



UEFA's Women's Football Development Programme (WFDP)

As the European football governing body, UEFA is committed to the development of girls and women's football in all of its affiliated 54 member associations. The UEFA Women's Football Development Programme (WFDP) was launched to support the extensive progress of the women's game, the principal aim being the provision of ample opportunities to all girls and women who want to play football within their community, regardless of skill or talent, offering them a safe environment in which to play to their own aspirations.

Background: in December 2010, the UEFA Executive Committee approved significant funding to women's football development through the UEFA HatTrick programme. An initial pilot phase in 2010/11 saw the distribution of funds to four national associations (Portugal, Italy, Slovakia and Republic of Ireland), specifically for the development of women's football. Positive results were immediate – for example, the Republic of Ireland set up a national women's league in October 2011. Following the success of this pilot scheme, the programme was repeated for the 2011/12 season, further increasing the availability of funding. As of October 2011, an unlimited number of associations could apply for financial support in this pilot phase. In addition, Steffi Jones, the German women's football icon, was appointed as ambassador for the UEFA WFDP and continues to work closely with UEFA and its member associations to further cultivate women's football across the continent.

Next Steps: the UEFA HatTrick programme will continue to foster the development of women's football and, running from July 2012 to July 2016, the WFDP may award each member association up to €100,000 per year to be used specifically for the development of girls and women's football. This amounts to €21.2 million of available funding which is subsequent to approval of submitted development projects.

UEFA keeps track of the approved WFDP projects through reporting and regular visits to member associations. In reviewing the content and results, several factors stand out as fundamental to the future development of women's football:

Grassroots: there are approximately 1.2 million registered female players in Europe and the aim of each member association is to inflate that number. Currently, the uptake varies significantly from country to country but the method used to generate new interest is predominantly grassroots football. The vast majority of WFDP supported projects have started in schools or with local community centers reaching out to girls and teaching them the rules of the game both on and off the pitch. Many associations have used their own star players and professional coaches as role models, organising football festivals, youth tournaments or summer camps. The projects span many age groups, some girls as young as five going up to 16 years of age. It is clear that supporting the women's game at the base level and empowering young girls to play is essential to both growth and sustainability.

Integration and perception: over the course of the WFDP these two factors have become increasingly recognisable as milestones. Several projects have been approved to enhance integration, for example the creation of a mixed youth tournament or a call for clubs to form girls' teams with combined training sessions so boys and girls can practice together. A number of associations have also launched public relations campaigns to promote the women's game not only in the eyes of the potential players but also to positively influence parents, teachers, media and governments towards a stronger role for women in football. The common thread between integration and perception is *acceptance* which is of vital importance when defining women's football as a game in its own right. In some cases, women playing football can liberate their role in society and help tackle fundamental issues such as gender prejudice and discrimination.



Women's Football Development Programme

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Player Pathway: it is essential to keep incentive alive by creating a career pathway to support the best possible advancement of elite youth players. Many of the WFDP projects to date have included newly launched women's competitions, leagues or elite youth programmes thus providing more opportunities for talented players to compete at a regional level and potentially advance to the international arena. In tandem, and of equal importance, many associations have invested in coaching and referee courses to raise the level of female match officials and instructors available to nurture and guide the upcoming new players long-term. Some countries have opened dedicated women's football centres which are fully operational as training centres and represent the hub of their national women's game.

In this light, UEFA has recently launched a series of international development tournaments for WU16-WU17. The tournaments are true learning experiences for the young players, not just in fine-tuning their skills through practice and guidance, but also allowing them to experience an international and highly competitive environment. On an annual basis, UEFA also hosts the Women's Under 17 and Women's Under 19 as well as the increasingly well-known UEFA Women's Champions League. The Women's EURO is held every four years.

Governance: UEFA pledges to lead the development of all aspects of girls and women's football as a key priority and will endeavor to act as a role model through concrete action - this includes the appointment of women into governing positions. This pledge has already borne fruit with the Chairwoman of the UEFA Women's Football Committee, Karen Espelund, becoming a full member of the UEFA Executive Committee in the spring of 2012. For the committee and expert panel term 2011-2015, UEFA has 24 female committee members overall, which incorporates one chair position and four vice-chair positions. This represents an increase of 71 percent from the 2009-2011 period.

The Women's Football Development Programme seeks to bring added value to football as a whole. UEFA and its associations have big ideas and hopes – and stimulating work lies ahead, with the overall well-being of European football in mind. A complete Review of the Women's Football Development Programme is now available, providing individual project information and statistics relevant to each UEFA member association.

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