

WORLD ATHLETICS

UNDER 20 CHAMPIONSHIPS

The IAAF World Under-20 Championships are a biennial competition organized by World Athletics, open to athletes who have not yet turned 20 by December 31 of the relevant year.

Founded in 1986 as the "IAAF World Junior Championships," the event was renamed the "IAAF World Under-20 Championships" in November 2015. The current name was finally adopted in 2019, following the international federation's name change.

Records and distances:
Walking has been a regular feature of the event since its beginning, but the distances have changed over time:
• Men: Always faithful to the 10,000-meter track event, in the latest edition the competition was shortened to 5,000 meters, where Australian Isaac Bearcrot walk in a time of 18:40.17. The 10,000-meter championship record belongs to Tunisian Rayen Cherni, who finished in 39:24.85 in Lima in 2024.
• Women: Having started in the 5,000-meter track until Annecy 1998, they switched to the 10,000-meter race in 2000, before returning to the 5,000-meter race in the latest edition in Eugene 2026. Over the longer 10,000-meter distance, the championship record remains the unbeatable 42:47.25 set by Czech Anežka Drahotová in Eugene in 2014.
In the last edition, Italian Serena Di Fabio ran 5,000 meters in 20:57.57, setting a new championship record for the distance, surpassing Irina Stankina's historic record, which had stood since 1994.

Interesting facts, records, and historical data:

• The youngest winner ever is China's Wang Yan, who became champion at just 15 years and 78 days in the inaugural edition in 1986.
• Russia's Irina Stankina is the only woman to win back-to-back titles, in 1994 and 1998.
• Vladimir Kanaykin (Russia) won a gold medal in Kingston 2002 and a silver medal in Grosseto 2004.

• The men's race with the highest number of participants and nations was held in Barcelona 2012, which saw 41 athletes representing 29 countries. The last edition also had 41 athletes, but from 26 countries.
• The most crowded women's race with the most nations was held in Cali in 2022, with 41 athletes representing 30 countries.

The medal table:

The roll of honor of the Under-20 World Championships is firmly in the hands of three superpowers that have exercised almost total hegemony:
1. Russia: Absolute dominance in both the men's (5 gold, 4 silver, 1 bronze) and women's (7 gold, 5 silver, 2 bronze) events.
2. China: Close behind the Russians with excellent results in both the men's (2-6-2) and women's (5-4-6) events.
3. Mexico: A historic breeding ground for race walkers, second among the men (3-2-1) and third among the women's with three splendid victories.
For decades, Italy – despite being a global superpower in race walking – remained without titles in this category, collecting only two silvers (Cacia and Stella) and two bronzes (Disabato and Orsani).
Eighteen-year-old Serena Di Fabio broke the curse on the track at Eugene 2026: with a solo walk in the 5,000-meter final, she won Italy's first gold medal. Also at the US event, Nicolò Vidal added to the Italian medal haul by winning the bronze medal in the men's event. Also at Eugene 2026, Australia also won its first gold medal at the U20 World Championships thanks to Isaac Beacroft's victory.

