competition teams with a predominance of male athletes, the claim that there is a perception that male coaches are more knowledgeable, and the lack of a special working area for women in sports facilities.

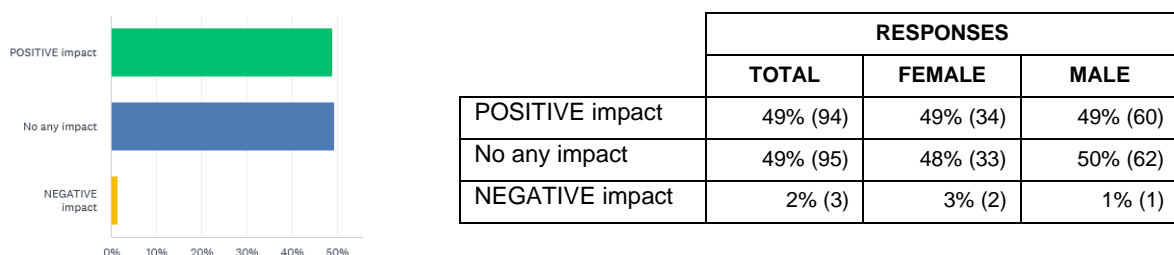
The only issue where men reported being discriminated against on the basis of gender more than women was receiving less media coverage.

Q6: Have you ever experienced or felt *POSITIVE* discrimination in traditional archery because of your gender? (extra financial incentives, training opportunities, privileged travel and accommodation, special media attention, sponsorship opportunities, etc.)



Only 5% of men and 9% of women reported experiencing positive discrimination.

Q7: To what extent the inclusion of Traditional Turkish Archery in the UNESCO Representative List of the ICH of Humanity has affected TTAF's activities and decisions based on gender equality in sport.



Half of the respondents think that UNESCO ICH Listing has no impact on TTAF's activities related to gender equality. The rate is the same for both male and female respondents. Possible reasons for this feedback also require consideration in the discussion.

Discussion and conclusions

In the early 20th century, with the end of the activities of Istanbul Okmeydanı, the center of Traditional Turkish Archery, this heritage lost its institutional framework and was interrupted. After a failed revival attempt in 1937, the second revitalization attempt took place in the 2000s. This movement, which started with individual efforts in 2004, developed in a systematic and planned manner with the Archers Lodge, which was reactivated in 2013. As a result of these

developments, Traditional Turkish Archery, as a living heritage, found its place under the roof of UNESCO in December 2019.

Established in February of the 2019, the Turkish Traditional Archery Federation became the umbrella organization of Traditional Archers in the country and started to organize its activities at the highest level to revive and spread this heritage. The first efforts in this field were the gathering of professional working groups and commissions to establish regulations.

One of the key activities of the Federation has been to address the regulations in such a way that women are equally represented with men in Traditional Turkish Archery, in which women were not included in the historical infrastructure. As a result, 5 years later, 47% of active licensed athletes are women and 53% are men. However, women are represented at a lower percentage of 36% in terms of choosing referee and coach positions. An important point here is to inquiry the reasons that prevent women from participating in referee and coach courses at the same rate, despite their high interest in this.

In the survey, women seem to agree that they are provided with sufficient opportunities and facilities to practice this sport (79%) and that the competition regulations are such that women can compete on equal terms (87%). 81% of the respondents also approve of the practices of the Federation in this regard. On the other hand, women emphasize underrepresentation in sports management (25%) and underestimation of sports performance (20%) as areas where they experience negative discrimination based on gender, albeit at low rates. Therefore, addressing and resolving the gender discrimination that may emerge at these points should be among the priorities of decision-makers. At this point, the Federation, clubs and provincial sports representatives of the Ministry have a duty.

Another important point that draws attention in the survey is the perception of the participants about the impact of UNESCO ICH on Traditional Turkish Archery. Approximately one in three respondents disagreed that the inclusion of Traditional Turkish Archery on the UNESCO Representative List of the ICH contributed positively to women's access and equal participation in the sport. Additionally, 50% of respondents stated that it had no impact on TTAF's activities related to gender equality. This issue requires further analysis.

As it is known, the 14th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee, hosted by Colombia, recognized “Traditional Turkish Archery” as a living heritage on 12 December 2019. Approximately three months after this date, Türkiye also entered an extended lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted the entire world. This situation hindered stakeholders, who would ordinarily collaborate and coordinate on Traditional Turkish Archery, from convening. Although TTAF continued its activities under challenging circumstances, synergy between institutions related to Traditional Turkish Archery could not be established for an extended period. As a result, the desired progress in developing projects and programs, conducting joint safeguarding and promotion activities, and planning awareness and capacity-building initiatives in collaboration with UNESCO ICH was not achieved.

Nonetheless, the institutions involved have acknowledged this issue and have redirected their focus accordingly. The Turkish Traditional Archery Federation, the Archers Foundation, and relevant ministries and departments will develop and implement the 'Conservation Action Plan' for Traditional Turkish Archery within 2025.

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