

**ETHICAL ISSUES AFFECTING UNDERAGE PLAYERS IN THE E-SPORTS
SYSTEM BETWEEN PROBLEMS OF INTEGRITY AND GENDER-BASED
DISCRIMINATION: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FROM AN INTERNATIONAL LAW
PERSPECTIVE***

Abstract: The vast majority of e-sports players, whether professional or amateur, are underage teenagers. Given the very young age of the players, the ethical issues affecting the e-sports system pose a series of additional risks, as e-sports players could be more vulnerable and susceptible to corruption attempts and discriminatory treatment. This paper will first seek to identify the main issues affecting underage players and, then, to suggest possible solutions under International Law.

In particular, the first part will discuss the problems of integrity that undermine the legitimacy and the growth of the e-sports sector, such as illegal betting, match-fixing and doping. After a brief explanation of the phenomena, the work will analyse the sanctions provided in the e-sports system in order to suggest some guidelines for uniform rules.

The second part of the paper, in turn, will focus on gender-related challenges faced by young female players, notably equal participation and professional opportunities, the toxic patriarchal culture of objectification and hyper sexualization both of the players themselves and of female characters, as well as online violence and harassment. Suggested approaches will comprise the analysis of legal protections to female minors in the realm of International Law, as well as progressive initiatives by international actors such as the “Game Changers Coalition” by UNICEF.

Keywords: *e-Sports Integrity, International Federations, gender, discrimination, International Law*

1. Introduction

One of the first definitions of e-sports considers them as “an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies” (Wagner, 2006). Although it is a good starting point, in reality e-sports are organised video game competitions or, more specifically, the activity of playing video games competitively, whether as a professional or as an amateur. For instance, according to the European Parliament Resolution of 2022, e-sports are “competitions where individuals or teams play video games — typically in front of spectators — either in-person or online, for entertainment, prizes or money” (European Parliament, 2022).

The main problem with the first definition, in fact, is the difficulty of equating e-sports to traditional sports, as the European Sports Charter, for example, considers as such “all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, are aimed at maintaining or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels” (Council of Europe, 2021). Based on this definition, critics argue that e-sports cannot be

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considered sports given that they do not involve any significant physical activity and that e-sports players merely sit and move their fingers on a keyboard or console.

In truth, what differentiates e-sports from traditional sports is not so much the element of the physical activity, but rather certain aspects peculiar to this category that are foreign to traditional sports, such as the type of audience (consisting mainly of video game players themselves), the prevailing economic and commercial dimension of e-sports, and, above all, the presence of incomparable stakeholders, namely the video game publishers who produce the games, hold the exploitation rights (Bastianon, 2020, pp. 196–198), and, as trademark owners, have the power to change the rules of their games at any times, including those relating to tournaments (Schöber & Stadtmann, 2018, p. 6).

Against this backdrop, this paper will focus on one of the peculiarities of the e-sports sector, which is the fact that e-sports players, generally, whether professional or amateur, are underage. According to research, in fact, around 20% of videogame players are under the age of 18 (Declerck, 2025, p. 22), which is the legal age of majority in most States around the world, as well as according to Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, UN General Assembly, 1989).

The very young age of the players may pose a series of additional risks in relation to the ethical issues affecting the e-sports system, as e-sports players could be more vulnerable and susceptible to corruption attempts and discriminatory treatment.

Thus, in the second paragraph we will discuss the problems of integrity that undermine the legitimacy and the growth of the e-sports sector, such as gambling, match-fixing and doping. Firstly, by presenting a brief explanation of each phenomenon and, secondly, by suggesting some guidelines for uniform rules of sanctioning illicit behaviours.

In the third and fourth paragraphs of the paper, in turn, we will focus on three gender-related challenges faced by young female players, whose vulnerability when interacting with the e-sports environment also increases due to the intersecting factors of gender and age. The difficulties in equal participation, representation and security against violent treatment and harassment will be discussed, followed by possible interventions proposed by International Law and put in practice by organizations such as UNICEF.

2. Issues of Integrity in the e-Sports System: from Doping to Gambling and Match-fixing

One of the most common violations of integrity is doping, which can generally be defined “as the use of artificial substances or methods to improve human physical capabilities and, consequently, sport performance” (Guadagno, 2025, p. 141).

In the e-sports world, players tend to favour cognitive enhancements substances as they have to sustain long hours of concentration as well as proper eye and hand coordination in order to be more effective in the game for as many hours as possible (Guadagno, 2025, p. 142). Thus, apart from caffeine supplements and energy drinks, e-sports players may use beta-blockers or psychostimulant substances to bolster their competitive performance by strengthening their cognitive functions, reducing fatigue, and improving their reacting times (Guadagno, 2025, p. 142).

In addition to that, as e-sports activities are necessarily carried out using technological instruments and tools, there may also be cases of the so-called “e-doping”, which consists of illicit improvement, traditionally known as *cheats*, of both gaming hardware and software in order to enhance the players’ performances in the game³.

Another issue of integrity is gambling, which generally consists of betting a sum of money on the outcome of a game of chance or a future event that does not depend on the person placing the bet, with the probability of winning a prize if that outcome occurs.

The peculiarity of the e-sports sector is the fact that there are two types of gambling: real money betting and the so-called “skin” betting. On the one hand, the former is carried out in exactly the same way as traditional sports betting, as several betting sites have started to create special e-sports betting slips through which fans of e-sports can bet on the results of a team or even individual players during a

³ For some examples see Guadagno (2025), pp. 143-144.

competition. In particular, in 2020, with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent suspension of all major traditional sports leagues, the betting industry turned almost entirely to virtual leagues, the only sporting events that could take place at that time, even if the phenomenon of e-sports betting existed long before and has always posed a problem to the sector, as most of the money in the e-sports market derives from betting (Schöber & Stadtmann, 2018, p. 5).

On the other hand, skin betting represents the Wild West of online gaming because it operates in a legal grey area, given that remuneration is not economic in the traditional sense of the term (Ifra Law, 2019, pp. 46–47). Skins are virtual tokens, such as weapons, potions, swords or other tools, that can be used to customise the games' characters, allowing players of e-sports such as "Fortnite" or "Counter-Strike" to advance more quickly and efficiently. They are usually collected during the game itself, but can also be purchased on secondary markets with an average value of around \$10, although particularly rare ones can be worth several hundred thousand dollars. Players can use their skins as currency to bet on a team or an individual player on an e-sports betting site, or they can use them to participate in games of chance such as virtual dice rolls, roulette, and other casino-style games. If they use their skins to play these types of games, they can obtain other skins in return, which they can then convert into currency on secondary markets. This practice remains difficult to control, as players only win and lose skins and do not obtain real money until they trade them on secondary markets (Ifra Law, 2019, p. 47).

In light of that, there is a need to uniformly regulate the phenomenon, especially in order to avoid the practice of illegal betting by e-sports players themselves, who may bet on their own defeat and then intentionally lose the competition, thus distorting the results of the game in order to collect the corresponding prize from the bets.

This last hypothesis is, in fact, the other most obvious problem of integrity in e-sports: match-fixing. It poses the most serious risk to the legitimacy and growth of the industry (Abarbanel & Johnson, 2019) and consists in deliberately losing a match to profit from betting fraud, usually under the influence of criminal organisations that promise players much higher sums of money than those they could win in official competitions⁴.

The low remuneration and the young age of the players are, in fact, the main factors behind the phenomenon of match-fixing in e-sports.

Firstly, the low compensation provided by e-sports competitions determines a major risk factor, given that only the top players and tournament winners generate enough income, between salaries, prize money and sponsorships, to make a profession out of them and live comfortably. Consequently, there are players and teams that would prefer to bet against themselves "in order to achieve higher profits through match-fixing than would be possible through prize money" (Schöber & Stadtmann, 2018, p. 5).

Secondly, as most e-sports competitors become professional or semi-professional players as teenagers and then retire before the age of 30, the pressure of having short careers and, hence, fewer years of earning may contribute to the choice of manipulating match results.

Therefore, e-sports players are more vulnerable to the allure of illicit profits and more susceptible to corruption attempts (Sportradar, 2024, p. 27).

2.1 Possible Solutions of Integrity Issues

All of the integrity issues described above become riskier and more problematic if we think about the young age of the players involved in e-sports competitions, in particular the damages that can be caused to children's health, both physically (with assumption of prohibited substances) and mentally (with the risk of developing an addiction).

⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the phenomena of match-fixing and illegal betting see Infante, I. (2025). 'It's in the game': the problems of gambling and match-fixing in e-sports. In G. Bevilacqua & I. Infante (Eds.). *Framing legal and ethical issues in electronic sports from the perspective of International Law*. (*Il Nuovo Diritto delle Società*, numero straordinario, pp. 122-135). Retrieved from https://www.nuovodirittodellesocieta.it/Article/Archive/index_html?id=1320&idn=197&idi=-1&idu=-1.

In International Law, under the UNCRC, States “have the obligation to amend, review or implement legal and policy measures, and develop plans of action to fulfil the right to health” (Declerck, 2025, p. 245).

While only States are parties to the Convention and, thus, bear the responsibility of ensuring that private entities like the videogame companies respect children’s rights, there are many soft law instruments which directly address the gaming industry, like the UNICEF Recommendations for the Online Gaming Industry on Assessing Impact on Children (UNICEF, 2020).

When it comes to e-sports tournaments the preferable solution would be the adoption of deterrence measures, such as specific sanctions against detractors, that could prevent the breaches of integrity. However, in the e-sports system there can be overlaps between the various institutions that can issue sanctions due to the presence of the video game publishers, who sometimes also act as competition organisers, like *Riot Games*. This makes it difficult to draw a clear line on which organisation is responsible for sanctioning offences (Schöber & Stadtmann, 2018, pp. 6–7).

Moreover, the world of e-sports does not have, to this day, a single international governing body recognised by the entire sector and capable of implementing codes of conduct valid for all e-sports competitions, such as FIFA (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*) does for football. There is, for example, the Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC), a non-profit association founded in 2016 that has, *inter alia*, the task of protecting the integrity of e-sports by preventing and punishing all forms of integrity violations, including doping and match-fixing. In fact, ESIC has a Code of Ethics, a Code of Conduct, an Anti-Corruption Code and an Anti-Doping Code, all of which serve to help prevent, detect and sanction cases of manipulation in e-sports competitions.

The Anti-Doping Code, for example, refers to a list of prohibited substances that players are not permitted to take unless they require a therapeutic use exemption (Esports Integrity Commission [ESIC], n.d., art. 4) and establishes “a dedicated disciplinary process pursuant to which anti-doping rule violations can be dealt with fairly, with certainty and in an expeditious manner” (Guadagno, 2025, p. 151). The Anti-Corruption Code, meanwhile, forbids all those who participate in various capacities (as players, coaches, managers, etc.) in e-sport tournaments from betting (ESIC, n.d., art. 2, para. 2.1).

However, these Codes only apply to the e-sports competitions that have voluntarily joined ESIC, with the inevitable risk of unequal treatment between the various leagues since some major publishers such as *Riot Games*, *Blizzard Entertainment* and *Valve Corporation*, for example, are not members of the ESIC (Schöber & Stadtmann, 2018, p. 7).

There is also the International Esports Federation (IESF), which counts 141 national federations among its members and specifically regulates international e-sports championships between national teams. However, even in this case, the rules only apply to tournaments organised by the IESF, with the additional risk of discrepancies for end-users.

In general, most integrity policies prohibit doping, gambling and match-fixing and sanctions may include the suspension, disqualification or ban of the players, forfeiture of prize money and fines⁵, with the length of the ban depending on the gravity of the conduct, as well as on the reiteration of the offence. For example, Article 6(1) of the ESIC Anti-Corruption Code provides as aggravating factors: a lack of remorse on the part of the Participant; the Participant’s previous bad disciplinary record; the substantial amount of any profits, winnings or other reward directly or indirectly received by the Participant as a result of the offence(s); the substantial damage to the commercial value and/or the public interest in the relevant Game/s, Match(es) or Events; the fact that the offence affected (or had the potential to affect) the result of the relevant Match(es) or Event; the endangerment of the welfare of a Participant or any other person as a result of the offence; and the involvement of more than one Participant in the offence (ESIC, n.d., art. 6.1). However, as each organisation has its own rules, a player who has been banned from a game due to unlawful conduct could easily participate in competitions involving other video games.

Therefore, considering the growing popularity and competitive nature of e-sports, the creation of an international body recognised by the entire sector and capable, at the same time, of both enforcing uniform rules of conduct and sanctioning unlawful behaviour, would be desirable.

⁵ See for example: ESIC. *Anti-corruption Code*, art. 6, para. 2; Electronic Sports League. *General Rules*, art. 2, para. 4.1; Riot Games Esports. *Global Code of Conduct*, 2025 edition, art. 5, para. 4.

The successful creation of a global regulatory body would, firstly, necessarily require publishers to relinquish some of their power, which is by no means an easy feat, as they “are generally unwilling to subject themselves to imposed rules and regulations legislated from external governing bodies” (Martinelli, 2019, p. 513). This, however, does not mean that there are no incentives for the e-sports companies as well (Ingram, 2019). On the contrary, given that more and more States are beginning to regulate the phenomenon⁶, if e-sports companies agree to join an international regulatory body, “they will be able to shape the regulations to which they are subjected, rather than turning their power over completely” (Ingram, 2019, p. 520). Furthermore, in addition to demonstrating to lawmakers that “the industry is capable of self-regulation” (Holden, Rodenberg, & Kaburakis, 2017, p. 272), the companies could also reap financial benefits, as the establishment of a standardised international body could reassure reluctant investors that the e-sports sector is becoming more stable, organised and efficient (Ingram, 2019, p. 520).

In conclusion, the solution of a uniform regulation would help to solve the problems that the e-sports industry is facing in terms of integrity violations, as it would also increase deterrence, given that offending players would be banned from participating in any e-sports competition, regardless of the game in which they carried out the offence.

3. Female players and the e-sports ecosystem: aggravated challenges

When it comes to gender, the challenges faced by players in the e-sports system mirrors the major problems women and girls face in society at large, namely issues of objectified representation (often paired with the hyper sexualization of the players and the female characters), equal participation, and outright harassment and exposure to violent treatment online. In the context analysed here, the circumstances are aggravated by the fact that the subjects are minors, which grants them an added level of vulnerability, and by a lack of clear and binding legal instruments aimed at protecting their rights in this space.

As literature on the creation of competitive gaming shows, this form of entertainment did not originate as gender-biased. Contrary to notions present in discussions regarding sports, in which the rhetoric around the physical potentialities of each gender often leads to the assumption of male dominance and the consequent subjugation of female athletes, the creation of video games was initially marketed for all people, irrespective of gender. In fact, it was not until the *Atari Crash* in the United States (Gallagher & Park, 2002), a collapse in the American video game economy which saw a drastic drop in sales between the years of 1983 and 1985 due to a market saturation and the rise of personal computers, that companies such as Nintendo started to use a “segmented” approach to their marketing strategies.

From that point on, video games advertisements adopted young males as a target audience to whom the games were being promoted as a possible new hobby. Amongst the many symptoms of this change, it is worthy to mention the proliferation of the “damsel in distress” storylines, as well as the fact that one of the most popular portable consoles at the time was named “Game Boy”. This trend was maintained throughout the 90s, when technological advancements in computing and in the industry as a whole were a double-edged sword: on the one hand, more female characters and “girl games” were created, inviting the entrance of more women and girls in this environment; on the other hand, said characters often reproduced a sexualizing and objectifying gaze of the female body, and the games themselves reinforced gender stereotypes, often dealing with beauty and fashion, as was the case for the Mattel Barbie games. An interesting twist came from the creation of individualized avatars in the 2000s, which afforded female players the agency to personalize their own characters as they pleased ((Vitucci, 2024, pp. 11–20)). Still, the challenges persist.

⁶ Apart from the countries where the phenomenon of e-sports originated, like South Korea, there are more and more States nowadays that are starting to regulate e-sports, like, for example, the United Kingdom, France and San Marino. A fact which further increases the risk of fragmentation of the system, since the measures adopted by some States may be more permissive, while others may be much stricter.

With the establishment of the e-sports system and the development of official gaming competitions, the ethical problems faced by female players, especially those underage, which were consolidated through the evolution of the video games industry, became evident and remain pungent today. Data from 2024 shows that e-sports are still mostly consumed by a male audience, which makes up roughly 67% of e-sports watchers, while women are 33% of the spectators. This tendency is repeated in regards to video game players worldwide – men still represent 54% of all players while women are 46% (Webb, 2025) – and is even more staggering when it comes to competitive gaming, where only 35% of gamers in general are female and women are roughly 5% of all professional e-sports players (Tang et al., 2025).

In addition to that, the issue of lack of female participation is likewise present within the game developing industry itself, an environment in which women were 22% of the global average workforce in 2020 and where, according to the Women In Games NGO, only 16% of women are represented in the executive teams of the top 15 game companies in the world (Women in Games, n.d.).

This is a direct reflection of the gender stigmas present in the e-sports ecosystem. Anthropological and psychological studies on the behaviour of players and audiences show the overwhelming presence of a culture of hegemonic masculinity in which women are seen as subordinate to men, in this case through the association of masculinity with supposedly more effective ‘rationality’ prowess (Rogstad, 2022). In this context, researchers introduced the concept of *geek masculinity*, or “a distinct form that challenges traditional hegemonic masculinity [because it is not connected to traditional physical attributes associated with manliness] while simultaneously reproducing certain patriarchal power relations through technical expertise and digital competence” (Tang et al., 2025, p. 3).

The acknowledgement of the current status quo for gendered relations in the e-sports world allows for a clearer understanding of the other challenges faced by underage female players, namely issues of representation and online violence. Since women are seen as inherently less tech-savvy or interested in gaming, they are given less encouragement to enter the world of e-sports and are, thus, underrepresented in all levels (as players, spectators, consumers, industry insiders, etc), as previously mentioned. There is also a great imbalance in earnings. For instance, data from 2025 shows that the most well-paid female e-sports player, Sasha “Scarlett” Hostyn, has received around \$472,000 in prize money (Webb, 2025) while the most successful male e-sports player, Johan ‘N0tail’ Sundstein, has earned \$7.18 million (Serafico, 2025). A similar pattern can be observed in the shy number of all-female teams and all-female e-sports competitions in comparison with male counterparts, which leads to a lack of female role-models for women and girls interested in entering the field (Women in Games, 2023).

Moreover, female characters continue to be portrayed through the male gaze, which is often done through the objectification and hyper sexualization of their bodies. Female players, in turn, often hide their gender when playing in order to avoid sexist comments, as shown by a survey of 900 women gamers from the US, Germany and China conducted by Reach3 Insights in partnership with Lenovo. The results state that 59% of the women surveyed use either a non-gendered or male identity when playing games online to avoid conflict and that 77% of them have dealt with at least some sort of frustration when gaming because of their gender, such as judgements of skills (70%), gatekeeping (65%), patronizing comments (50%), and even unsolicited relationship asks (44%) (Reach3 Insights, 2021).

This discussion is particularly relevant for underage players because, although data shows that the majority of players are not within this age group⁷, it is also likely that those interested in the field will start interacting with it from a young age⁸. That can be attributed to the marketing of video games, which is often targeted at children, but also to the fact that a successful career in competitive gaming requires quick reflexes, which is a skill known to drop in early adulthood (Ward & Harmon, 2019).

⁷ For instance, it is reported that 24% of video game players in the United States were underage in 2024. Entertainment Software Association. (2024). 2024 Essential facts about the U.S. video game industry. *The ESA*. Retrieved from <https://www.theesa.com/resources/essential-facts-about-the-us-video-game-industry/2024-data/>.

⁸ For example, research conducted in France with 284 men and 58 women shows that boys start playing video games around the age of 7 and girls around the age of 9. Borkowski, J., Besombes, N., & Cabagno, G. (2022). Esports for everyone? The case of women’s players esports career in France [Conference paper]. *HAL*. Retrieved from <https://hal.science/hal-03981643>.

3.1 Possible Solutions of Gender Issues

In view of this scenario, it is important to understand what approaches, if any, International Law has been taking to deal with gender-based problems faced by underage female players.

As previously mentioned, from an international perspective, the protection of minors' human rights is enshrined more specifically in the UNCRC, which, in its Article 32, paragraph 1, gives States parties to the Convention the obligation to "recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development" (United Nations, 1989).

The matter of the "digital environment" is specifically addressed in the UNCRC Committee's General Comment N. 25 (2021), which clearly states that "children may be discriminated against by their being excluded from using digital technologies and services or by receiving hateful communications or unfair treatment through use of those technologies" (United Nations, 2021), with a highlight to the fact that "specific measures will be required [from States] to close the gender-related digital divide for girls and to ensure that particular attention is given to access, digital literacy, privacy and online safety" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2021, p. 2).

The document, which was written based on the reports of the States parties, on the jurisprudence of the human rights treaty bodies and on consultations with multiple stakeholders, including children, goes on to recognize that violent and sexual content, cyberaggression, harassment, abuse and gambling are among the risks which States parties to the convention should identify and address. This is to be made through a series of proposed measures of implementation, which include, *inter alia*, the adoption of legislation and comprehensive policy and strategy, coordination of guidelines and programs related to the topic within government agencies and departments, allocation of resources, data collection and research, and the dissemination of information, awareness-raising, and training.

Additionally, given the relevance of the video games market, an important concern is raised regarding children's rights and the business sector. It is set forth that businesses have an obligation to respect children's rights and to prevent and remedy abuses to them, while the States are responsible for making sure that said businesses comply with these responsibilities. In order to do that, States parties should "require all businesses that affect children's rights in relation to the digital environment to implement regulatory frameworks, industry codes and terms of services that adhere to the highest standards of ethics, privacy and safety in relation to the design, engineering, development, operation, distribution and marketing of their products and services. That includes businesses that target children, have children as end users or otherwise affect children" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2021, p. 7).

In the context of gender, children and e-sports, this effort is also complemented by soft law instruments, as is the case for issues of integrity. One example is the International Safeguards for Children in Esports (British Esports Federation et al., 2025), a new framework recently released by Safe Sport International. This new document takes lessons from the original 2014 work by the same agency titled 'International Safeguards for Children in Sports' and emphasizes the importance of the promotion of a safe environment for e-sports. There are eight proposed safeguards: the development of a policy, intended as "a statement of intent that demonstrates a commitment to safeguard children involved in esports from harm and provides the framework within which procedures are developed" (British Esports Federation et al., 2025, p. 15); the development of a system of operational processes to respond to safeguarding concerns and to process complaints; the promotion of advice and support for those responsible for safeguarding children; the establishment of measures to minimize risks to children; the establishment of codes of conduct with guidelines on behaviour; the recruiting, training and effective communicating of members of staff in direct contact with children; working with partners; and the monitoring and evaluating of compliance. The goal here is to establish professional standards which can guarantee that underage players, both professional and amateur, can take part in gaming activities safely, a reality which is not only beneficial for the individuals themselves, but also for the integrity of the e-sports system as a whole.

Another important initiative is the Game Changers Coalition, a global program created by UNICEF Innovation whose goal is to close the gender digital gap by equipping adolescent girls and young women with STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) skills, especially through video games. It is described as a space for private companies, civil society organizations, governments and young leaders to unite in order to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in the video gaming industry, as well as enhance representation and security for girls through the financing of concrete actions and the demystification of the career in video games. The Coalition has three main operational pillars: *Build Her Foundation*, which comprises developing a STEAM curriculum aimed at helping girls transition from learning to profiting in the industry; *Build the Game*, which focuses specifically on inserting girls within the gaming industry itself; and *Build the Global Network*, which helps girls create connections through mentorship, collaborative events to design games, internships, among other activities.

It is also worth mentioning that, as previously stated for issues of integrity, resolutions to issues of gender could equally benefit from the establishment of an international regulatory body for the e-sports sector which would ideally involve both national federations and private companies. In this context, the establishment of a unified set of clear rules and of monitoring systems can serve two indispensable purposes for the success of competitive gaming: the protection of the human rights of underage female players and the consolidation of transparency and legitimacy within the e-sports ecosystem.

4 Closing Remarks

In light of the topics discussed, it becomes evident that underage e-sports players are affected by a myriad of ethical and gender-related issues which become more heightened given the vulnerability associated with their young age and the booming competitive gaming market, which ends up becoming predatory if this said expansion is not followed by the development of adequate legal safeguards.

From an International Law perspective, the States are still the main subjects concerned with the responsibilities of promoting and securing the rights of minors. In the context of e-sports, this translates as a duty to oversee the operation of businesses in this sector and their adherence to legal frameworks put in place. When confronted with the lack of said judicial directives, and without coordination between all concerned stakeholders (States, players, video game developers and publishers, tournament organizers, among others), attempts at protecting underage players remain fragmented and inconsistent. The creation of a unified international regulatory body, capable of enforcing universal standards for integrity, fair play, and child protection, represents a necessary step forward to ensure that e-sports evolve within an ethical and rights-based framework.

In addition to that, the advancement of initiatives like UNICEF's *Game Changers Coalition* and the *International Safeguards for Children in Esports* demonstrates the potential of collaboration between governments, international organizations, and the private sector. By fostering inclusivity, equity, and accountability, these actions can help reshape the e-sports landscape into a safer and more inclusive environment for all participants.

Ultimately, ensuring that the e-sports industry grows responsibly is not merely a matter of regulation. Upholding the integrity of competition and promoting gender equality among underage players are indispensable conditions for the long-term legitimacy, sustainability, and credibility of the e-sports ecosystem on the international stage.

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