



**ECA<sup>®</sup> YOUTH  
FOOTBALL**



# **GIRLS' DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY ANALYSIS**

**European Club Association Women's Football 2025**  
in Association with Sportsology Group



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# FOREWORD



**“Women’s football has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years.**

With more young girls than ever playing the game, understanding and strengthening their development pathways has become essential. Women’s sport requires tailored approaches that ensure athletes have the resources, opportunities and environments to thrive.

This project stands at the forefront of that mission, offering the first in-depth analysis of girls’ development systems across Europe. It provides clubs with a unique opportunity to connect, share best practices and learn from one another, while also encouraging reflection on current strategies and future ambitions. The initiative aligns seamlessly with the European Club Association’s vision, empowering clubs to strengthen their role in shaping the women’s football landscape.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Claire Bloomfield, former

Head of Women’s Football at ECA, whose vision and determination were the driving force behind this project. Her recognition of the critical role girls’ pathways play in the wider women’s football ecosystem has been fundamental in shaping this work.

What sets this study apart is its exclusive focus on girls, recognising that their journeys cannot simply mirror those of boys. A holistic and inclusive approach is essential — one that supports players on and off the pitch and fosters environments where young female athletes can flourish.

This report is both a resource and a call to action. By engaging deeply, reflecting meaningfully and acting decisively, we can ensure that every girl has the opportunity to pursue her passion for football and that the next generation of players receives the support they deserve”.

**Martina Pavlová**  
ECA Vice-Chair /  
AC Sparta Praha



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Girls' Development Pathway Analysis is an initiative by The European Club Association aimed at helping its member clubs to develop and professionalise girls' football. As the women's game continues to grow, the need for a well-structured pathway becomes essential to offering aspiring female players a clear route towards personal and professional success in football.



**Clubs play a vital role in the development of young talent for the women's game.** However, not all aspects of the talent pathway are straightforward. There are still many unknowns about development practices in the girls' game and areas where leading practices can be highlighted. This is why ECA introduced this study: to shed light on the current landscape of girls' football at European clubs.

Thirty-five regions across Europe took part in an extensive survey and were complemented by more than 50 interviews. With the support of the global advisory firm Sportsology Group, some 'outside of football' perspectives were

implemented in this study and a framework for internal club assessment — including recommendations and key questions for clubs — was set up. This report should empower clubs to professionalise their talent pathway in girls' football and *Be A Changemaker* for the next generation of talent for the professional women's game.

As the girls' talent pathway is structured differently at various clubs, a framework of 'success factors' has been established that considers all aspects of the journey into professional women's football. The findings of these factors in the current landscape and its leading practices are structured in five core chapters.

## CLUB STRUCTURE

The **club structure** outlines how clubs are organised to create a pathway into women's football. Key aspects include integrating girls' and women's football into the decision-making at a club leadership level while maintaining autonomy where necessary. Building a distinct brand identity for the women's game creates the opportunity

for the women's side to differentiate itself. Moreover, securing both organisational and financial commitments from the club is vital for aligning the goals of the girls' youth programme with the club's broader strategy and operations. Ultimately, maintaining a consistent football identity across age groups helps balance player development with competitive success.



## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

### ▶ Creating a written strategic vision for girls' football

A longer-term strategy will help clubs set priorities and actions with clear goals that are tailored to the resources and budget available. This can include establishing relationships with international and local clubs and entities.

### ▶ Operating as one club with independent decision-making power

Women's and girls' key decision-makers are part of broader club senior leadership and board-level structure. They are given the freedom to operate as a separate entity from the men's and boys' teams, where applicable.

### ▶ Establishing a strong club and brand identity for girls' and women's football

Creating a footballing and club brand identity specifically for the women's game will differentiate them from local and international competitor clubs.

## KEY CHALLENGES

### ▶ Integrating the football philosophy consistently across all teams

Maintain a unified playing style that aligns with club values and adapt to competitive demands while balancing short-term success with long-term player development.

### ▶ Ensuring club organisational buy-in

Align the girls' academy's operational model with the broader club strategy, ensuring resource allocation supports the primary objectives of women's and girls' football.

### ▶ Securing club financial buy-in

Ensure adequate funding and balance the budget between the first team and the academy.



## ATHLETE CARE

In any talent pathway, focusing on both the personal and professional development of athletes is essential.

**Athlete care** plays a formative role in this, with tailored housing and education options creating a safe and stable environment for girls at the club.

Safeguarding and mental health support have become top priorities as clubs enhance their commitment to player wellbeing. Medical care is another key aspect, yet research shows only 54% of clubs feel confident in their medical onboarding procedures for new female players, revealing significant gaps in this area. The lack of women-specific research,

particularly around topics such as the menstrual cycle, balancing academic and dual careers and injury prevention, presents a major challenge for clubs.

This gap not only complicates medical evaluations but also increases the risks to player health, underscoring the urgent need for more research and resources dedicated to the unique needs of female athletes.

Additionally, nutrition support, including guidance for players and families, is vital, especially when addressing eating disorders, where the involvement of nutritionists and psychologists is central.

## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

### ▶ Club-provided housing and education

Girls are supported by the club, which provides full-time accommodation and schooling. This can be with host families, on-site housing, club-provided accommodation, local school collaborations or even on-site schools.

### ▶ Safeguarding and mental health programmes

Integrate specific women's and girls' academy safeguarding procedures among players and staff. Provide mental health support through regular check-ins, player surveys and psychology availability.

### ▶ Menstrual cycle tracking

Educate girls around the impact of the menstrual cycle on mental health and athletic performance. Where applicable, integrate the menstrual cycle into training plans.

## KEY CHALLENGES

### ▶ Balancing academic and dual careers

A professional playing career/financial security is not guaranteed for female players, so a large focus is being put on continuing to pursue academic and other professional careers, which can be tough to balance.

### ▶ Lack of women and girls' athlete research

Medical tests are often still based on male athletes, and with a lack of research and knowledge around the female athlete, we still see some uncertainties in medical evaluations and, for example, integration of gynaecological testing and injury prevention.

### ▶ Consistent medical and mental health data logging

Besides the lack of structure and tools for data gathering and recording, the communication flow between players and medical staff is often difficult to manage in terms of sensitivity and timing.

### ▶ Addressing nutritional education and eating disorders

Proper nutrition is crucial to support muscle growth and complement the training regime. When dealing with young players, the language spoken around nutrition and education becomes paramount not just to the players, but to parents and coaches too.



## ON-PITCH DEVELOPMENT

**N**ext to the development of a player on a personal level, the aspects of growing as a footballer are centralised in **on-pitch development**. The connection between players and coaches — in football in general — is usually very close and has a significant impact on a player's journey throughout age groups.

In the girls' game, the need for enhancing coaching skills through targeted education and training — with a focus on developing personalised training plans for players, particularly in strength and conditioning — is very high. While more professionals are becoming

qualified, the lack of experience in women's football remains a challenge.

As players often face an extensive workload, balancing frequent call-ups for national and regional tournaments with education and dual careers can take its physical toll. There is therefore a need for better established performance functions, as current data tracking is insufficient and relies largely on manual systems.

Lastly, goalkeeping development is hindered by a perceived low quality of coaching, contributing to a shortage of skilled goalkeepers.

### CURRENT LANDSCAPE

#### ▶ Investing in coaching development and education

Advancing the development and education of coaches at all levels helps to improve standards and create a structured talent pathway within clubs.

#### ▶ Implementing club-wide coaching methodologies and frameworks

Formalising coaching methodologies assists clubs in driving consistency and alignment across all age groups.

#### ▶ Prioritising individual development plans

Individualised plans provide players with personal goals and training programmes that address specific needs and development areas.

### KEY CHALLENGES

#### ▶ Addressing the shortage of professionals experienced in the women's game

There is a shortage of coaching and performance staff with experience in the women's game, impacting the quality of gender-specific player development.

#### ▶ Increasing the representation of women on the coaching staff

Despite efforts to address this area, the representation of female coaches remains low.

#### ▶ Managing extensive player workload

The demands of balancing education with football, including frequent international call-ups, create a risk of mental and physical burnout.

#### ▶ Establishing effective performance functions

Many clubs lack structured performance tracking systems necessary to monitor player development, often relying on manual data collection and basic storage solutions.

#### ▶ Improving goalkeeping development

Clubs often struggle to provide high-quality specialised goalkeeping training to players, hindering the development of goalkeepers who are ready to make the step up to the professional game.



# INFRASTRUCTURE

In **infrastructure**, effective operation and scheduling, and access to high-quality facilities are key components for the growth of girls' football. Many clubs take the initiative to organise friendly matches and integrate mixed-gender competitions (typically up to age 15) to provide competitive match experience, but the lack of formal international competitions for girls in Europe limits development opportunities against high-quality teams from abroad. Financial and logistical challenges further restrict participation in elite tournaments, highlighting the pressing need for continued improvements to structured domestic leagues across each age group. It is common for existing leagues to lack the

quality required to challenge players and drive performance. Additionally, most girls' teams share facilities with boys' academies or women's first teams, resulting in scheduling conflicts and a feeling of being deprioritised. This reflects the need for greater investment in dedicated spaces that cater specifically to girls' programmes. Alongside facility challenges, clubs are beginning to adopt centralised communication systems to streamline processes between players, parents and staff. However, operations for girls' teams remain underdeveloped, with coaching staff often relied upon for kit management, scheduling and transportation due to the absence of dedicated team managers and operational support.

## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

### ► Streamlining club operations and communication

Clubs are beginning to adopt centralised systems for scheduling, player data management and communication with players, parents and staff to improve operational efficiency.

### ► Improving access to facilities

Although most clubs provide access to training and matchday facilities, they are often shared with boys' academies or women's first teams, creating scheduling challenges and deprioritisation of girls' programmes.

### ► Developing competition programmes and scheduling

Clubs are increasingly organising friendly matches and seeking international competitions to expose players to varied competitive environments, especially given the lack of advanced, structured domestic girls' leagues.

## KEY CHALLENGES

### ► Insufficient operational staffing

Clubs often lack dedicated staff for girls' academies, such as team managers and operations roles, placing additional administrative work on the coaching staff.

### ► Kit and transportation issues

Just over half of clubs provide free kits for all ages, but many rely on annual membership fees. Additionally, less than 50% of clubs offer transportation for match days, leaving logistical responsibilities to parents or guardians.

### ► Limited investment in dedicated facilities

Shared facilities with boys' programmes, women's first teams or external groups often lead to scheduling conflicts, hindering player development. Despite recent renovations, many clubs lack dedicated, high-quality facilities for girls.

### ► Lack of competitive match opportunities

Due to the absence of formal domestic leagues, many clubs are forced to compete in mixed-gender leagues, which presents challenges in terms of physical and tactical development. International competitions are limited by financial and logistical barriers.



## PLAYER PATHWAY

astly, the overall **player pathway** highlights how practices around recruiting and retaining players into the youth system to become professional players or set them up for another footballing career are established.

Overall, there is a strong desire among clubs to build a robust talent pipeline for the future of women's football in roles on and off the pitch. However, the lack of domestic incentives for the development of club-trained players makes it difficult for clubs to justify a heavier investment in girls' youth systems. Therefore, a significant gap exists between the level of women's senior teams and girls' youth age groups.

The increasing demands of the game often push clubs to recruit externally rather than promote internal talent. Scouting practices are frequently underdeveloped as clubs are struggling

to cover desired areas due to limited resourcing and data available.

A necessary aspect of developing a high-quality girls' talent pathway is the allocation of dedicated staff to support both the operational and developmental needs of young players. The results from staffing research indicate that many clubs face challenges in providing sufficient full-time personnel, particularly in emerging and developing clubs.

Clubs at more advanced stages of maturity, however, are making significant strides by increasing the number of specialised staff dedicated to coaching, medical, performance, care and wellbeing roles. By investing in dedicated staff across key areas, clubs are ensuring that their youth systems are equipped to provide tailored support necessary for long-term success.

## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

### ► Generally, there is a large desire to build up girls' football

Clubs engaged in the study all share a similar goal to build a pipeline that's well-equipped for the next generation of women's football talent.

### ► Clubs are looking beyond professional playing careers

Success is not only measured by first-team playing performance. Clubs are also dedicated to supporting players in pursuing a career in football off the pitch and setting them up for success to the best of their abilities.

### ► Domestic regulations of club-trained players

Clubs frequently expose young players to senior-team environments prematurely to comply with national association regulations, which can harm their development by rushing them through the development stages.

## KEY CHALLENGES

### ► Reducing the gap between women's senior teams and the girls' academy

The increasing demands of the game are hard for girls to keep up with in general. Exposure to the first team is often premature, and only done to match national association regulations, leading clubs to recruit first-team players instead of prioritising internal player promotion.

### ► Improving the development of scouting practices

Clubs experience difficulties in attempting to cover all the desired geographical areas to spot talent due to a lack of human resources. They also struggle with gathering data from other markets due to the lack of availability.

### ► Addressing the need for training compensation

With the absence of training rewards in their current form, clubs struggle to make a business case for the girls' academy and request dedicated resources to build up the system.





## Tools to Identify The Next Steps and Actions

As part of this project, ECA aims to leave clubs with actions and focus on the 'what' and 'how' in moving forward with developing the girls' talent pathway. In the structure of this report, all chapters are concluded with tools to conduct an internal club assessment.

The standards set in the maturity matrix provided with every chapter showcase a level of professionalisation in a certain area, such as club structure, on-pitch development, and so on. The club can recognise their current practices in the maturity matrix and, by reading ahead, identify what the potential next steps could look like. Suggested key performance indicators (KPIs) to track

success and growth are provided, as well as recommendations for the actions to be taken next.

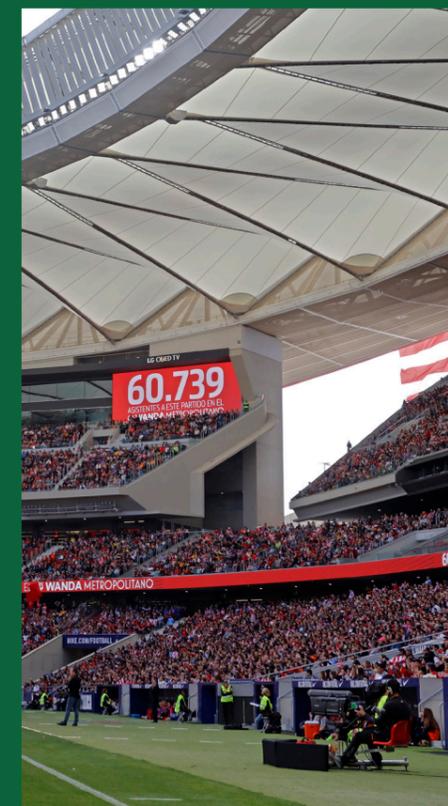
The maturity matrix will show the areas of development for the club. To be able to act on this — within the context of your market, region and budgets — a list of key questions is provided per chapter for clubs to take away and start internal conversations at the club. For example, when building the scouting and recruitment function in the girls' pathway, key questions to consider would include the market coverage, systems used and which people are involved in the decision-making process. *Please find the Club resources – key questions on pages 264.*

## A Sporting Advantage

The advantages of developing a structured talent pathway for girls extend beyond club level. Developing homegrown talent to strengthen senior teams and reduce recruitment costs will support the club to become more competitive in domestic and international tournaments and, together, increase participation and strengthen community bonds. These benefits will provide value to the club to further develop a clear and accessible player pathway.

Overall, investing in girls' football within European clubs has significant sporting advantages. The game has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, not just in terms of popularity, but also in the development of talent, driving competition quality and competitive balance. Investment from clubs, national associations and governing bodies will strengthen the foundation for building sustainable pathways in women's football across Europe. These organisations have the ability to provide vital resources, infrastructure and expertise that can elevate the standard of play and ensure that young female athletes have equal access to professional opportunities.

In order to make the case for investment at this level, this report provides a roadmap for clubs to drive outcomes and have evidence to articulate the value of investing in their youth pathways. Finally, investing in girls' football is foundational for the long-term success and growth of the sport. By focusing on youth development, improving competition and fostering a shared club culture, clubs can significantly strengthen their women's teams and contribute to the broader advancement of football. This investment is essential to ensuring that girls and women can compete at the highest levels and continue the sport's rapid evolution.



# REPORT METHODOLOGY

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This project marks the beginning of the latest ECA initiative to merge the youth and women's football workstreams to enhance youth development in women's football. Recognising the growing urgency to effectively advance girls' development, this innovative study aims to deepen our understanding of the diverse development systems for girls across Europe. Additionally, it explores how clubs can be supported in building and enhancing systems aimed at identifying, developing and nurturing young talent in all areas of the girls' youth pathway.

## Establishing the Framework

To achieve this, different types of sources and research methods have been used, combining both quantitative and qualitative insights from in-depth club visits and interviews, round-table discussions with industry experts and survey analysis.

This ECA-funded study was produced in collaboration with Sportsology Group, which specialises in providing premium knowledge, insights and strategic advice across global sport. An ECA taskforce composed of club representatives was established to provide strategic direction and guidelines to the research, guaranteeing that this project was a targeted investigation of the needs of the clubs and providing them with valuable resources to inform decision-making.

The development of this research follows an approach with the objective of leveraging the network of ECA member

clubs and looking beyond European football for innovative practices. Specifically, the project has been designed to drive insights in three main stages:

- ▶ **Current state assessment**
- ▶ **Leading practices**
- ▶ **Club-level recommendations**

We have identified a framework of 11 critical and sensitive success factors that we have used to evaluate and investigate the academy landscape in women's football. These factors are: strategy, operating model, medical, performance, coaching, recruitment, care and wellbeing, facilities, operations, competitions and scheduling and professional transition.

## ECA Internal Taskforce



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## Current State Assessment

This report draws from a large survey that gathered insights from football clubs across 35 European countries. By prioritising geographic and league diversity, the study reflects a broad spectrum of experiences and approaches within the varied landscape of girls' football development. Responses were collected from a wide range of nations and leagues, each with its own set of challenges and associated levels of investment in women's football.

By assessing a wide range of clubs, the report not only provides insights from the practices in the most developed footballing nations but also from emerging football markets, each with their own unique landscape. In doing so, it allows for a more nuanced understanding of the successes, challenges and opportunities clubs face at different levels of maturity, and in different footballing cultures.

The survey was complemented by qualitative research, including in-depth interviews and site visits. Nine online interviews and seven on-site club visits across Europe were conducted to support insights on organisational structures, methodologies and current practices in place to help and guide young girls throughout their path to senior and professional football. Clubs shared their unique approaches to player development, helping to provide a view of the current state of girls' football across the continent.

This diverse geographic spread of clubs participating in the study allows us to identify trends, highlight leading practices and acknowledge common challenges across a range of contexts. It also ensures that the report's conclusions are not constrained to a single nation's experiences but are relevant across an array of footballing environments.



## Leading Practices

To give the analysis a global perspective, we looked across various sporting disciplines in women's sports to catch meaningful insights from successful practices and translate them into girls' youth development in football. To achieve this, we broadened our scope, involving experts and leaders from sports in other continents and engaging with them in interviews with a specific focus (e.g., player development plans, competitions etc).

Industry experts from the women's football ecosystem with varying roles and backgrounds (e.g., clubs, federations, coaching and former players) were also involved. We engaged with them during specifically organised round-table discussions aimed at exploring a range of topics to help inform our work, and to have our findings challenged and checked to ensure that all aspects of the player development process were addressed.

We would like to extend special thanks to the following people and organisations for their invaluable contributions:

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### EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTORS

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Professor of Female Endocrinology and Exercise Physiology, Manchester Metropolitan University
- ▶ USL Super League
- ▶ F1 Academy
- ▶ Women's Tennis Association
- ▶ National Women Soccer League



## Club-Level Recommendations

The club-level recommendations serve as practical guidance for clubs to assess, refine and enhance their youth development programmes for girls. These recommendations are built on the analysis of data collected through surveys, interviews and club visits, and are aimed at helping clubs to identify areas for improvement across key success factors. By addressing the unique needs of each stage of professionalisation,

the recommendations offer targeted strategies to create an optimal environment for the development of young players.

The recommendations form part of the maturity matrix, which allows clubs to self-assess based on their development in key areas such as strategy, coaching, performance, recruitment and player care. The matrix allows clubs to understand their current

standing, from emerging to advanced stages, and provides a roadmap to progress towards more sophisticated and effective practices. Additionally, specific KPIs and actionable steps are suggested to ensure measurable progress, enabling clubs to track their improvement over time.

Through these recommendations, the report aims to empower clubs with the tools and insights necessary to

build sustainable development systems that not only identify and nurture talent but also provide players with the skills and opportunities to succeed on and off the pitch.

These recommendations highlight the importance of continuous learning, innovation and collaboration across departments, helping youth systems to remain robust and adaptable to the changing landscape of women's football.



# FRAMEWORK OF SUCCESS FACTORS

The growth of women's football in Europe has made significant progress, yet the pathway for young girls aspiring to reach the professional level remains varied and, in some cases, underdeveloped. ECA's research study is guided by a framework of 11 success factors critical to the development of young female athletes. This framework was used to create a toolkit of strategies and recommendations aimed at enhancing training environments, resource access and overall development opportunities.



## CLUB FOUNDATIONS

### Strategy

A successful girls' football programme begins with a clear strategy. This involves embedding the club's DNA within the women's and girls' football departments, creating a football vision and philosophy, and determining a team identity and style that aligns with the club's values. Establishing partnerships for talent development within the local community further strengthens the programme. A robust strategy ensures that clubs set specific actions and goals that drive the long-term success of girls' football.

### Operating Model

A well-structured operating model is essential for integrating women's and girls' football into the broader organisational framework of the club. This includes establishing a clear organisational structure, defining staff roles and responsibilities, and setting budgets to support the programme's growth. By doing so, clubs can ensure that their girls' football departments are seamlessly connected to the wider club structure, enabling more effective management and resource allocation.

### Framework of success factors in women's football youth development

#### 1 Club Foundations



Strategy



Operating Model

#### 2 Internal Capabilities



Medical



Performance



Recruitment



Coaching



Care and Wellbeing



Operations

#### 3 Competitive Environment



Competitions and Scheduling



Facilities

#### 4 Pathway Outcome



Professional transition

# INTERNAL CAPABILITIES

## Medical

Medical support plays a vital role in player development and care. Establishing comprehensive onboarding and player assessment procedures, alongside rehabilitation and return-to-play protocols, helps to ensure athletes are cared for appropriately. Specific considerations for girls, such as gynaecological assessments and education on the menstrual cycle, further enhance health management. This focus on medical care is paramount in building a safe and supportive environment for young players.

## Recruitment

A well-organised recruitment strategy helps to drive the long-term success of any girls' football programme. Clubs can focus on building a structured recruitment plan that includes scouting at local, national and international levels. By gathering and analysing scouting data and forming partnerships with local schools, clubs can expand their talent pool and ensure that promising young players have access to opportunities. Recruitment efforts provide a steady pipeline of talent, crucial for long-term player development.

## Care and Wellbeing

The wellbeing of players is just as important as their technical development. Providing players with appropriate housing, safeguarding procedures, educational support and mental health resources creates a nurturing environment where they can thrive. These efforts help clubs to build strong relationships with their players and contribute to a positive culture that promotes holistic development on and off the pitch.



## Performance

Performance development is a core component of a successful player pathway. Defining training programmes, nutrition plans and incorporating sports science are areas that clubs can focus on to maximise player potential. Real performance data and insights, when used effectively, help clubs to monitor progress and make informed adjustments to training plans. Preparing young players for the transition to professional football is another key focus, ensuring they are ready for the next stage of their careers.

## Coaching

Quality coaching is vital to the growth of young players, and having a clear coaching philosophy and methodology is essential. This includes ensuring that coaches are well trained and continue to develop professionally. A focus on gender balance in coaching roles also adds value to girls' and women's football programmes. Clubs can benefit from providing individual player coaching and specialised training, such as set-piece and goalkeeping coaching, to meet the diverse needs of players.

## Operations

Operational efficiency is important for any successful football programme. By providing players with the necessary kits, equipment and transportation, as well as clear communication on schedules, clubs can make sure that day-to-day activities run smoothly. Strong operations allow the coaching and performance staff to focus on player development while players can concentrate on their training and competitions without logistical distractions.



## COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

### Competitions and Scheduling

Participating in competitive matches is essential for player development. Domestic and international competitions, along with training camps and friendly matches, give players the opportunity to gain valuable experience. Clubs can evaluate the balance and structure of their competitions and scheduling, to ensure that players are regularly competing at a level that promotes growth.

A well-rounded competition and scheduling plan contributes to both individual player development and the overall success of the team.

### Facilities

Access to high-quality facilities is fundamental to creating an environment where players can develop effectively. Clubs can assess their training centres, stadiums and support facilities to ensure they meet the needs of their girls' programmes.

Dedicated training pitches, changing rooms, treatment areas and classrooms help to provide a professional setting for young athletes. Continuous investment in facilities demonstrates a club's commitment to the growth of girls' football.



## PATHWAY OUTCOME

### Professional Transition

A key area of focus for clubs is ensuring that players have a clear pathway from youth to senior football. By establishing structured progression plans, clubs can help to guide players as they transition from the academy to the first team.

Measuring academy KPIs and tracking players' professional and off-pitch career development helps clubs to maintain a sustainable model for advancing talent.

A focus on professional transition means that the players are prepared for the challenges of senior football.



## Using the Roadmap

This report offers a roadmap for advancing the girls' game in Europe by sharing insights and fostering club collaboration. Success is defined through the welfare of young female players and the strategic benefits to clubs. It ensures that emerging talent receives the necessary support to thrive and transition to first-team football. The report guides clubs in enhancing female youth development and demonstrates how these improvements can lead to more players reaching first-team status and driving overall club success.

CHAPTER	SUCCESS FACTORS	CONTEXT
CLUB STRUCTURE	<b>STRATEGY</b> <b>OPERATING MODEL</b>	A successful girls' football programme is built on a clear strategy and a solid operating model. The strategy aligns the club's values with its women's and girls' departments, defining team identity, football philosophy and local talent partnerships. The operating model ensures seamless integration with the broader club, establishing clear roles, responsibilities and budgets to support growth. Together, these components create a framework that drives the long-term success of the girls' football programme.
ATHLETE CARE	<b>MEDICAL</b> <b>CARE AND WELLBEING</b>	Athlete care integrates medical support with overall player wellbeing, prioritising the athlete as an individual. It goes beyond physical health to include mental wellness and personal growth. In girls' football, where care systems are often underdeveloped, a well-rounded approach is essential for players to succeed both on and off the field. Without this care, athletes are more vulnerable to burnout, injuries and mental health challenges.
ON-PITCH DEVELOPMENT	<b>COACHING</b> <b>PERFORMANCE</b>	On-pitch development refers to the structured process of enhancing a player's technical, tactical, physical and mental abilities through coaching and performance optimisation. It encompasses the creation of tailored training programmes, individualised development plans, and the use of performance data to monitor and improve player progress. This chapter focuses on two critical success factors — coaching and performance — which work together to contribute to providing a holistic approach to developing players ensuring they are well-prepared to transition to senior football. On-pitch development is essential for fostering talent, reducing injury risks and maximising player potential, contributing to the long-term success of both the individual and the club.
INFRASTRUCTURE	<b>OPERATIONS</b> <b>FACILITIES</b> <b>COMPETITIONS AND SCHEDULING</b>	To advance girls' football, addressing all infrastructural aspects is important. Efficient operations, such as managing kits, transportation and schedules, enable coaches and performance staff to focus on player development. A competition and scheduling plan with competitive matches and training camps is essential for player growth. Additionally, high-quality facilities — including training pitches, changing rooms and treatment areas — are fundamental for effective development.
PLAYER PATHWAY	<b>RECRUITMENT</b> <b>PROFESSIONAL TRANSITION</b>	Clubs establish structured plans to guide players from the academy to the first team, tracking their on-field performance and their off-pitch development. A clear professional transition ensures players are prepared for the challenges of senior-level football. To complement this, a well-organised recruitment strategy — focused on scouting locally, nationally and internationally — maintains a steady pipeline of talent ready to step into the professional game.

# CLUB CATEGORISATION

With the high degree of variance in the level of maturity of women's clubs across Europe, we have segmented the survey data to have a clearer understanding of trends and factors influencing clubs at different stages of their development. To achieve this, we structured a scoring system to evaluate the maturity and development of those clubs submitting data for the study.

This system considered multiple factors that contribute to the clubs' overall level of professionalisation. Each factor is weighted according to its importance in determining a club's maturity level, and the final score is used to classify each club into one of four categories:

-  **Advanced**
-  **Established**
-  **Developing**
-  **Emerging**

This categorisation enables the data to be segmented based on their league infrastructure, investment and level of performance.

## Scoring Criteria

**1 Country**  
*WEIGHTED 5X*

The market in which a club operates plays a significant role in its development due to significant variations in national investment in women's football, cultural attitudes and the competitive landscape.

**2 UEFA Club Coefficient**  
*WEIGHTED 4X*

The UEFA women's club coefficient provides an objective measure of a club's success in European competitions. A higher coefficient indicates consistent performance against other top European teams, reflecting the overall quality of the club.

**3 League Tier**  
*WEIGHTED 3X*

The league tier reflects the competitive level at which the club's women's team currently plays, with the standard of competition improving as teams move up the league structure. This increase in competitiveness correlates with better resources and enhances opportunities for player development.

**4 Club Status**  
*WEIGHTED 2X*

The operational status of a club — whether professional, semi-professional or amateur — is another critical indicator of the level of resourcing it can provide to the development of the women's game.

**5 Academy Age**  
*WEIGHTED 2X*

The maturity of the girls' youth system is an important factor in assessing its long-term commitment to talent development. Older academies tend to have more refined training programmes and more established pathways.

## Scoring Calculation and Category Assignment

**Total score =**

$$\begin{aligned} & (\text{COUNTRY SCORE } \times 5) + \\ & (\text{UEFA COEFFICIENT SCORE } \times 4) + \\ & (\text{LEAGUE TIER SCORE } \times 3) + \\ & (\text{CLUB STATUS } \times 2) + \\ & (\text{ACADEMY AGE SCORE } \times 2) + \end{aligned}$$



Based on the total score each club is assigned one of the following categories:

-  **Advanced Club**  
Clubs with high scores across all criteria with well-established and successful women's football programmes.
-  **Established Club**  
Clubs that are mature and competitive but have slightly less developed infrastructure or less success in European competitions.

-  **Developing Club**  
Clubs that are growing and have potential but still have significant areas in which to improve.

-  **Emerging Clubs**  
Clubs in the early stages of developing their women's and girls' football programmes or operating in markets with limited resources.

This scoring categorisation offers a structured foundation on which to analyse girls' youth system pathways and their place within the broader women's football landscape. This should allow in-depth analysis of the present state of the women's game and should also serve as a benchmark for tracking progress over time.

## DEVELOPMENT PHASES

Based on the data collected during the study, the girls' youth system development pathway has been categorised into three distinct phases: foundation, development and professionalisation. These phases reflect the specific needs and training focuses that players require at different stages of their development. By aligning data to these phases, clubs can more effectively assess their current setup and adjust their strategies accordingly.



# UNDERSTANDING THE MATURITY MATRIX

A maturity matrix is a framework designed to help clubs assess their current capabilities across various key development areas in the girls' youth system and identify opportunities for growth. Structured across four levels of maturity, from emerging youth systems through to those with more advanced practices, the maturity matrix outlines what all levels of professionalisation look like and provides guidance on how to progress through each stage.

## Key Components of the Maturity Matrix

### 1 Processes and operations

The matrix outlines the processes and operational structures that should be in place for effective player development. At the lower stages, it focuses on establishing basic protocols and systems that should be seen as a minimum standard when setting up a girls' youth system. As clubs progress through the matrix, they are encouraged to build upon these foundations by adopting more specialised operations.

### 2 KPIs (key performance indicators)

The matrix also provides some suggested KPIs that clubs can use to measure their progress and the effectiveness of their programmes. By utilising KPIs, clubs can make sure they first measure what is paramount and that they are progressing towards their goals.

### 3 Recommendations

Each stage of the matrix includes recommendations that guide clubs towards the next level of maturity. These recommendations serve as practical steps in helping clubs to implement new systems, adopt new technologies or invest in staff and their development. The matrix encourages a continuous cycle of improvement by offering clear pathways for clubs to move from one level to the next.

## How to Use the Maturity Matrix

### ▶ Assess Current Practices

Alongside the maturity matrix, this report provides a series of questions clubs can ask themselves to evaluate their current processes and operations against the defined standards. This allows them to uncover the areas they are excelling in and to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

### ▶ Track Progress

By monitoring the KPIs outlined in the matrix, clubs can track their performance over time and measure their success in the key areas in each department.

### ▶ Implement Recommendations

The recommendations provided at each stage help guide clubs through the necessary steps to progress.

The maturity matrix is more than just an evaluation tool — it is a strategic framework for driving continuous improvement across all departments in girls' youth systems. By following the matrix, clubs can firstly ensure they meet a set of minimum standards while also pushing towards innovative and advanced practices, improving performance and ultimately advancing the overall health of the girl's youth pathway in European football.



# **BUILDING THE FUTURE OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL**

Develop Homegrown Talent	46
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The Advantages of Developing a  
Structured Talent Pathway for Girls

# 1

## Develop Homegrown Talent to Strengthen Senior Teams and Reduce Recruitment Costs

One of the most significant benefits of creating a structured girls' talent pathway is its ability to produce homegrown players who can strengthen the club's senior women's team. By investing in youth development programmes for girls, clubs can establish a system where young athletes are given the tools, coaching and support necessary to develop into professional-level players. These programmes ensure that girls receive proper technical, tactical and physical training from an early age while also fostering their personal growth and understanding of the game. Nurturing young talent through a club's academy provides a clear progression route from grassroots to senior football, meaning players are not only technically proficient but also ingrained with the club's culture, style of play and core values.

A well-structured player development pathway enables clubs to significantly

reduce their dependence on the growing cost of external recruitment and transfers. It is evident that the transfer market in the women's game will continue to grow, leading to more costly transfers. Rather than solely allocating substantial resources to acquire players from other clubs or regions, clubs can focus on nurturing talent from within. This internal approach builds a pipeline of skilled players who are aligned with the club's culture, playing style and values, while minimising the financial risks and uncertainties associated with external scouting and recruitment. Beyond the immediate savings, investing in a girls' player pathway could create long-term revenue opportunities. As a hub for talent development, clubs can capitalise on their academy's success by negotiating transfer fees for players as the women's player trading market continues to expand, therefore getting ahead of the curve.

**“ This analysis can be a guideline to improve the overall level and standards. If we want to continue to grow and create a sustainable ecosystem, it is crucial that we offer our young girls the best professional and dedicated support possible. ”**



**Katrien Jans**  
Women's Football Manager,  
Royal Belgian Football Association



## 2 Support the Club to Become More Competitive in Domestic and International Tournaments

As the standard of women's football improves globally, competition between clubs is becoming increasingly fierce. Those that develop a strong girls' football programme now will be better positioned to compete in domestic and international competitions in the future.

A well-organised girls' academy can significantly strengthen a club's prospects in competitions by producing highly skilled players who understand the club's culture and style of play. The majority of clubs that are successful in the UEFA

Women's Champions League have youth structures in place.

The potential for international success is a key sporting reason for clubs to invest in girls' football. As women's football continues to gain prominence on the global stage, European clubs with well-established girls' programmes will be able to attract top players and compete for the most prestigious titles.

A strong foundation in youth development will ensure that clubs remain competitive in both domestic leagues and international tournaments.

**“Developing players who are trained within your club's game model and style of play is invaluable. It ensures they possess the technical skills and tactical understanding to make a smooth transition to the first team.”**



**Charlotte O'Neill**  
Managing Director,  
Manchester City Women



### 3 Increase Participation and Strengthen Community Bonds by Demonstrating a Clear Player Pathway Within the Club

Investing in girls' football goes beyond enhancing performance on the pitch. It serves as a requisite tool for increasing participation, expanding the player pool and developing deeper connections with the local community.

By creating a direct and accessible pathway for girls to progress from grassroots level through to senior teams, clubs can encourage more young players to engage with the sport, providing them with the opportunity to pursue football in a structured and supportive environment.

A well-defined player pathway demonstrates to aspiring athletes that there is a roadmap for development and helps them to envisage a future within that club.

A structured girls' talent pathway not only benefits on-pitch performance but also has a significant impact off the pitch. It offers young girls the opportunity to stay involved in the game as coaches, analysts or referees. When girls' and women's football is integrated into the club's wider structure, it fosters a shared identity across men's and women's teams. This alignment promotes a stronger sense of community and loyalty among players, staff and supporters. It also enhances coaching quality because coaches and trainers can work across both teams, sharing leading practices and elevating standards throughout the club.

Clubs can promote diversity and inclusivity within the sport by making football accessible and providing clear pathways for girls to progress. Reaching out to girls from all backgrounds and offering them a place in the club's

structure helps to create a more diverse player pool and encourages broader community involvement. This diversity strengthens the club's identity and reputation, demonstrating its commitment to equality and growth.

Additionally, when a club invests in girls' football, it has the opportunity to strengthen its ties to the community. Offering local youth programmes can create a sense of pride from within the community, helping to build a stronger fanbase for the women's team and, by extension, the club as a whole.

Community engagement activities such as hosting training camps, matches or events for young players further develop these bonds, ensuring the club remains a pillar of the local sporting culture.



**“Whether girls begin at youth academy level or join through local programmes, seeing a progression to higher levels builds a sense of belonging and ambition. This motivates players to stay engaged and committed, knowing they have the potential to grow within the youth system and perhaps reach senior women’s football, and become future role models.”**



**Kirsten van de Ven**  
Technical Director,  
Elitfotboll Dam

# CLUB STRUCTURE

Success factors **Strategy, Operating Model**

In the realm of European football, the strategic vision and operational framework for girls' football serve as the bedrock for success across the environment. When clubs implement a strong structure, clear vision and well-defined strategies, it creates an environment where every aspect of the player pathway can flourish. This chapter explores the components of club strategy and operational models, and the findings not only showcase leading practices but also shed light on the significant challenges clubs encounter in advancing and supporting girls' football.

## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

**A** robust strategic vision is essential for the success of girls' football within any club. This analysis reveals several leading practices that clubs are implementing to ensure their girls' football programmes are well-integrated and prioritised within the overall club structure.

For girls' football to truly thrive, it's vital that key decision-makers for women's and

girls' programmes are included in the club's senior leadership. This allows the club to function as a cohesive unit with independent decision-making power. By doing so, the voices of those involved in girls' football are amplified at the highest levels of management, resulting in alignment with the club's overall strategy while effectively addressing the unique needs of the women's game.





**A**t the same time, it's crucial for decision-makers to have the autonomy to manage the women's and girls' programmes independently. This independence means they can concentrate on the growth and development of

these programmes without being overshadowed by the men's and boys' initiatives. This dual approach not only aligns with the club's broader objectives, but also ensures that women's football receives the dedicated attention it needs.



### FC Bayern München

FC Bayern München Frauen has become increasingly integrated with the club. Bayern München has relied on key figures such as current Women's Football Director and former player Bianca Rech, who has worked in various roles over the years to help grow and develop a strategy on the women's side, which has led to even greater success in the past decade.

In 2019, a new strategy was put in place by then-manager Karin Danner, who spent almost 30 years at the club. The ambition was to make the club more successful in both the Frauen-Bundesliga and in Europe, as well as further shaping their youth development setup.

From 1 July 2024, the women's football department started reporting directly to the board member for sports, having further access to resources to become more successful on and off the pitch in the future.

**D**eveloping a strong and distinct identity for the women's and girls' programmes is vital for their success. This involves crafting a brand that resonates specifically with the women's game, setting the club apart from both local and international competitors. A clear and compelling brand identity enhances visibility, attracts talent and fosters a loyal fanbase, all of

which are essential for the long-term success of the programme.

A consistent brand identity, visible across all facets of the club — from marketing materials to matchday experiences — reinforces the club's commitment to its women's and girls' programmes. This consistency is vital for establishing a strong presence in the football community and beyond.



**“ It’s important to have the men’s side of the club to benefit from all that experience, and many things can be adopted for our own activities. At the same time, it is crucial to have the autonomy to develop the girls’ and women’s sides in such a way that all conditions are tailored specifically to girls and women. ”**



**Katrien Jans**  
Women's Football Manager,  
Royal Belgian Football Association



## NWSL

In the United States, the **National Women's Soccer League (NWSL)** operates under distinct brands; either as dedicated women's football teams, or with the same ownership operating women's and men's teams.

Unlike many European football models, where women's teams are often viewed as extensions of the men's clubs, and share resources, NWSL teams are independent, with their own identity, marketing and organisational structures. This approach allows the women's teams to create unique identities, appealing directly to their fan bases and sponsors, and for the clubs to be run as a business with women's football as their product and core value.

Even when an NWSL team

shares the same ownership with a men's team — like the Orlando Pride (MLS's Orlando City SC) and Houston Dash (MLS's Houston Dynamo) — the women's teams operate under distinct brands, with logos and merchandise that are separate from the men's side. This independence extends to the staffing structure, where teams have their own leadership in place for business and sporting operations, typically reporting directly to the ownership or a board, and never through or under the men's club hierarchy.

Each women's organisation sets its own **business and sporting objectives**, often with a focus on building a strong and distinct fan base, an attractive fan experience at home matches with a close link to their local communities,

commercial partners and achieving success on the field, with a player-centric and player-first focus. This autonomy allows them to tailor sponsorship deals, fan engagement strategies and community outreach programmes to their specific needs and audience, giving them greater control over their brand narrative, and how they present themselves in the marketplace.

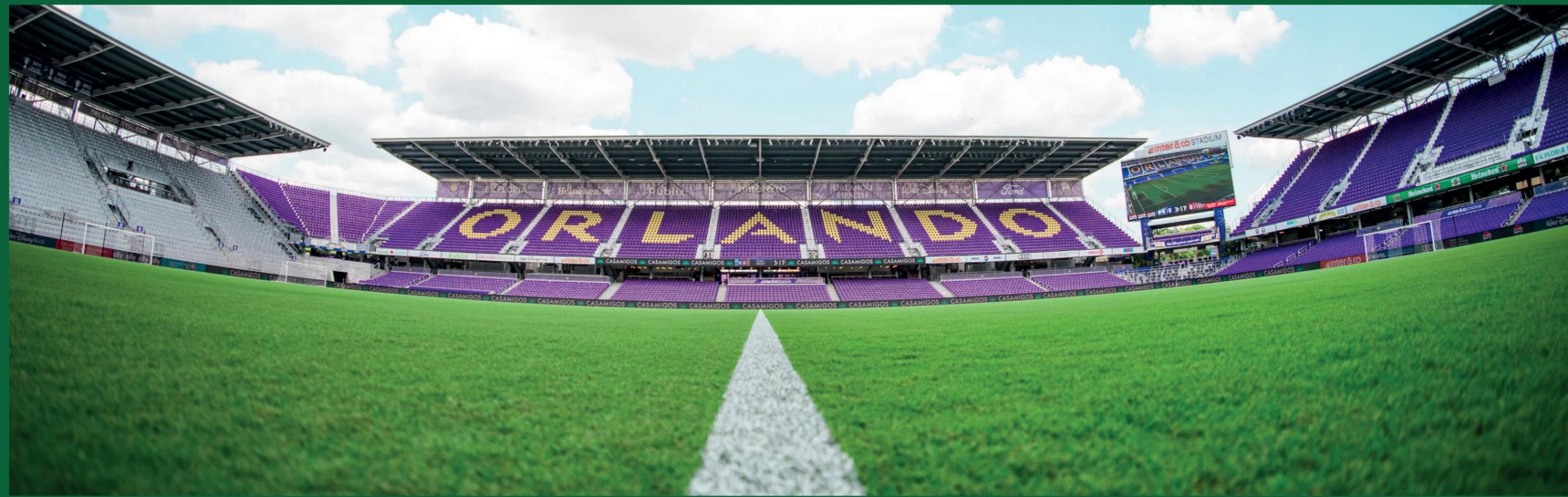
Furthermore, this model fosters **growth opportunities** specific to the women's sports ecosystem, where they can create pathways for women in coaching, administration and executive roles.

In contrast to traditional shared European club structure models where women's sports are often seen as secondary, the NWSL's independent structures allow these organisations to prioritise their own

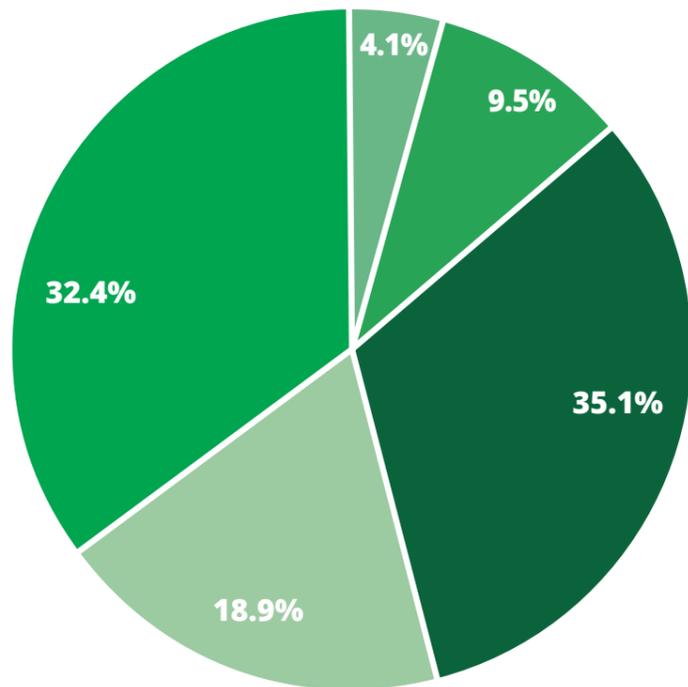
development and the growth of their leagues, helping to elevate women's sports on a larger scale. The league has a long-term strategy, and all efforts are put in place to grow each club's financial success.

By maintaining a distinct separation from men's football these teams position themselves as **independent entities**, which helps build recognition for women's sports, and enables them to develop sustainable business models, fan bases and a long-term future in professional sports.

This structural separation gives women's teams a women's football-specific environment and knowhow, as well as greater **autonomy and flexibility** to pursue growth strategies specifically tailored to the women's game.



Strategic plans for girls' youth system

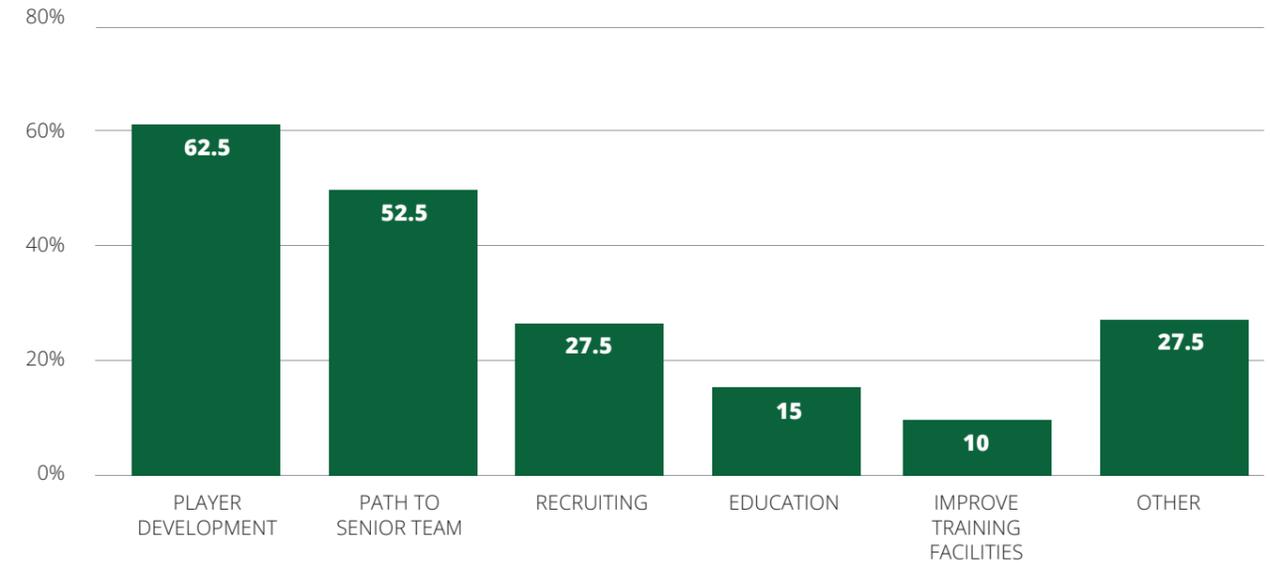


A majority (67.6%) of clubs have a written strategic plan, including 54% who plan for three years or more, demonstrating high-level consideration of long-term plans. This helps them to have a clear and shared direction with defined goals, actions and strategic priorities.

- None
- One-year plan
- Two-year plan
- Three-year plan
- Four-year plan

Within strategic plans, player development (62.5%) and pathways to the senior team (52.5%) are overwhelmingly the most common objectives mentioned by the majority of clubs.

Key actions or goals present in clubs' strategic plans



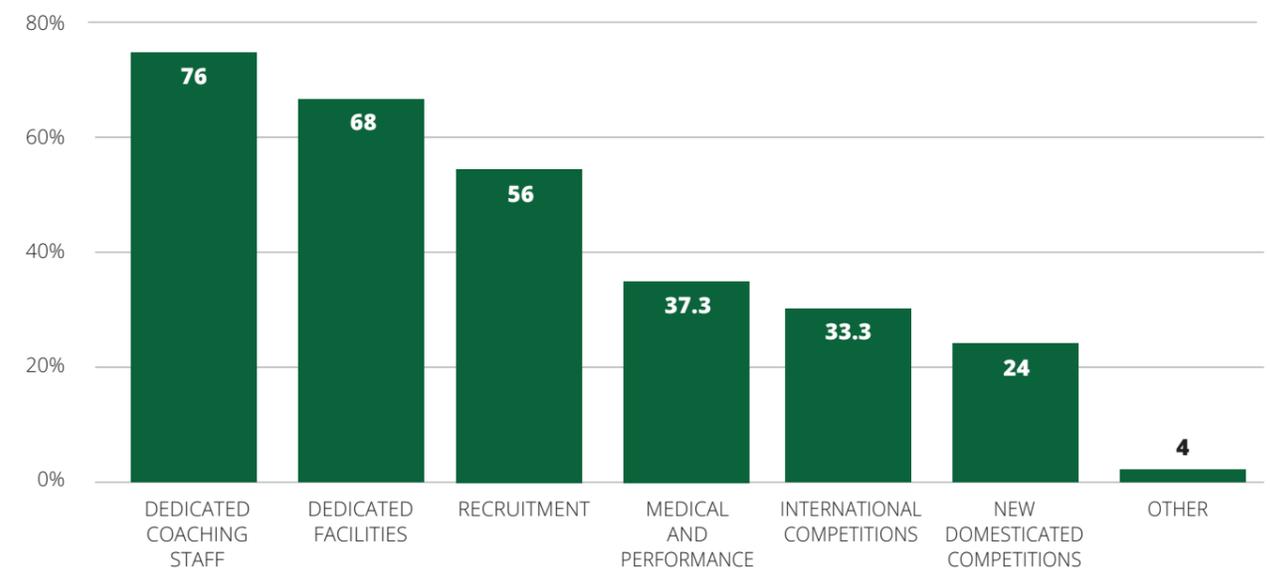
Legia Ladies

With the ambitious goal of elevating the status of Polish and eastern European women's football, Legia Ladies is approaching the women's football at the club by building a strong marketing foundation for women's football while also breaking stereotypes and championing the empowerment of women in sports. The club's core mission extends beyond just winning matches or generating revenue. The focus is on women's empowerment and the need to create a distinctive identity that resonates with a new and diverse audience. While rooted in Legia Warszawa's DNA, the women's team is building its own community and visual presence (for example through collaborations with TikTok and Klarna), designed to attract fans who may not have previously engaged with women's football.



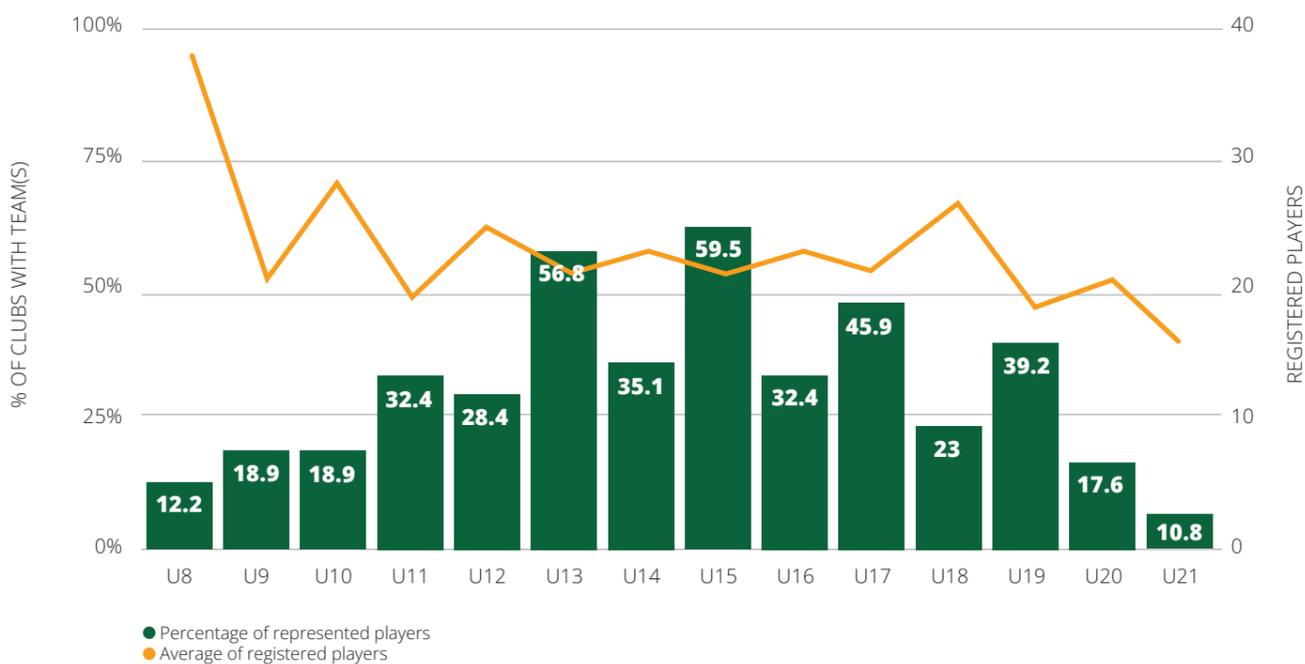
At the same time, the club is focused on developing talent from the local areas, creating opportunities for players to grow and succeed within a professional environment. With the backing of Legia Warszawa, whose commitments are reflected in the sharing of training facilities and match venues, Legia Ladies is laying the groundwork for becoming a significant force in the sport.

Key priorities to develop girls' youth system environment

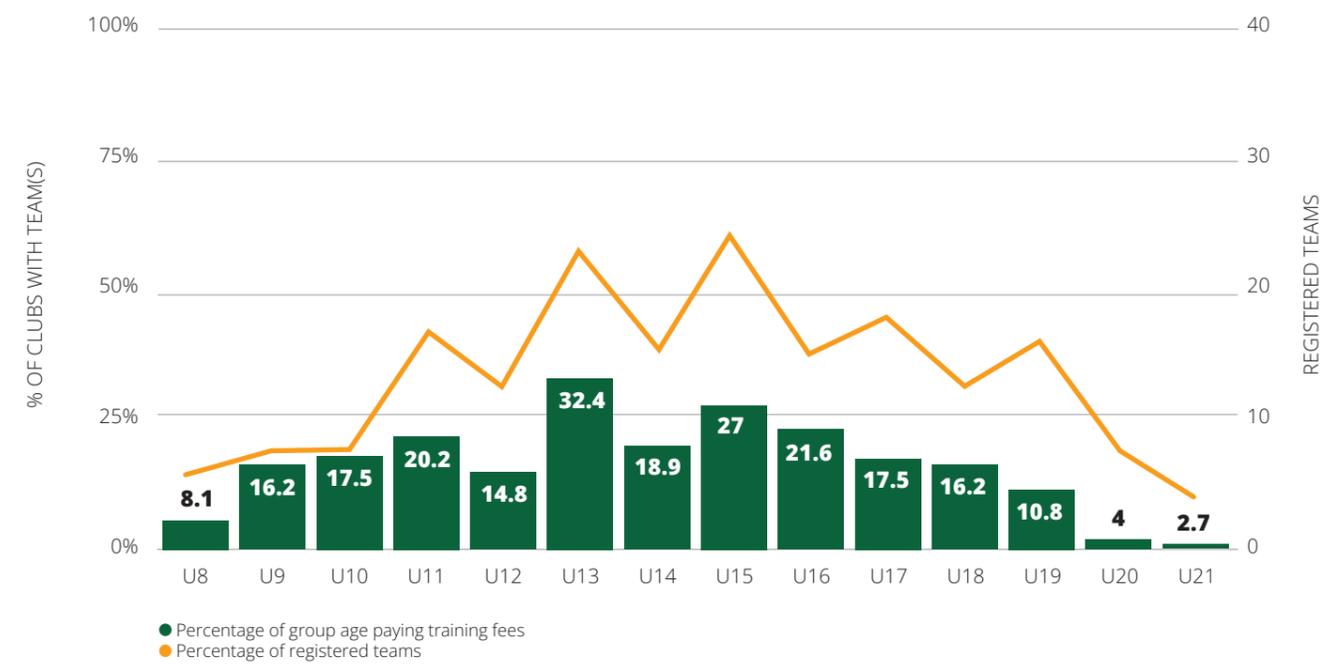


Dedicated facilities and coaching staff are the top strategic priorities for clubs' girls' youth systems.

### Age group representation in the girls' youth system



### Age group paying training fees



One of the key strategic decisions in a youth system is determining which age groups to include and how many teams and players to develop within the club. This decision varies by club and is influenced by factors such as the number of girls participating in the sport, available resources and the average

age of the first team. An analysis of girls' youth systems shows that only a few clubs field very young teams (U8 to U10) during the foundation phase of their academies. This is likely to be due to low participation rates among girls in these age groups in many countries, making it challenging for clubs to attract players at this early stage.

During the development of youth systems, finding additional funding and financial resources is a common challenge. According to the survey, 51.7% of clubs charge an annual fee for girls to register and participate in training and matches. This strategic approach often includes various benefits within the fee, such as club membership, discounted rates and stadium tickets. This helps to generate revenue for the clubs and also ensures that young girls receive a high standard of services.

**Average annual fee charged in the girls' youth system to train**  
of clubs that charge a fee

**€396.29**



## KEY CHALLENGES

Despite the leading practices outlined, clubs encounter significant challenges in fully realising the potential of their girls' football programmes. The research highlights several key obstacles that must be addressed.



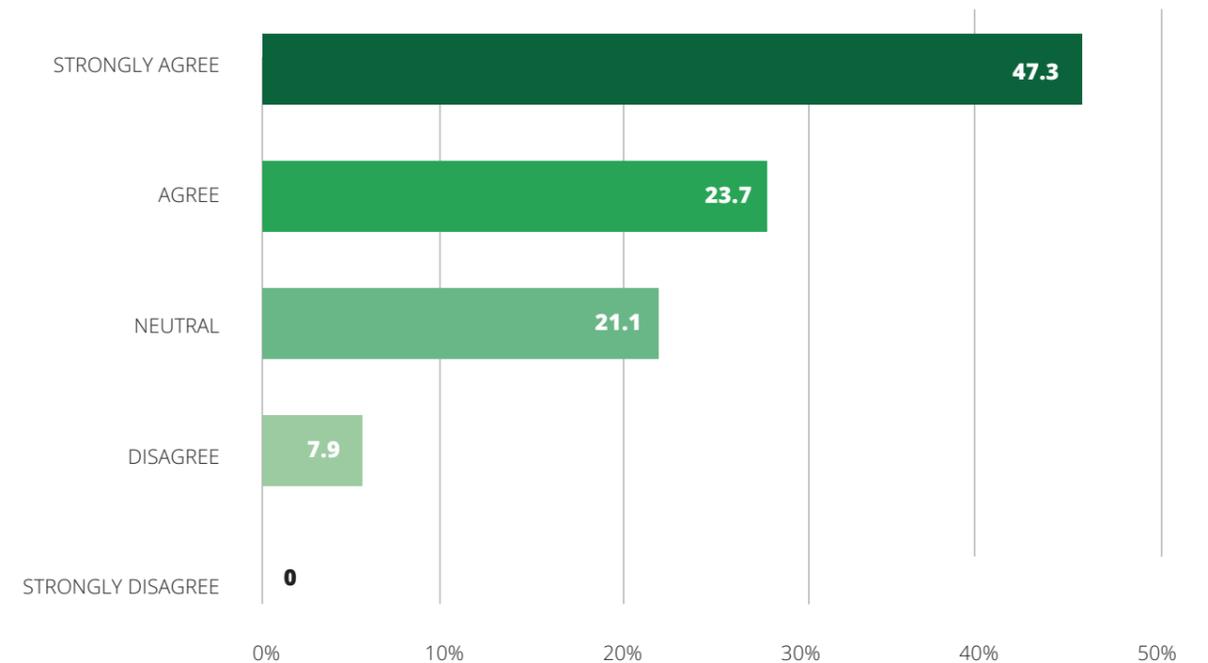
### Setting a Clear Vision and Football Philosophy

A large majority of clubs agree that having a clear vision and football philosophy is crucial within the girls' youth system. This philosophy can be used as a framework for all aspects of player development, from coaching methodologies to the structure of the competitions and scheduling. While clubs have made significant progress in clearly defining a football philosophy and vision for the girls' youth system, the key challenge lies in coupling this with a clear style of play and team identity across the various stages of the girls' pathway.

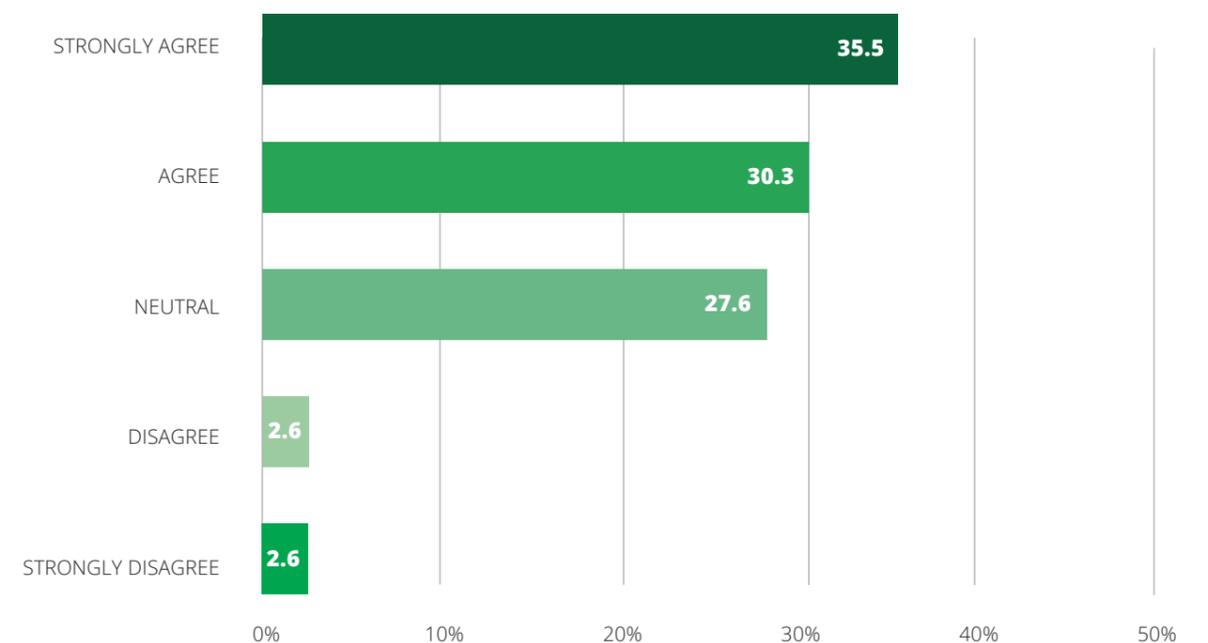
Although the majority (69.8%) of clubs surveyed have a clearly defined football philosophy and vision in place, balancing the need for a consistent football identity while developing well-rounded players with strong fundamental technical abilities is often complex. Developing adaptable players who can meet the demands of the professional game requires careful consideration of how to apply the club philosophy at each stage of the pathway.

A large majority of clubs agree (or strongly agree) that the club's vision and football philosophy are clearly defined in the girls' youth system.

The girls' youth system has a clearly defined football philosophy and vision



The football philosophy includes a clear style of play for women's and girls' football



**“ Successful women’s football clubs thrive when their strategies are rooted in distinct identities yet synergised with the broader organisational vision. True empowerment emerges when the women’s department is a vital entity in its own right. ”**



**Erik van Spanje**  
Former Head of Strategy,  
AFC Ajax

## Ensuring Club Organisational Buy-in

One of the primary challenges is ensuring that the operational model of the girls’ academy is aligned with the broader club strategy. This alignment is key for securing the necessary resources and support from the club’s senior leadership. Without it, the girls’ programme may struggle to gain the organisational buy-in needed to prosper and achieve its objectives.

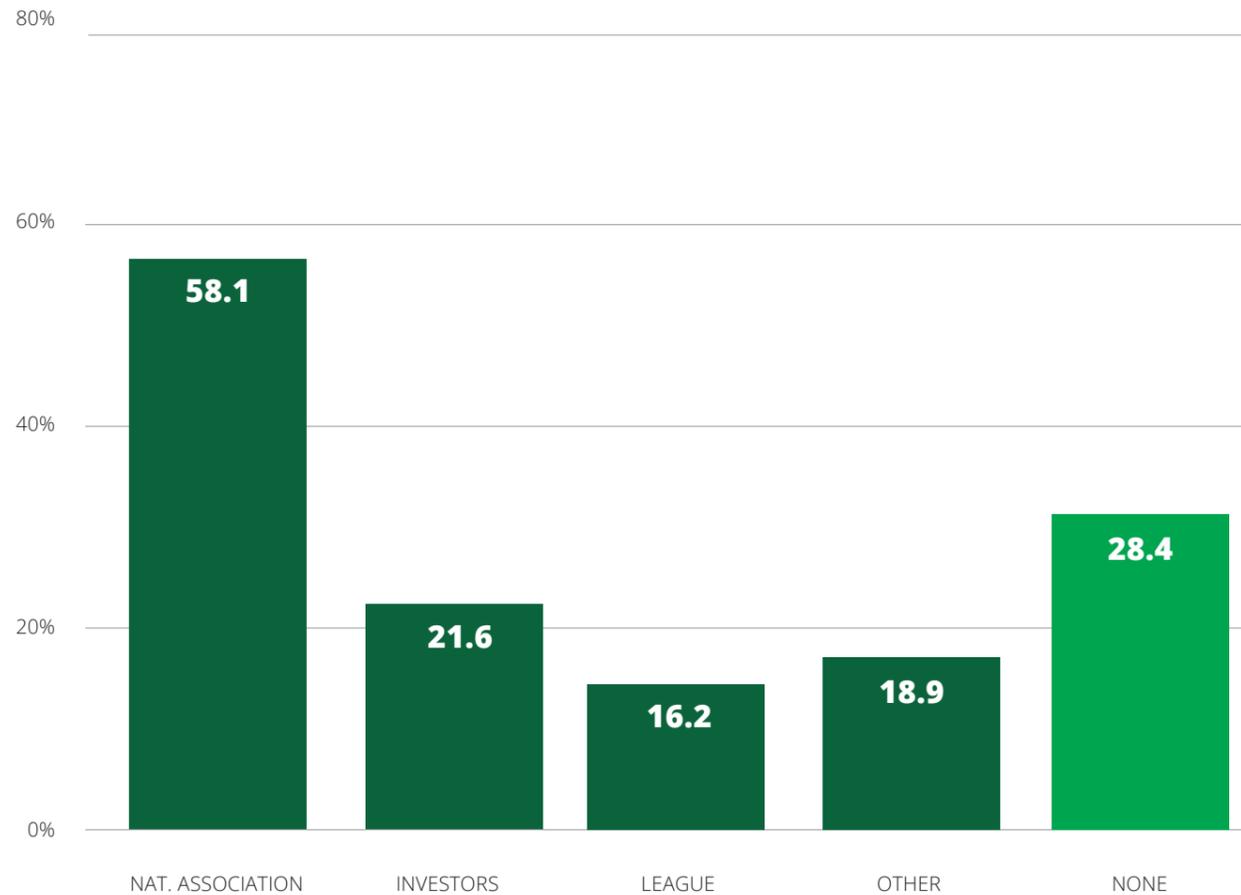
Ensuring that resource allocation supports the primary objectives of women’s and girls’ football is another fundamental challenge. Clubs must balance the needs of the women’s and girls’ programmes with those of the men’s and boys’ programmes, ensuring

the former receive adequate resources to develop and succeed. When resources to build a dedicated women’s and girls’ football area are not sufficient from a financial and human capital perspective, clubs need to analyse the different necessities the women’s department might require and accordingly develop synergies with existing capabilities to satisfy the demand.

Strong collaboration and smooth communication procedures across different departments and areas of the club can be extremely beneficial for pursuing club-level strategic goals, with no difference between men’s and women’s departments.



### Clubs' source for funding and subsidies



### Securing Club Financial Buy-in

Adequate funding is the lifeblood of any successful football programme and girls' football is no exception. One of the major challenges facing clubs is securing a sustained financial commitment to the women's and girls' programmes. This involves not only maintaining sufficient funding but also balancing the financial demands between the first team and the academy.

Clubs must be strategic in how they allocate their financial resources. This requires careful budgeting to ensure that the immediate and long-term needs are met. Investment in the girls' academy is particularly important, as it lays the

groundwork for the future success of the women's first team.

The majority of clubs (69%) indicated that the budget for women's football has increased over the past three years. Of those, 21% of the clubs remained consistent, and 9% experienced a budget decrease.

In addition to the budgets clubs provide to grow the girls' youth system, some receive funding/subsidies from external organisations as well.

Growing the quality and participation of the game on a national level will be the association's main motivation to support clubs.

### Establishing a Footballing Identity

Another significant challenge is establishing a consistent footballing philosophy that permeates all levels of the club, from the youth teams to the first team. This philosophy should align with the club's core values while also adapting to the specific demands of the women's and girls' game. To this extent, it is critical that all the people committed to the organisational structures of the different departments are involved and engaged in the process of transmitting club values. The strategy, the vision and the club's principles should be shared with

everyone within the club to enable them to pass on this philosophy to players and other people. Regular meetings with department leads and team staff and cross-functional meetings can help clubs to establish a consistent philosophy and create alignment with common goals.

Clubs must find a balance between achieving short-term success and focusing on long-term player development. This is particularly challenging in the context of girls' football, where the pressure to produce immediate results can sometimes overshadow the importance of nurturing young talent for the future.



## Talent Development Strategy and Club Partnerships

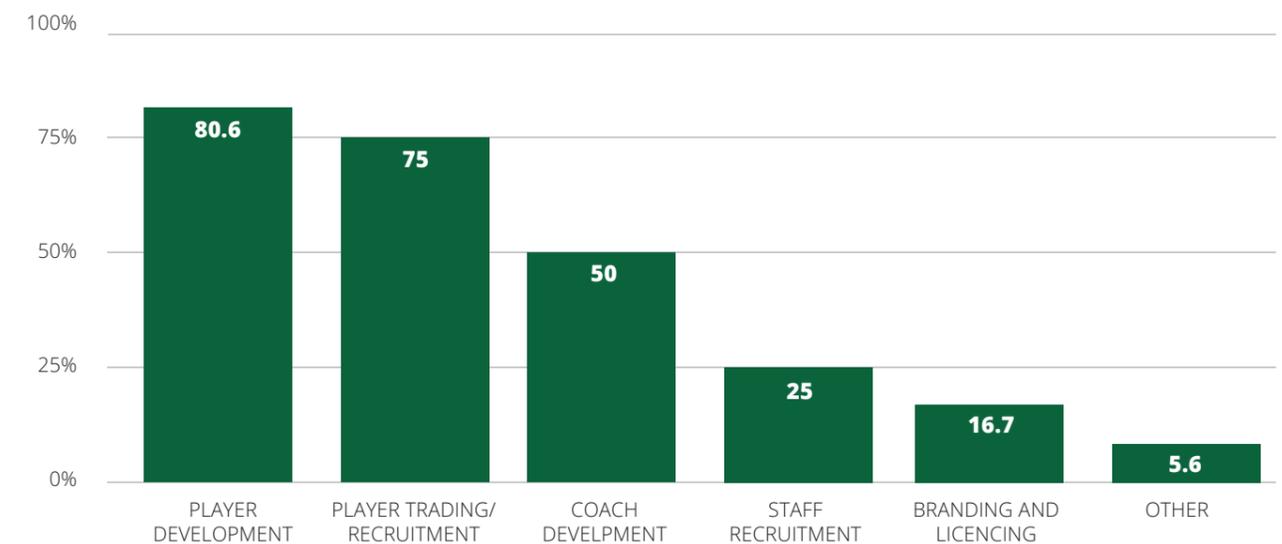
Effective talent development is central to the success of girls' football, and club partnerships can play a crucial role in this process. They can enable clubs to broaden their talent pool and enhance the knowledge exchange that can be beneficial for the entire women's and girls' football ecosystem. The research sheds light on how clubs are leveraging partnerships to enhance their talent development strategies.

The research indicates that a significant number of clubs (53%) do not have any partnerships with other clubs, which represents a missed opportunity for enhancing player development.

Partnerships can be instrumental in providing additional resources, expertise and opportunities for players to develop their skills in different environments.

A primary reason for clubs to partner with other clubs is to develop playing and coaching talent. Among the clubs that do have partnerships, the primary focus is on player development, with an emphasis on trading and recruitment. Local partnerships are the most common, followed by regional, national and, to a lesser extent, international partnerships. These collaborations can be valuable for accessing broader talent pools and sharing leading practices in youth development.

### Purpose of the partnership formed



### HB Køge

HB Køge has leveraged the extensive network provided by their owner, Capelli Sport, to enhance collaboration and knowledge exchange with clubs from diverse countries and backgrounds.

Clubs within the Capelli Sport umbrella regularly share coaching strategies and on-pitch training methodologies. They also participate in monthly meetings featuring keynote speakers who cover topics such as mental health, female athlete development, data analysis, medical practices and player load management. These initiatives foster meaningful discussions and drive growth across all the clubs involved.



### Club Atlético de Madrid

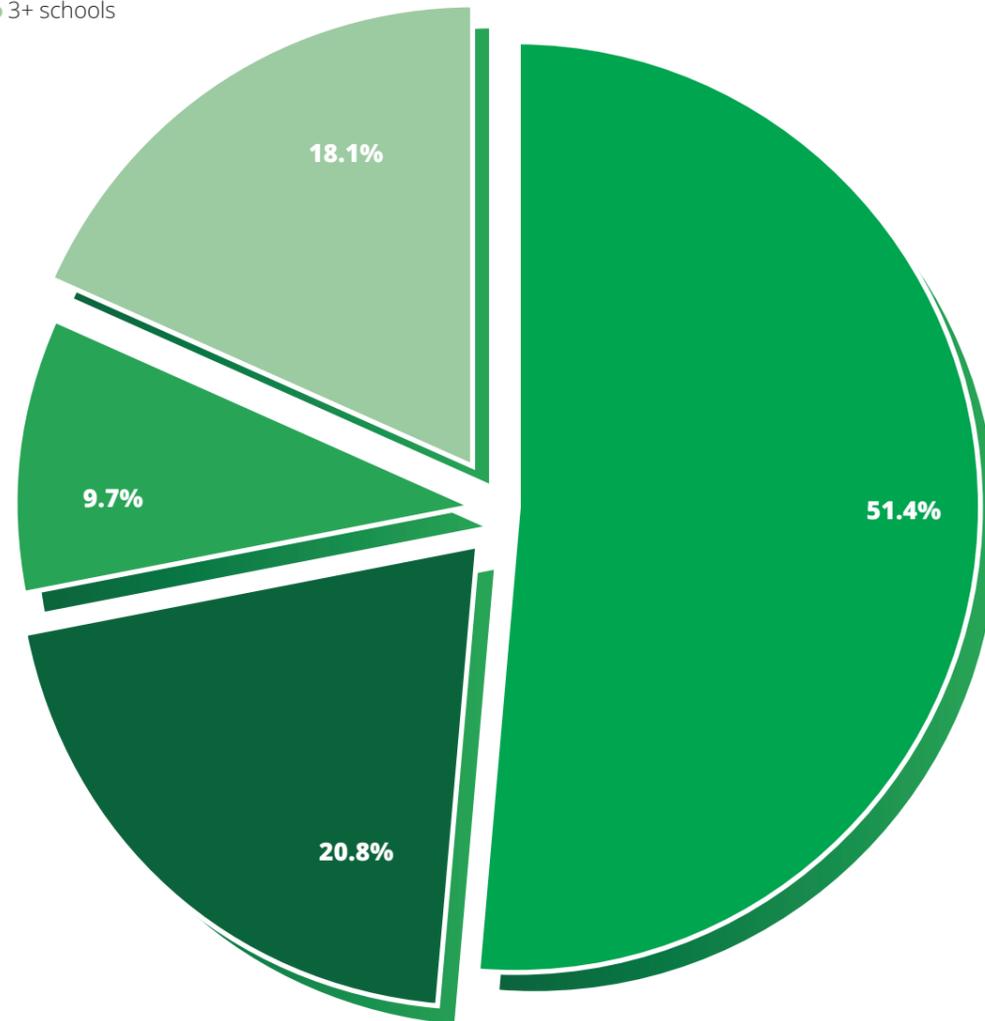
Club Atlético de Madrid's youth system is a key strategic pillar for the club's development and its international expansion efforts. In the Madrid area alone, the club operates 15 technical centres (*escuelas de tecnificación*), which serve as partner clubs. Through these, Atlético shares its coaching expertise, aiming to improve training methodologies and player development pathways, having an impact on more than 1,000 young players.

On a broader scale, the club considers several strategic factors when expanding internationally. The goal is to become a trusted partner by sharing its football vision and management model, enhancing the skills of local staff, supporting holistic player development and contributing to the growth of local football communities.



Partnership with schools

- No partnership
- 1 school
- 2 schools
- 3+ schools



**D**espite the importance of school partnerships in increasing girls' participation and identifying talent, the research reveals that the majority of clubs currently lack such partnerships. This absence of school collaborations may limit clubs' ability to engage with and develop young female players effectively. Establishing strong

relationships with schools could help clubs tap into new talent and foster a deeper connection with the local community. Educational programmes and recreational and sporting activities delivered together with schools can enhance youth players' participation in the game and strengthen the position the club has locally.



**SFK 2000 Sarajevo**

Since its inception, SFK 2000 Sarajevo's mission has been to develop local players. However, the number of young girls approaching and engaging with the game is not always at a desirable level, enormously reducing the pool of talents.

To overcome this challenge, the club has established several



partnerships with local schools. They collaborate in the creation of sporting activities to enhance the participation of young girls from the youngest ages (6 to 10 years old). They organise tournaments, send coaches and engage with girls in recreational activities to help them bond with the club and the game.



**Malmö FF**

One of Malmö FF's standout features is its commitment to ensuring that all the players receive the best academic education possible.

The club collaborates closely with the local education system and has developed strong partnerships with 18 local schools within a one-hour radius, providing 75 coaches across a range of age groups,

and players with a seamless education pathway that complements their football development. This network of partner schools expands the reach of the club, enabling them to provide high-quality education alongside dedicated football-specific resources such as coaching and equipment to girls outside its immediate area.



## Internal Organisational Buy-in and Structure

The integration of girls' football within a club's organisational structure is integral to its success. The research highlights several key findings related to how clubs structure their women's and girls' programmes.

The majority of clubs have integrated women's football into their overall organisational structure, with **88%** reporting that their women's and girls' departments have defined organisational

charts. This integration means the women's and girls' programmes are aligned with the club's broader goals and objectives. Defined roles and responsibilities are essential. The research shows that most clubs have established clear communication channels and role definitions within their women's and girls' departments, which ensures accountability and effective management.



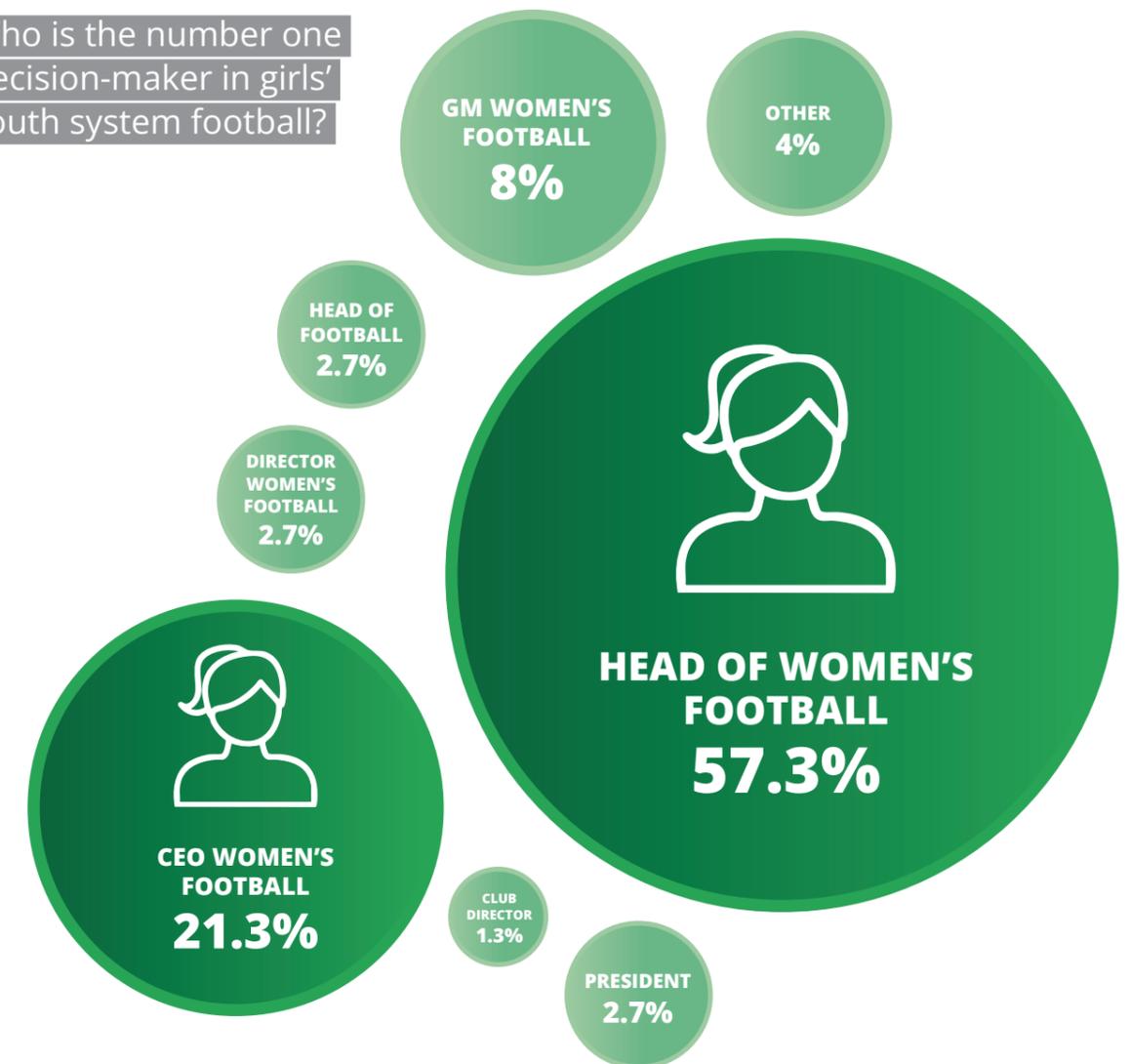
## Decision-making and Leadership

The Head of Women's Football is typically the main decision-maker for women's and girls' programmes within clubs. The role is crucial to ensure the needs and priorities of the women's game are represented at the highest levels of the club. The research indicates that clubs recognise the importance of this role in driving the success of their girls' football programmes.

Strong collaboration between the women's first team and youth staff is recognised as a key factor in the success of girls' football programmes.

This collaboration further helps to guarantee that the club's footballing philosophy and strategic vision are consistently applied across all levels, from youth development up to the first team.

Who is the number one decision-maker in girls' youth system football?



## Commitment to Women's Football

The research highlights a strong commitment among clubs to investing in women's football. This commitment is reflected in the significant financial and organisational resources that clubs are allocating to their women's and girls' programmes. Clubs demonstrate a strong

commitment to the development of girls' players, recognising that nurturing young talent is pivotal for the future success of their women's first team. This commitment is reflected by the emphasis on player development in the club's strategic planning and resource allocation.



**“ We now have a significant opportunity to establish a women's identity in football that is as strong and independent as that of the men's teams. Women's teams possess their own unique character and narrative. It is our responsibility as clubs to cultivate and define this distinct identity, to create a vibrant, inspirational and empowering environment. ”**



**Amanda Moura Pietrzak**  
COO,  
Legia Ladies

## INTERNAL CLUB ASSESSMENT

The strategic vision and operating model of a club are fundamental to the success of its girls' football programme. By addressing the challenges of organisational and financial buy-in, and by fostering a strong footballing identity and partnerships, clubs can create an environment that supports the development and elevation of young female talent.

This chapter emphasises the need for clear, consistent strategies that align with broader club goals while providing the necessary autonomy and resources to women's and girls' football.

The insights provided within this chapter serve as a guide for clubs looking to enhance their girls' football programmes, offering practical strategies and considerations for overcoming the challenges that they may face.

By implementing these leading practices and addressing the identified challenges, clubs can play a pivotal role in the continued growth and success of the women's game across Europe.



Overleaf  
**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Club structure**



**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Club Structure**

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
DESCRIPTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clubs are starting their journey in women's football. Their efforts, though in the early stages, are driven by enthusiasm and passion for developing the game. While strategies may still be forming, these clubs have a foundation from which they can build towards future success.</li> <li>Organisational structures are taking shape, providing a foundation to expand and refine roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>Women's football is present within the club, with growing interest and a focus on creating more opportunities to support its growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clubs are moving forward with more focus and intention. They have begun to formalise key strategies and are steadily building on their early efforts, showing clear progress in areas of structure and support.</li> <li>Organisational structures are evolving, with clearer roles and a focus on streamlining operations for increased effectiveness.</li> <li>Resource allocation for women's football is becoming more strategic, allowing for continued growth and support of key initiatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Solidified strategies support clubs actively working towards their goals. Their approach is structured and they consistently achieve key success factors, demonstrating a clear commitment to advancing women's football.</li> <li>Well-defined organisational structures, with strong communication and collaboration across departments, ensure smooth operations and accountability.</li> <li>Strategic budget management is in place, with dedicated resources for women's football, allowing for targeted investments that foster development and growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These clubs are seen as leaders in women's football, setting the bar for excellence. They operate with highly sophisticated strategies and are at the forefront of innovation, consistently exceeding expectations and contributing to the game's advancement.</li> <li>Their structures are finely tuned to support women's football, with streamlined processes and exceptional resource allocation.</li> <li>Women's football is fully integrated into the club, with robust support from leadership, and financial management drives continuous innovation and long-term success.</li> </ul>
STRATEGY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At this stage, the club is starting to define its identity, focusing on establishing core values that will shape its future.</li> <li>Efforts to clarify the direction of development are under way, doing the groundwork for a football vision to guide women's football growth.</li> <li>Early steps in community outreach are being made, with initial interactions beginning to form connections with local schools, fans and organisations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A clearer sense of identity is forming, with the club DNA becoming more defined and aligned with women's football objectives.</li> <li>The football vision is gaining focus, providing a clearer framework for decision-making and goal setting in the women's football programme.</li> <li>Community engagement is evolving, with projects such as player clinics and school outreach beginning to strengthen relationships and build support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Club DNA is now well established, influencing decisions and behaviours across the women's programme, and providing consistency/direction.</li> <li>A clearly articulated football vision drives the club's strategy, ensuring alignment between its long-term goals and daily operations.</li> <li>Strong community engagement programmes are in place, making the club a recognised and positive presence in the local community with measurable impacts on support and participation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly respected for its strong and influential club DNA, the organisation serves as a model for others in both women's and broader football.</li> <li>The football vision is cutting-edge and innovative, setting trends and driving progress across the wider football landscape.</li> <li>Extensive and impactful community outreach programmes address key social issues while contributing significantly to the development of women's football at all levels.</li> </ul>
OPERATING MODEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The club is beginning to recognise the importance of defining clear roles and responsibilities for women's football, with early steps being taken to bring more structure.</li> <li>Women's football operates with growing independence as early efforts to foster communication and collaboration with other departments start to take shape.</li> <li>Women's football dedicated budget is modest, but there is an emerging focus on stabilising resources to support future development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearer roles and responsibilities are being established for women's football, resulting in improved coordination and accountability within the department.</li> <li>Collaboration between women's football and other departments is increasing, leading to more alignment and shared objectives across the club.</li> <li>Budgeting practices for women's football are becoming more stable, enabling better long-term planning and more efficient resource allocation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well-defined organisational structures are in place, ensuring everyone involved in women's football has clear roles and responsibilities, enhancing operational efficiency.</li> <li>Women's football is fully integrated into the club's overall operations, with strong collaboration between departments and a unified approach to shared goals.</li> <li>Substantial and stable budgets reflect the club's commitment to women's football, allowing for significant investments in programmes and long-term success.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The organisational structure for women's football is highly optimised, supporting peak efficiency and ensuring all stakeholders are aligned in their roles.</li> <li>Seamless integration of women's football across the club allows for collaboration at every level, with unified objectives and a fully coordinated approach to success.</li> <li>Budgets are substantial and secure, enabling transformative investments in player development, facilities and impactful community outreach initiatives.</li> </ul>



# MATURITY MATRIX Club Structure

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of strategy documents in place (strategic plans and vision statements, for example).</li> <li>• Good level of staff training and awareness regarding strategic objectives.</li> <li>• Basic partnership agreements with local businesses or organisations.</li> <li>• Percentage of budget allocated to women's football compared to total club budget.</li> <li>• A number of dedicated staff positions for women's football.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress in implementing strategic initiatives outlined in the club's plans.</li> <li>• Increase in the number and variety of community engagement activities.</li> <li>• Growth in the number of partnership agreements with local businesses, schools or community organisations.</li> <li>• Percentage increase in budget allocation for women's football compared to the previous year.</li> <li>• Number of cross-departmental initiatives involving the women's football department.</li> <li>• Level of staff satisfaction with clarity of roles and responsibilities within the women's football department.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistency in the implementation of strategic initiatives across all areas of the club.</li> <li>• Positive feedback from stakeholders, including players, staff, fans and community partners.</li> <li>• Expansion of the club's partnership network, including high-profile collaborations with major sponsors or organisations.</li> <li>• Percentage of club revenue invested in women's football programmes.</li> <li>• Number of joint initiatives between women's football department and external partners.</li> <li>• Success rate of women's football initiatives in achieving predefined objectives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant impact on the development of women's football, both locally and globally.</li> <li>• High levels of satisfaction among stakeholders, with the club viewed as a leader and role model within the industry.</li> <li>• Percentage increase in revenue generated from women's football programmes and initiatives.</li> </ul>
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p><b>Draft short-term and long-term goals</b> and share them across the club's structure and departments.</p> <p><b>Define an organisational chart for women's and girls' football</b> with clear roles.</p> <p><b>Gradually structure alignment meetings</b> with the different departments.</p> <p><b>Start conversations and collaborations</b> with the community and local organisations to strengthen your club's position.</p> <p><b>Start defining financial budgeting processes</b> in line with the short-term and long-term goals.</p>	<p><b>Formalise a women's football strategy</b> with clear goals, core values and principles.</p> <p><b>Reinforce financial budgeting processes</b> in line with the strategy outlined.</p> <p><b>Consolidate club's engagement and collaboration</b> with community and local organisations throughout engagement programmes and different projects.</p> <p><b>Consolidate the women's football department organisational chart</b> with a clear reporting line, roles and responsibilities.</p> <p><b>Improve and enhance collaboration and communication processes</b> across different departments.</p>	<p><b>Structure alignment meetings</b> monthly with different departments to align on the strategy and to define club-level KPIs.</p> <p><b>Expand the partnership and collaboration network</b> on a national scale to consolidate the club's brand and identity.</p> <p><b>Structure processes and projects</b> jointly with other departments and the club's functions.</p> <p><b>Establish women's football as one of the core areas of the club.</b></p>	<p><b>Maintain continuous alignment of communication processes</b> to facilitate the sharing of information across departments.</p> <p><b>Expand collaboration within the club across different areas</b>, ensuring multidisciplinary cooperation in reaching the club's strategic objectives.</p> <p><b>Expand the partnership and collaboration network</b> on an international scale to broaden the club's vision and be recognised as a leading example by others.</p>

Please find the club resources – key questions on page 264

# ATHLETE CARE

## Success Factors **Medical, Care and Wellbeing**

Athlete care is a multifaceted concept, one that goes beyond just physical health to encompass mental wellness and overall player wellbeing. In the context of girls' football, where the infrastructure has lagged, the significance of athlete care becomes even more pronounced. It's about creating an environment where young players can thrive, both on and off the pitch. The demands of professional sports are great, and without a holistic approach to care, players are at risk of burnout, injury and mental health challenges.



## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

The landscape of athlete care in girls' football is characterised by both promising progress and persistent challenges. While some clubs have made significant strides in providing care, there is still

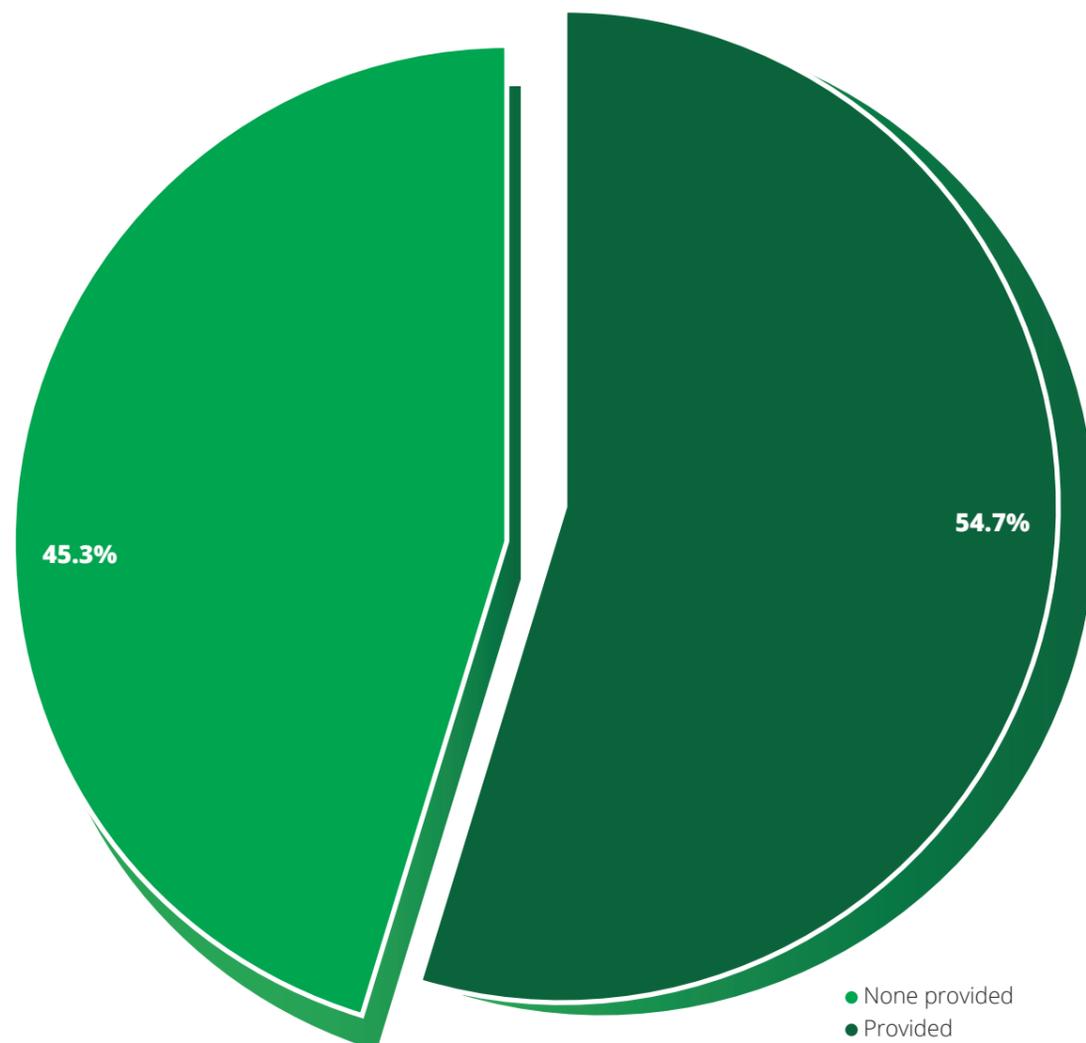
a considerable gap when compared to the boys' game. This gap is not just financial, but also reflects differences in research applications and leading practices tailored specifically to female athletes.

## Accommodation and School

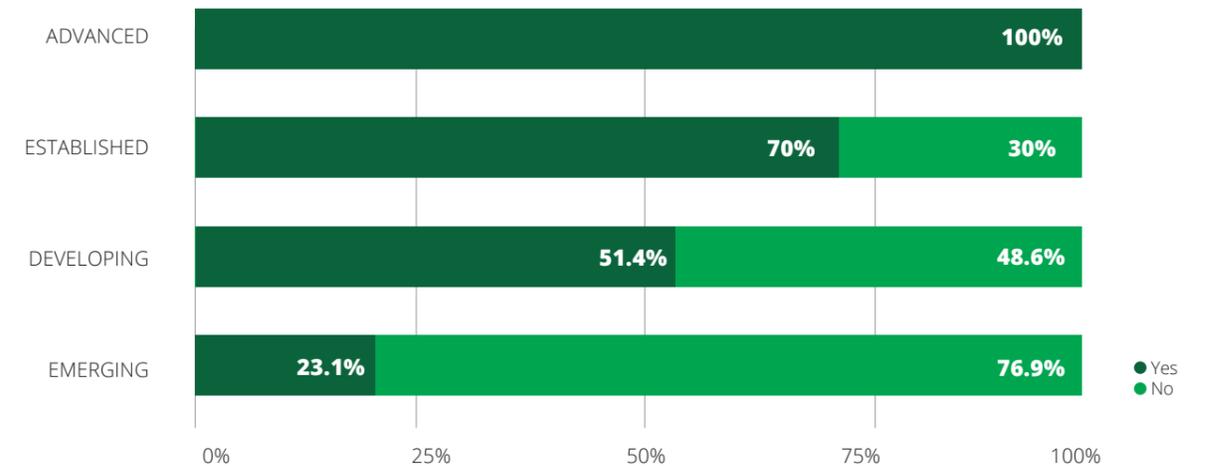
In advanced clubs, care begins with ensuring that players have stable living conditions and access to education. For young female players, the opportunity to live and study in a supportive environment is a crucial aspect of their development. Clubs provide full-time accommodation, whether through host families, on-site housing or club-arranged

facilities. This accommodation is often complemented by collaborations with local schools or even on-site educational programmes, allowing players to continue their studies without compromising their football training. This dual support system – education alongside football development – allows players to focus on their growth as athletes and as people.

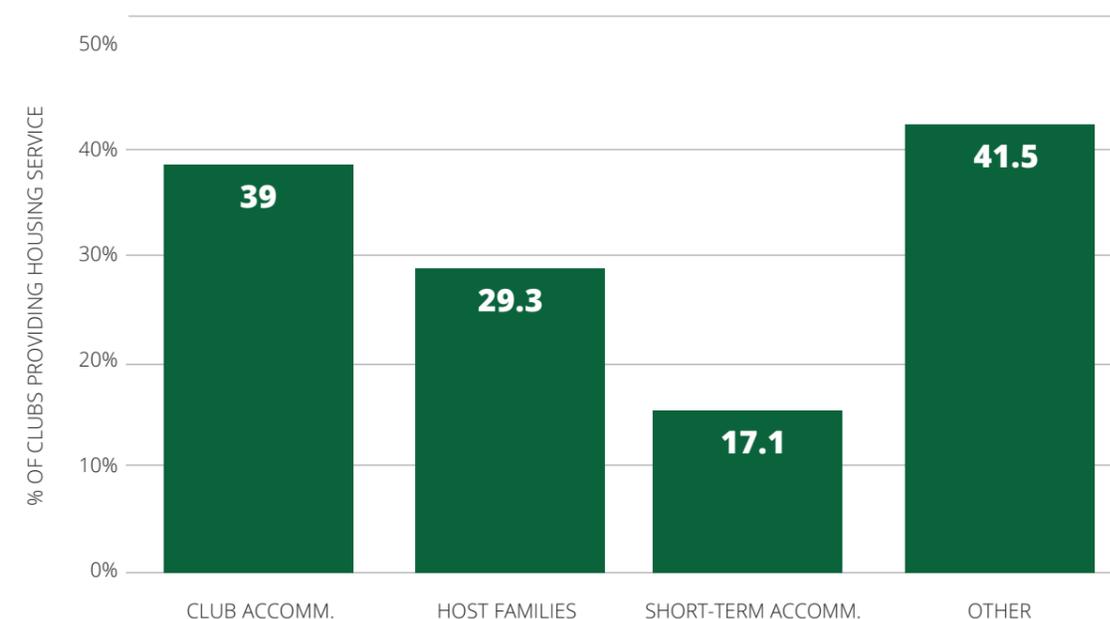
Clubs providing accommodation for girls' youth system players



Does the club provide accommodation for girls' youth system players?



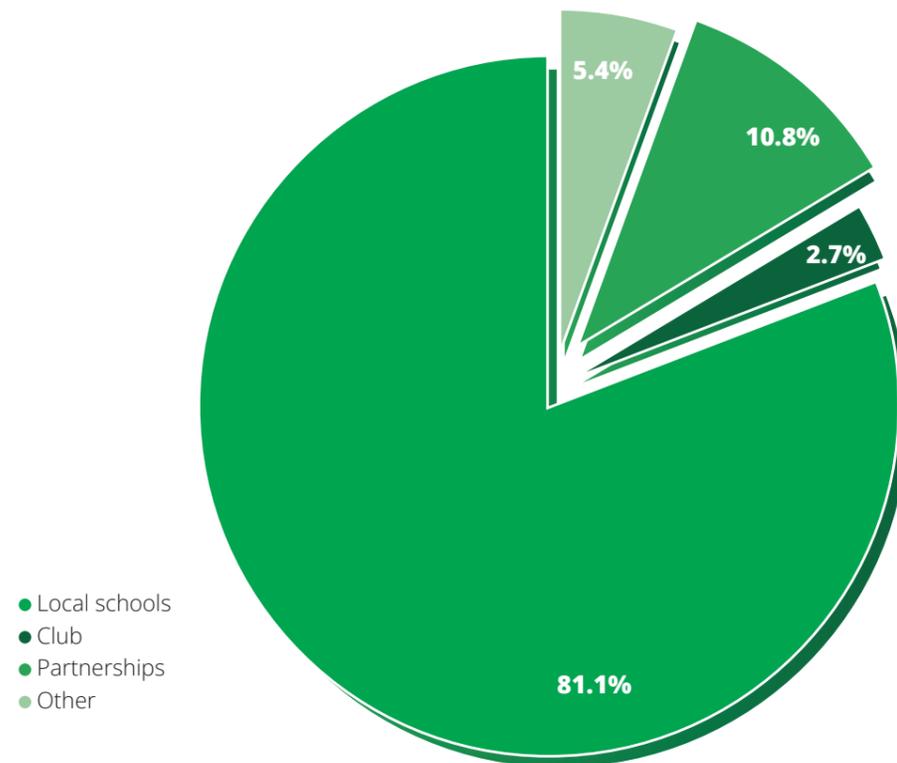
The data shows that the ability to provide housing for girls' youth system players can be closely linked to the club's stage of development. All advanced clubs offer housing, followed by **70%** of established clubs, just over half (**51%**) of developing clubs, and **23%** of emerging clubs. The trend is evident: as the club's level decreases, so does the percentage of clubs providing housing for their female youth players.



The data gathered does not indicate any correlation between the club category and the type of accommodation provided. The type of accommodation offered will depend more on the club's policies, available facilities and agreements with external partners.

Primary source of education  
for girls' youth system players

While clubs primarily rely on local schools to educate girls' youth players, they often offer additional courses to players as well. The most common subjects of additional educational courses include financial planning and budgeting skills, career development, communication, sports and time management.



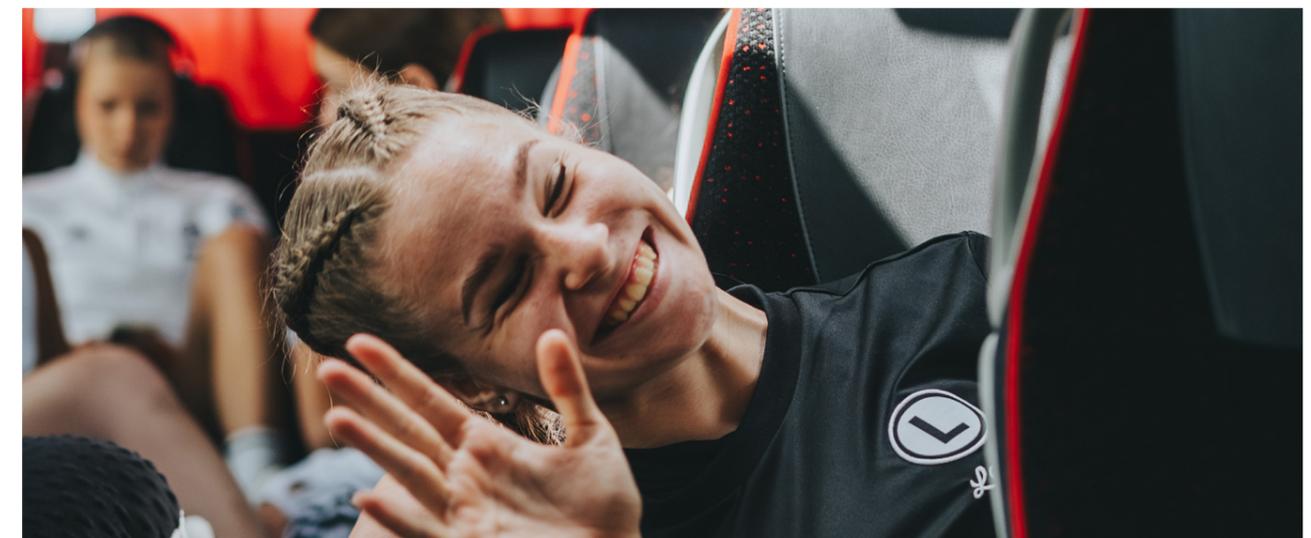
- Local schools
- Club
- Partnerships
- Other

Other Financial Support

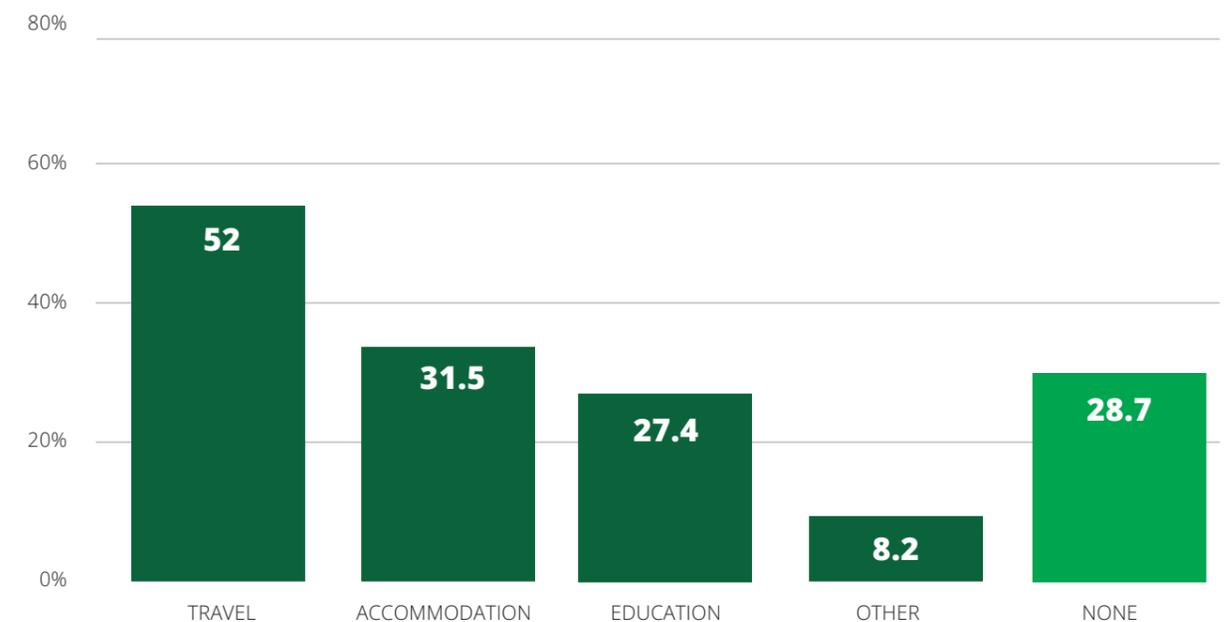
Care in girls' football goes beyond providing housing and education to players. The need for further financial support is high.

Of all the clubs, **71.23%** provide further financial support to girls' youth

system players. Travel support is most common, whereas in the 'other support' category, initiatives include free training or prize money, paying salaries for certain age categories, and providing free kits.



Type of financial support for girls' youth system



Paris Saint-Germain FC

As part of the build of the PSG campus, the club has included full-time accommodation for both boys' and girls' academy players. The dormitories have single or double rooms with full-time educators and security present on-site. Players and staff all wear a bracelet that gives them access to restricted areas. For example, boys' academy players cannot access the girls' dorms and vice versa.



An extraordinary aspect of the PSG campus is that the school was built for 120 academy players (including 34 girls), all of which can attend it without any additional costs for parents. All regular school courses are covered, plus courses such as social media training and sexual health (from 15 years old onwards). The school includes classrooms, communal spaces and a laboratory, providing a well-rounded educational environment.

For the entire club case study on Paris Saint-Germain, please refer to page 236.

## Safeguarding and Mental Health

**B**eyond the financial support, housing and education, safeguarding and mental health programmes play a critical role in a successful athlete care model. In the intense environment of football, safeguarding measures are essential to protect young players from physical,

emotional and psychological harm. Leading women's youth systems have integrated specific safeguarding procedures tailored to the needs of female athletes, with all staff members trained to support and protect the players. Setting safeguarding procedures is typically a club-wide initiative.

**65%**

always require a safeguarding certificate for girls' coaches, while 20% consider it preferable, and just 15% have no requirement.

**68%**

of clubs regularly review and evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding policies.

**68%**

consider their current procedures sufficient for background checks on coaches, staff and others working closely with girls' youth players.

**“ Setting safeguarding measures shouldn't just be a minimum standard. We can't wait for incidents to occur before taking action – working with children requires even greater sensitivity than at the women's level. ”**



**Amy McDonald**  
Senior Auditor,  
PGAAC



### AS Roma

AS Roma provides a tailored player care system, with some living on-site at the Centro di Preparazione Olimpica – Giulio Onesti, while others reside at home with their families. The club's player care staff have a pivotal role in supporting those who live on-site, providing assistance with school tutoring, organising recreational activities and helping players to navigate personal challenges.

A fundamental aspect of AS Roma's youth player support is the psychological care provided. With a dedicated team of specialists, the club makes sure that players' mental health is closely monitored and supported. These specialists work in strong collaboration



with various departments within the club – medical, educational and sporting – ensuring a holistic approach to player welfare. Regular individual meetings with players, as well as group sessions with

staff and teams, mean that psychological preparation receives the same attention as physical and technical development.

In addition, AS Roma prioritises education on critical topics. Safeguarding training and courses are provided to coaches and staff, especially for those transitioning from men's and boys' football, so that they are properly equipped to work effectively and safely with female players. At the start of each season, the club runs educational programmes on anti-doping, engaging players and their families to make sure that everyone is fully informed and prepared.

*For the entire club case study on AS Roma, please refer to page 242.*





## Women's Tennis Association (WTA)

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) has implemented a comprehensive framework around safeguarding to ensure the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of its athletes. This goes beyond simply promoting a code of conduct – it includes a holistic approach to player welfare, beginning with onboarding, and extending through an athlete's whole career. Recognising the unique challenges female athletes face, the WTA has developed specific strategies aimed at safeguarding its players from abuse, exploitation and undue pressure, whether originating from those in their own circles or from external influences like social media.

### 1 Code of Conduct and Safeguarding Training

The WTA prioritises player safety, focusing on safeguarding through continuous vigilance. In recent years, it has significantly strengthened its commitment by enhancing education, training and resources. This includes key steps such as the appointment of a director of safeguarding, expanding support staff, incorporating social media abuse services, and introducing a mandatory safeguarding education module for those seeking WTA Tour credentials.

Most recently, the WTA introduced a safeguarding code of conduct (effective 15 December 2024) which sets clear expectations for behaviour among players, coaches, staff and all individuals involved in the sport.

This proactive approach creates a safety net that encourages a culture of respect, fairness and open communication, giving all the WTA Tour participants a shared responsibility for keeping one another safe from abuse.

### 2 Mental Abuse Prevention

The WTA provides athletes with access to mental health resources, recognising the toll that pressure, competition and the demands of professional tennis can have on players. This includes psychological support — on tour and off — to help players to navigate the challenges of balancing their personal lives with their high-pressure careers. By emphasising mental health as a cornerstone of athlete care, the WTA is actively working to break down the stigma around seeking help while fostering an environment that promotes emotional resilience and wellbeing.

### 3 Protection From Online Abuse and Harassment

In today's digital age, one of the most significant threats to athlete safety comes from online abuse. Social media platforms, while useful for engagement and building a brand, can be rife with toxic behaviour, including harassment, threats and inappropriate comments. Female athletes, in particular, are often targets of sexist, racist and personal attacks, which can severely affect their mental health and sense of security.

To combat this, in 2023 the WTA, together with the ITF, AELTC and USTA, launched a proactive monitoring service that aims to protect athletes from online abuse and threats known as the 'threat matrix'. These professionals monitor online interactions, work with social media platforms to remove harmful content, and educate players on how to protect their privacy and wellbeing online. The WTA encourages players to report incidents of online harassment and has procedures in place to address these reports promptly and effectively.

This proactive approach to dealing with online threats ensures that players are not left to navigate these situations alone, reducing the emotional burden that can come from constant digital scrutiny. By offering both technical support and emotional counselling, the WTA helps athletes to manage their public profiles without sacrificing their mental health or safety.

#### 4 Dedicated Safeguarding and Advocacy Personnel

A key element of the WTA's safeguarding strategy is the presence of dedicated safeguarding personnel, whose primary role is to advocate for, and protect, the athletes. These professionals are specially trained to handle sensitive issues related to abuse, harassment and exploitation. Their responsibilities include conducting investigations into any reported incidents, making sure that athletes are aware of their rights, and providing confidential support for those who come forward with concerns.

Having these personnel embedded within the WTA creates a sense of trust and accountability. Players know they have a direct line of communication with individuals who are there specifically to protect their interests and wellbeing.

The presence of these advocates also serves as a deterrent to anyone who might attempt to exploit or harm athletes, knowing that the WTA has robust systems in place to address such behaviour.

#### 5 Creating a Culture of Support

The WTA's safeguarding efforts are not just about reacting to incidents but are aimed at creating a culture of support throughout the organisation. This includes ongoing dialogue about the importance of athlete welfare, regular check-ins with players to assess their wellbeing, and the fostering of a community where athletes feel safe and supported. The WTA has worked to eliminate any perception of vulnerability or isolation among its players, particularly adolescent athletes or those new to the tour who may not yet fully understand the pressures of life in professional sport.

By placing such a strong emphasis on safeguarding, the WTA is leading the way in showing how wellbeing goes far beyond physical health. It encompasses mental and emotional wellbeing, protection from both personal and digital threats, and the establishment of professional environments free from abuse and exploitation. Through a combination of education, advocacy and dedicated support, the WTA ensures that its athletes can focus on their careers while knowing their safety is a top priority. This holistic approach not only benefits the athletes individually but also enhances the integrity and reputation of the sport as a whole.

## Mental Health Support

These procedures for creating a safe environment are coupled with mental health support, recognising that the pressures of elite sport can take a significant toll on a player's wellbeing. Regular psychological check-ins and access to professional mental health support have become increasingly common. The main initiatives around players' mental health include access to psychologists and daily check-ins with players by means of a questionnaire.

Of the 23% of clubs providing access to clinical psychology services, the majority

primarily conduct group sessions, with some also including individual sessions. The remaining clubs provide individual sessions only.

With the increasing utilisation of daily wellness questionnaires to monitor sleep quality, general mood and anything that is bothering players, clubs are increasing their ability to identify any potential red flags as early as possible. Clubs highlight the importance of defining who has access to this data, as often coaches don't have access until necessary.



**23%**  
provide access  
to clinical psychology  
services.

**Clubs take a  
more proactive  
approach to  
mental health  
support.**



## The Sport Mental Health Assessment Tool 1

The Sport Mental Health Assessment Tool 1 (SMHAT-1) is a specialised questionnaire designed to assess and monitor the mental health of athletes. Developed by the International Olympic Committee Mental Health Working Group, the SMHAT-1 offers a systematic way to identify early signs of mental health concerns, such as anxiety, depression and sleep disturbances. It covers various psychological and psychosocial domains to give an understanding of an athlete's mental wellbeing.

### Tool Overview and Functionality

The SMHAT-1 is based on three steps: a core screening section (triage), followed when necessary by an additional assessment and any required intervention and monitoring. The core screening is designed to quickly identify athletes who may need further mental health support, while the additional assessment offers a deeper dive into specific areas including eating disorders, substance abuse and emotional imbalances.

Athletes complete the questionnaire regularly, typically during routine health assessments or as part of daily wellness check-ins. Questions focus on core aspects of mental health, such as general mood, life satisfaction and the impact of sports-related pressures like injuries or competition stress. The responses provide valuable data, allowing for tracking of an athlete's mental health over time.

One key aspect of the SMHAT-1 is its confidentiality. Only qualified mental health professionals or medical staff have access to the responses, ensuring athletes feel secure in sharing their honest experiences. This data is used to guide care, whether through individual interventions or broader mental health initiatives within the team environment.

### Application in Girls' Football

In women's and girls' football, where mental health challenges can be heightened by factors such as media pressure, injury recovery and body-image concerns, a tool like SMHAT-1 provides a valuable framework for early identification of, and intervention in, mental health issues. Its structured approach allows clubs to offer tailored support so that players receive the psychological care they need to thrive both on and off the pitch.



## Menstrual Health

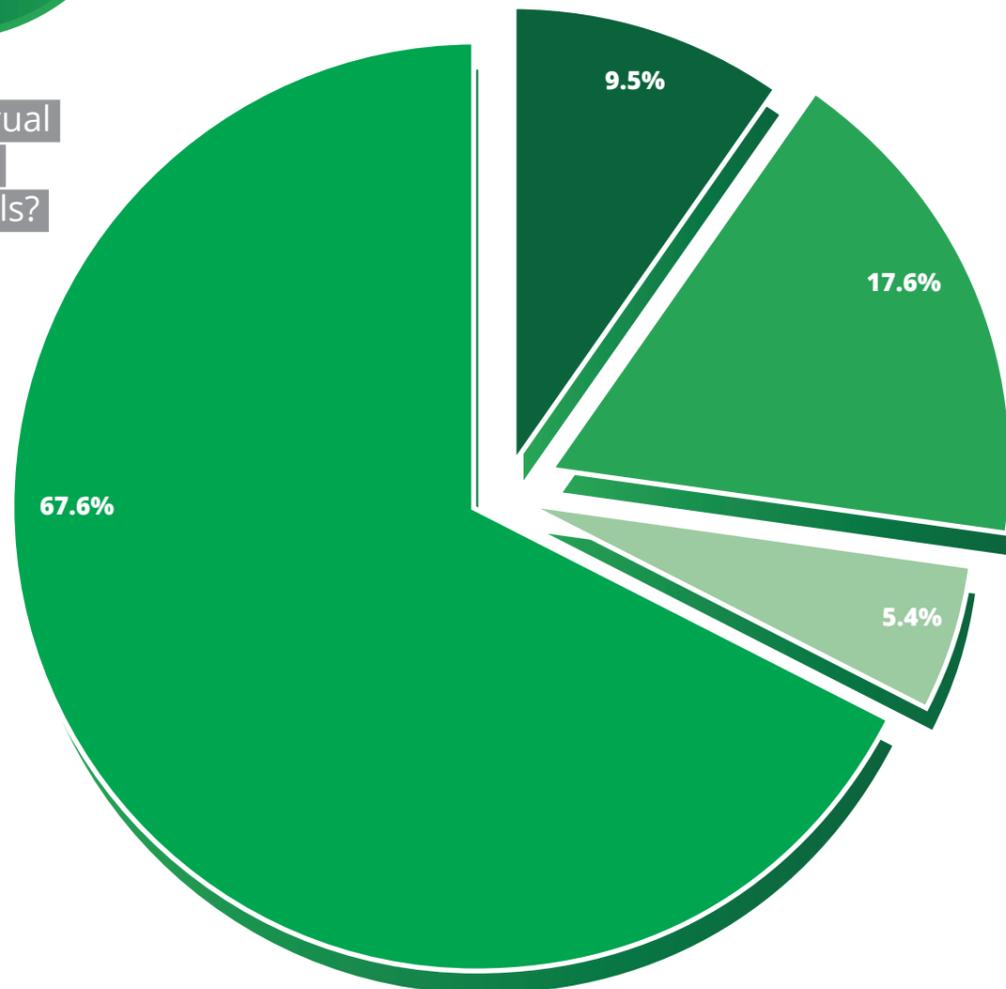
**A**nother area where athlete care is evolving is in the understanding and tracking of the athlete's ovarian hormone profiles, including the menstrual cycle and its possible impact on performance.

This practice, though relatively new in sport, is gaining recognition for its importance in women's and girls' football. The menstrual cycle can have a significant impact on players'

mental health and athletic performance and, by tracking it, clubs can tailor training programmes to better suit individual needs and abilities. For example, during certain phases of the cycle nuanced individual adjustments can be made to training intensity or recovery strategies, helping to optimise performance. Educating players about their menstrual cycles and other ovarian hormone profiles (such as hormonal birth control) also empowers them to take control of their health and performance from nutrition to recovery tactics, creating a more informed and resilient player.

**79%**  
of clubs do not track menstrual cycles in the girls' youth system.

When is menstrual cycle education provided for girls?



- Not provided
- All ages or before U13
- At U13 or after
- For other groups

**“ We need to measure or track players’ menstrual cycles using ovulation kits and blood samples – instead of just asking players about their cycles. This way, players get facts about their menstrual cycle phases rather than estimates. This will help us to identify possible menstrual dysfunction and menstrual cycle phase-based symptoms so these players can receive appropriate treatment. ”**



**Professor Kirsty Elliott-Sale**

Female Endocrinology and Exercise Physiology, Manchester Metropolitan University





L  
Ladies

### Legia Ladies

Legia Ladies is distinguished by its innovative approach to player performance and wellbeing. The club has implemented menstrual cycle tracking as part of its training regime. This method, based on the mini-cycles profiling approach, aims to enhance training efficiency and reduce injury risks by tailoring sessions to players' physiological states. The team performance coach explained that the data highlights the athletes' progress from March to September. The metrics gathered from Wednesday's training sessions during these months show significant improvements in the players' running performance across different zones. For instance, **zone 1** (walking) decreased from 76% in March to 41.8% in September. Meanwhile, **zones 2, 3 and 4**, which represent faster running paces, showed corresponding increases. Notably, sprint performance (**zone 5**) improved from 0.2% in March to 0.9% in September, indicating enhanced speed and stamina. The team is continuing to analyse data to assess the impact of tracking menstrual cycles on injury rates.

*For the entire club case study on Legia Ladies, please refer to page 254.*



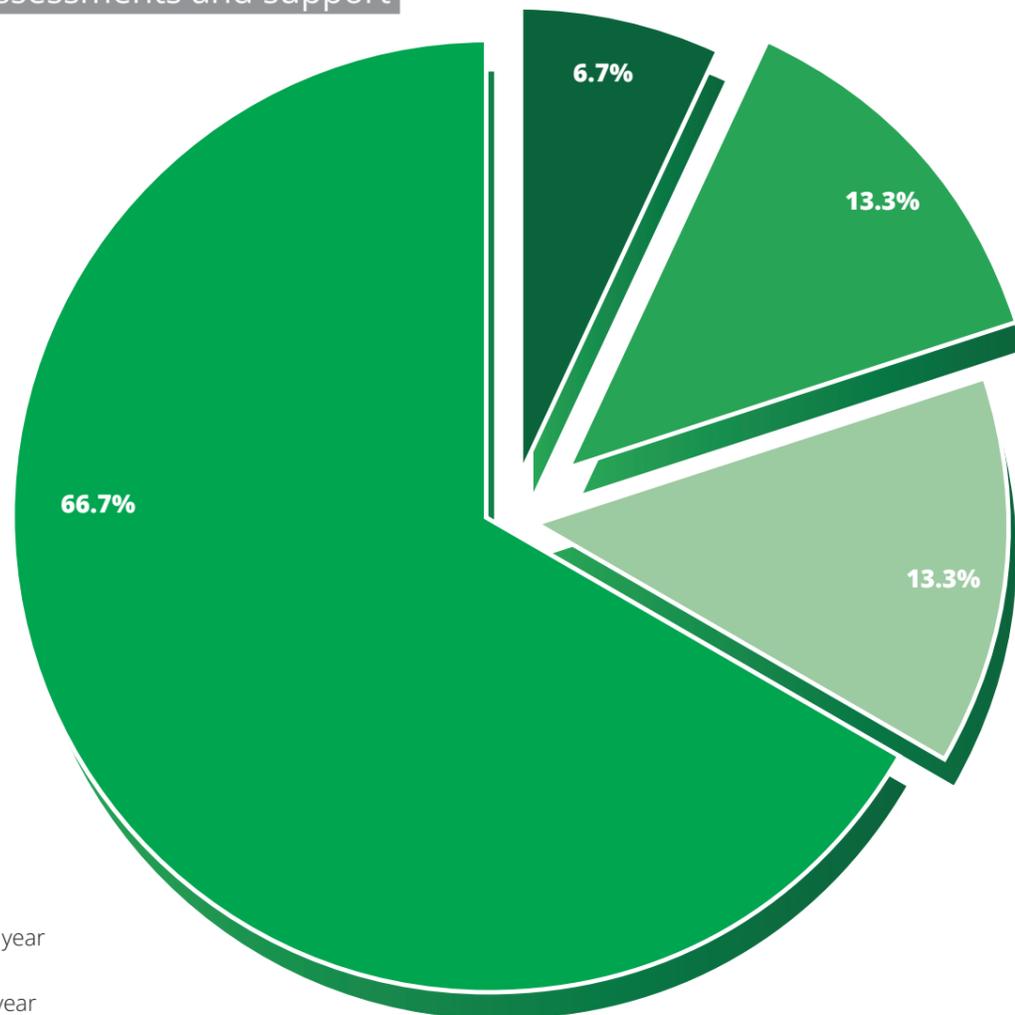
## Gynaecology Assessments

Clubs are exploring providing off-the-pitch care such as gynaecology as part of medical assessments and support. They are increasingly integrating gynaecological assessments into broader medical assessments for female athletes, recognising the importance of holistic health and its impact on female athletes. Of the established clubs questioned, **45%** of them offer this service, the highest rate among all categories. The frequency

of these assessments varies significantly across club development stages – while emerging clubs mostly offer less frequent assessments (less than once per year), a portion of advanced and developing clubs offer more regular support (more than once per year).

Established and advanced clubs make up the bulk of those providing this service, highlighting a potential disparity in health support infrastructure across different club maturities.

Gynaecology assessments and support



- Never
- More than once per year
- Once per year
- Less than once per year



### Arsenal FC

The club places a strong emphasis on promoting dual careers and personal development programmes (PDPs), recognising the importance of preparing athletes for life beyond their playing days. Their approach is holistic, aiming to foster well-rounded individuals who can excel on and off the pitch. A unique aspect of the club's culture is its strict 'no ask' policy. This ensures that players have unrestricted access to essential support without the need for justification or inquiry. For example, when it comes to menstrual cycle products, players are never required to ask or feel uncomfortable requesting what they need. The same open-door approach is applied to mental health and psychological support, reinforcing the club's commitment to player wellbeing.

In addition to this, the club extends its support beyond the individual athlete to their families, offering hardship assistance on a trust basis. Rather than subjecting families to invasive means testing, the club trusts players and parents to request help when needed, meaning dignity and respect are maintained throughout. This approach fosters a strong sense of community, allowing players and their families to feel supported in their journey without fear of judgment or financial scrutiny.

Through these initiatives, the club not only nurtures sporting talent but also cultivates an environment where personal growth and life readiness are paramount.

*For the entire club case study on Arsenal FC, please refer to page 238.*



Arsenal Football Club

## KEY CHALLENGES

The journey towards comprehensive care in girls' football is far from complete. Several challenges continue to hinder the full realisation of proficient player care, with each one reflecting deeper structural issues within girls' football.

### Dual Careers

One of the most significant challenges is the balancing act that many female footballers must perform between their academic and football careers. Unlike their male counterparts, who often have a more secure and lucrative professional pathway, female players face uncertainty regarding their future in football.

Financial security in women's football is not guaranteed, leading many young

players to pursue academic or alternative professional careers alongside their football commitments. This dual career path can be incredibly demanding, with players juggling the demands of training and competition with the need to succeed academically.

Without structured support from their clubs, these players risk burnout, as the pressure to excel in both areas can be overwhelming.

**“Preparing for life after football is a fine balance between focusing on education and football development interchangeably. Clubs have a responsibility to ensure players are engaging in development opportunities off the pitch. It is important that players are aware of their options, as well as involving parents and guardians in these conversations.”**



**Carys Dalton**  
Head of Player Care,  
Chelsea FC





### Borussia Dortmund

Borussia Dortmund is committed to providing dual career opportunities for its players, recognising that life after football requires preparation and diverse skill development. One of the key ways it achieves this is through dedicated internship programmes, either within the club itself or in collaboration with its extensive network of local businesses and commercial partners. These internships give players the chance to gain practical experience in various industries, helping them build skills that will serve well beyond their playing careers.

Moreover, the club actively seeks to retain former players by offering roles within the organisation once they retire from the game. Past athletes have successfully transitioned into club positions, using their experience and deep connection to the club to contribute in new ways. For instance, a former team captain has gone on to become the club's physiotherapist, highlighting how the club values and invests in the long-term futures of its players. This approach not only strengthens the club's sense of continuity and community, but also ensures that players are supported in their transition to life after football.



## Lack of Research Focused on Female Athletes

Compounding this challenge is the persistent lack of research focused specifically on female athletes.

This gap extends to areas such as gynaecological health, injury prevention and even psychological support. Without this gender-specific research, medical evaluations and care plans for young female players can be less effective,

potentially leading to higher injury rates and suboptimal performance.

The need for more research is urgent, as it will provide the foundation for more tailored and effective medical care strategies for clubs. This is reflected in the lack of overwhelming confidence in internal medical practices in the girls' youth system at clubs.

**54%**

of clubs have a clearly defined medical onboarding procedure for new girls.

**51%**

believe that the girls' assessment procedures match the boys' youth system.

**64%**

of clubs feel that they have a clearly defined return-to-play protocol.

**70%**

collaborate with external stakeholders to provide further medical care and second opinions for players.



## Medical and Mental Health Data Logging

The consistency of medical and mental health data logging remains a significant hurdle. Effective care relies on accurate and consistent data collection, but many clubs still lack the necessary structures or tools to gather and record this data efficiently. This issue is further complicated by the sensitive nature of health information, which requires careful management to maintain

confidentiality and trust between players and medical staff. When communication breaks down, especially regarding mental health issues, players may not receive the care they need in a timely manner, which can have serious consequences for their wellbeing and performance.

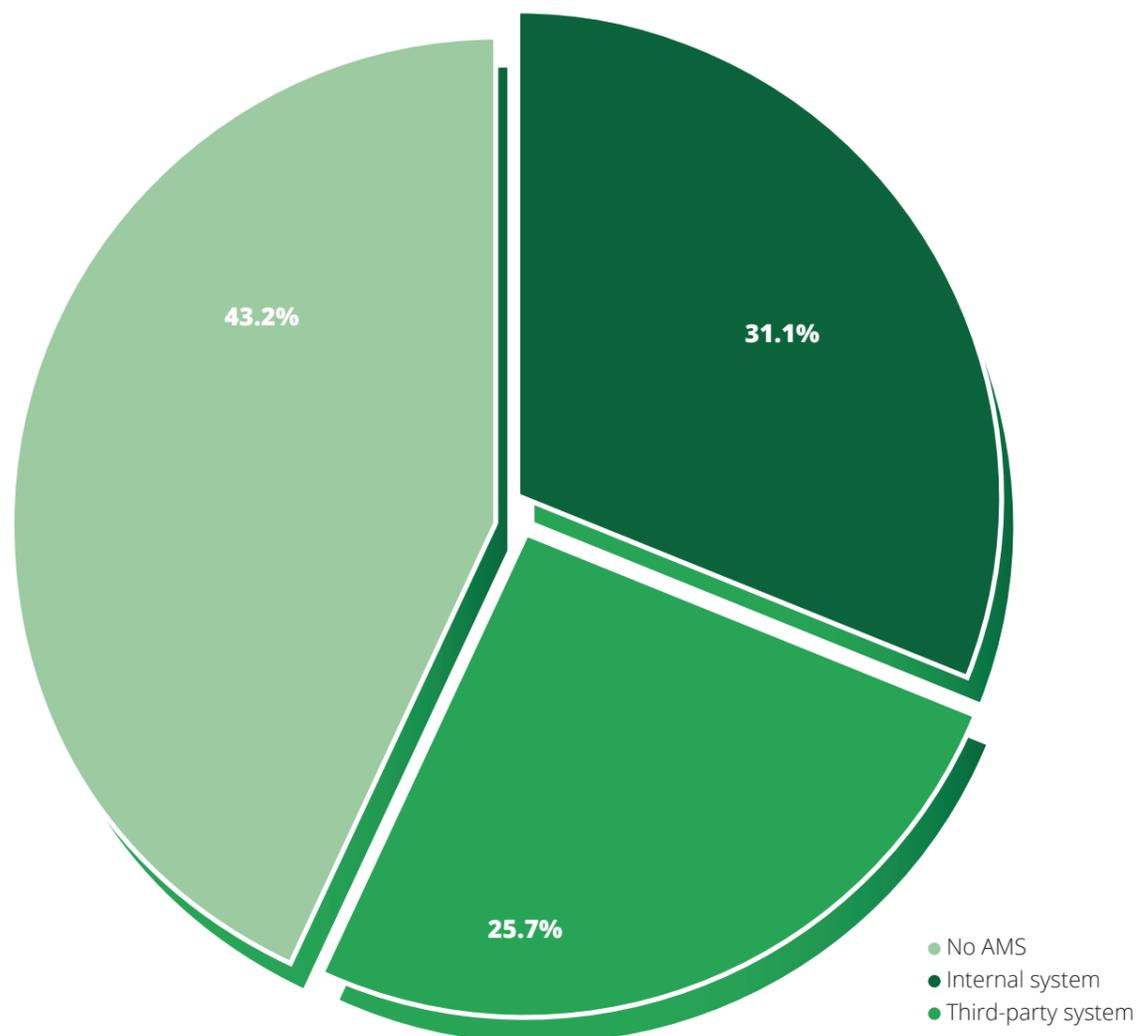
Although the majority of clubs use either an internal or third-party athlete management system (AMS) to track

players' health data, it is important to note that this practice is more prevalent among advanced and established clubs. There is a substantial difference between these clubs and developing and emerging ones. At emerging clubs, in particular, only 25% have an AMS system, indicating that this practice is not as common.

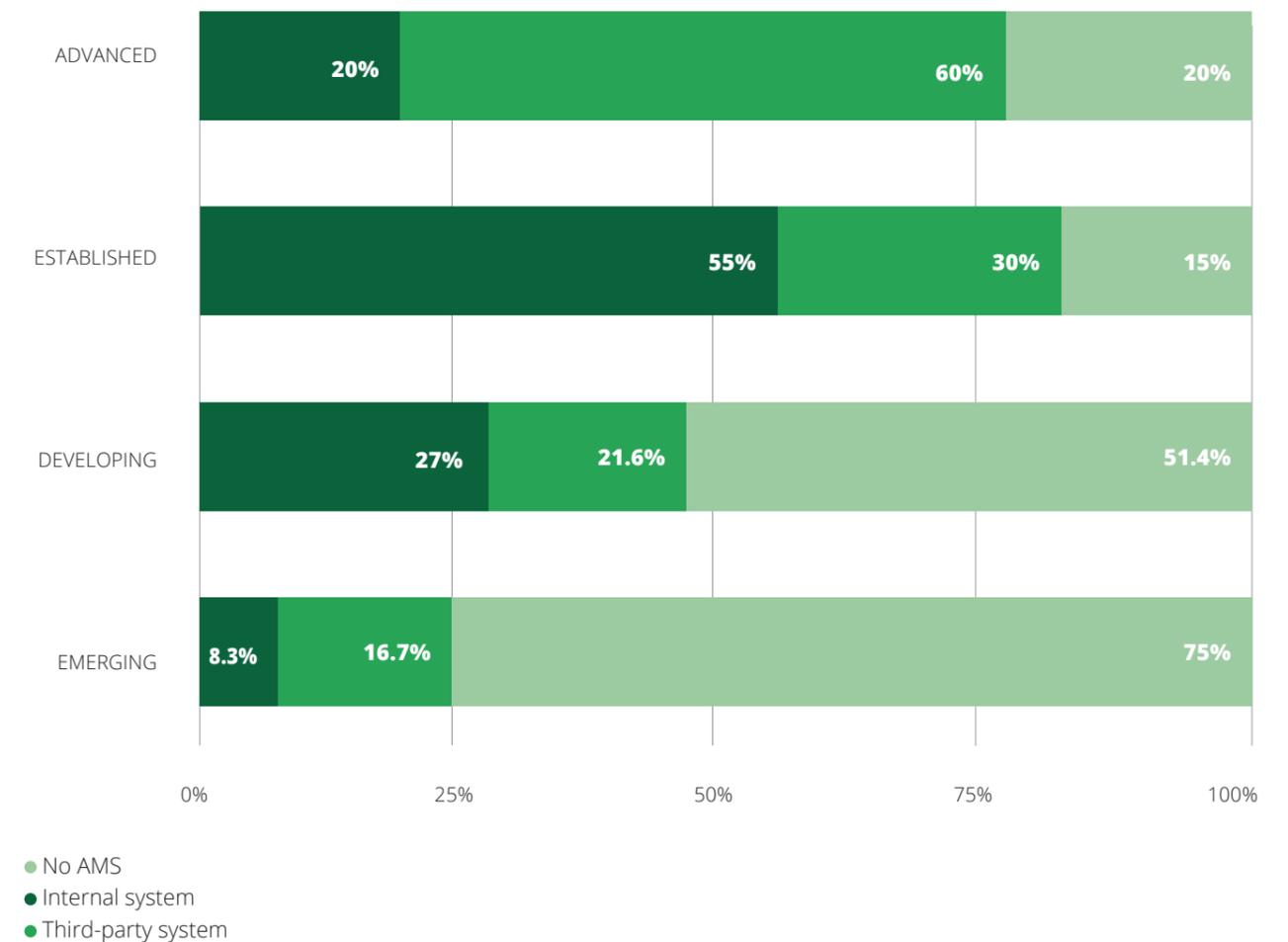
It is notable that while both advanced and established clubs have a similar

overall adoption rate of AMS systems, their preferences differ. Advanced clubs tend to favour third-party systems, with 60% following this practice. In contrast, 55% of established clubs use an internal system. This difference could be attributed to the varying economic capacities of these clubs. Advanced clubs might have the financial resources to invest in more sophisticated and well-supported third-party systems.

Use of an athlete management system to track player health data



Does the club use an athlete management system to manage player health data?



## Cardiac Screenings

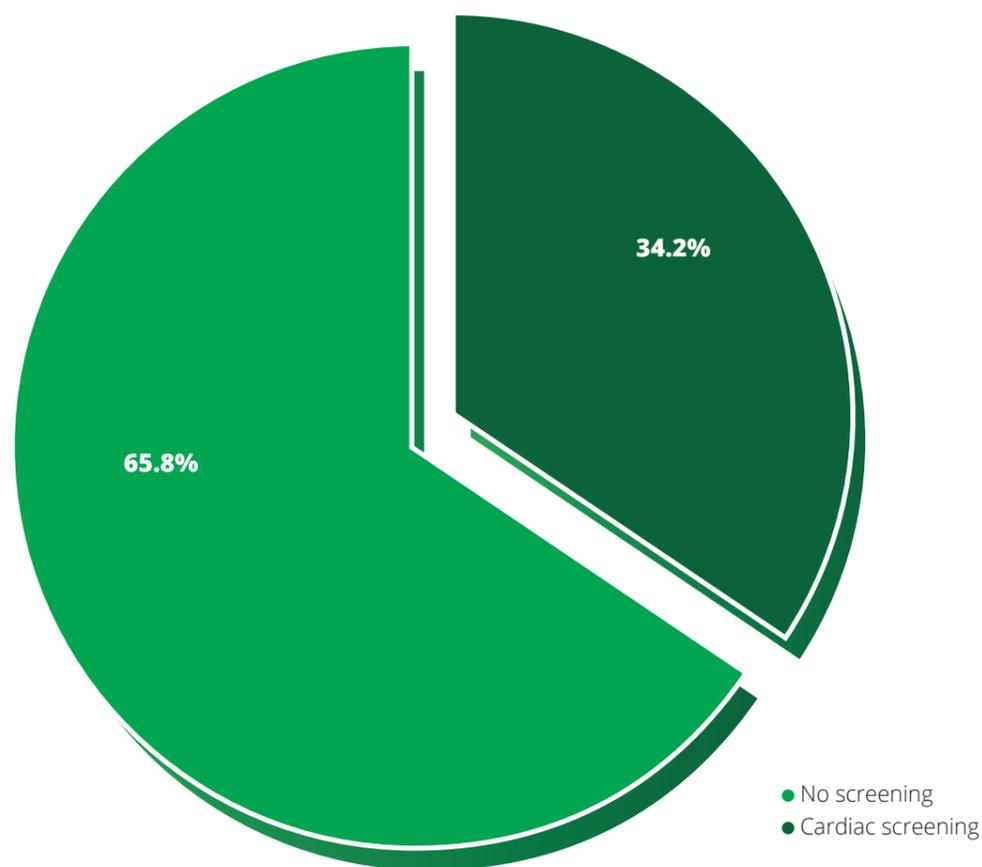
An example of clubs' player health data includes consistently logging cardiac screening data for players in the girls' youth system.

Survey results show that the majority of clubs provide cardiac

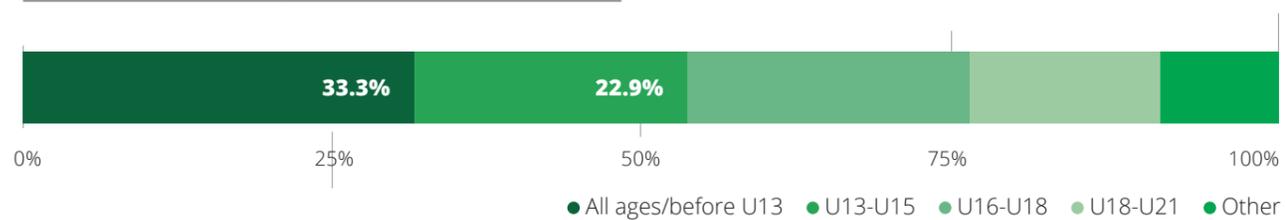
screenings, starting from a young age.

Clubs are often still building on an internal database with such related player health data for the women's first team. To be able to build that out, dedicated resources are important.

Clubs providing cardiac screening for girls in the youth academy



When clubs begin cardiac screening



## Nutritional Education and Eating Disorders

Nutritional education is becoming increasingly important in professional football, as a balanced and well-calculated diet has been shown to enhance players' health and performance. This emphasis on nutrition is also being adopted by women's and girls' football. Almost **78%** of surveyed clubs mention that the club provides nutritional guidance and education to their players.

Despite its recognised importance, only a small percentage of clubs — around **6%** — offer nutritional services across all categories.

Typically, clubs begin providing nutritional support between the U12 and U15 age groups when players' bodies are developing, and physical training demands are increasing. At this stage, proper nutrition is central to supporting muscle growth and

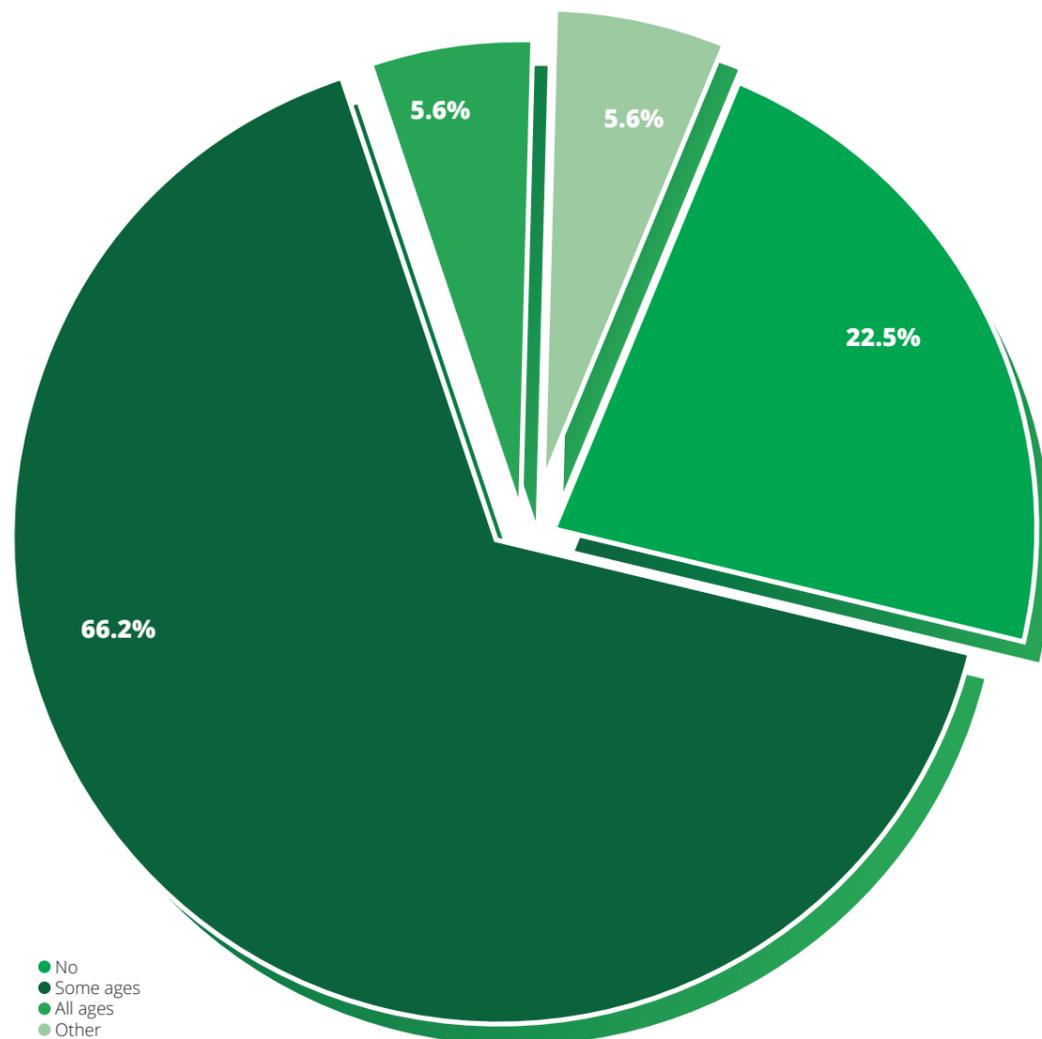
complementing the training regime.

**81%** of the clubs surveyed do not provide on-site meals. As a result, at this level, nutritional support is limited to education and setting guidelines without direct oversight or control over what players consume. This approach places the responsibility on players to follow the guidance, which may lead to inconsistent adherence and reduce the effectiveness of the nutritional programmes.

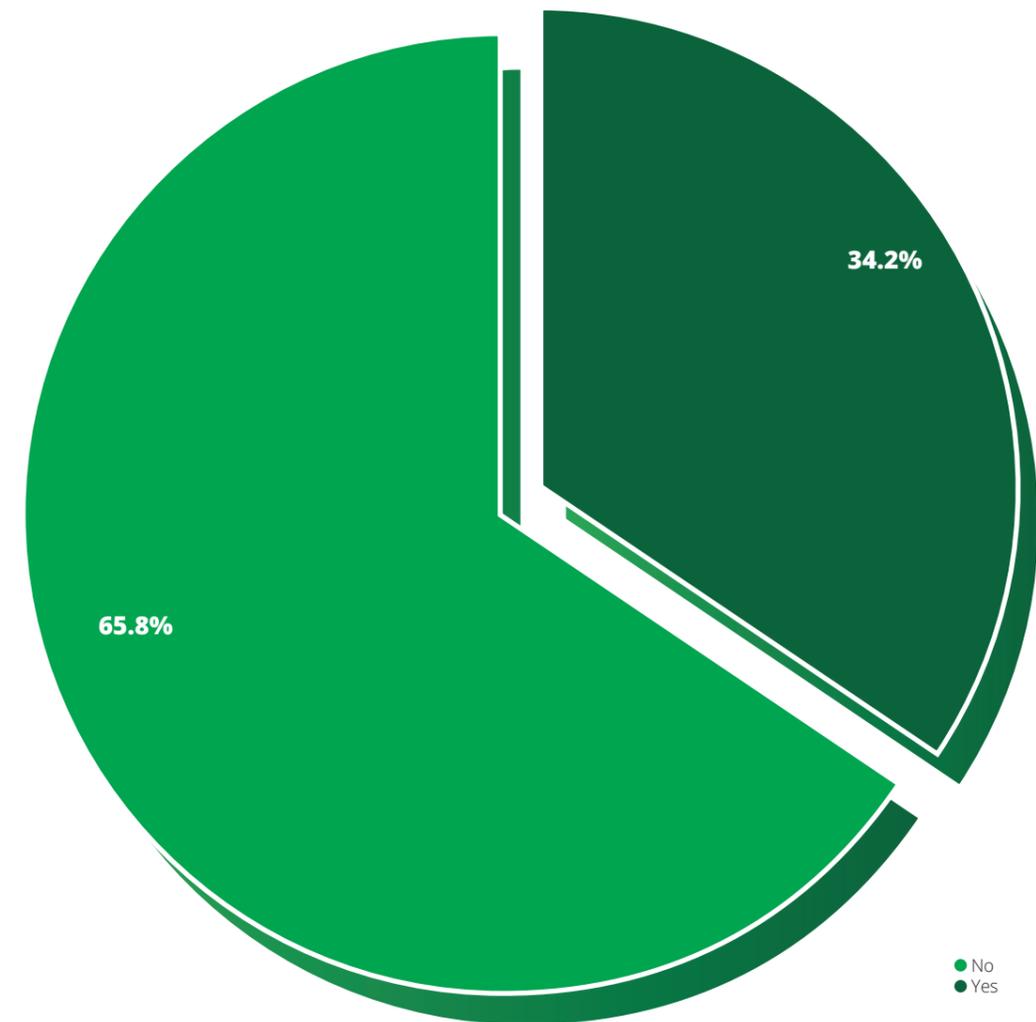
To mitigate the risk of eating disorders, clubs are starting to implement targeted protocols to support female players and prevent these issues from arising.

Currently, only **34%** of clubs have implemented such practices. Advanced clubs are leading the way, with **80%** of them already having these protocols in place.

Clubs who provide nutritional education and guidance



Clubs who established protocols to support players who may be at risk of eating disorders





### AS Roma

The club is developing an injury-prevention protocol in which the medical, nutritional and performance areas have established what the minimum requirements are for players: which tests are necessary to do at the beginning of the season; which essential medical evaluations or investigations are to be performed before starting the new season to prevent major injuries as much as possible and, if necessary, establish prevention protocols.

For specific player cases (with chronic pathologies, for example), orthopaedic, osteopathic, endocrinological visits, baropodometric and strength tests are performed, where necessary, and an injury-prevention plan is subsequently agreed upon.

With regards to nutrition, this includes providing girls with access to the first team's nutritionist for consultancy and for considering the opportunity to implement dietary plans, based on their specific needs.

The nutritionist plays a pivotal role in communicating with players, parents or guardians and coaches to identify unhealthy eating habits in a timely manner and directly address these issues.

**“ The future of women’s football depends not just on the talent of the players, but on the support systems that clubs build around them, ensuring players can thrive in every aspect of their lives. ”**



**Martina Pavlová**

ECA Vice Chair /  
AC Sparta Praha





### Women's Tennis Association (WTA)

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) has set a benchmark in wellbeing through its individualised programmes, particularly focusing on athletes aged 14 to 17. The WTA's initiatives provide insights that can be effectively translated into the development of girls' football.

#### The WTA's Approach to Wellbeing

Concerns about premature sport retirement of adolescent athletes due to burnout and injury led the WTA to recognise the physical and psychological challenges faced by adolescents entering the professional circuit. In 1994, they commissioned an international 'player development advisory panel' of voluntary and independent sports science and medicine experts to review and provide evidence-based recommendations for organisational changes that could promote career longevity — for example by minimising identified stressors and reducing the physical, psychological and developmental risks of women's professional tennis.

In 1995, the WTA provided an athlete development-orientated policy-level intervention via the modification of their age eligibility rule (AER) and implementation of



new mandatory player development programmes (PDP). These simultaneous changes to policy and practice allowed a phased-in approach to professional tennis participation for players between 14 and 17 years old in accordance with their age, ranking and the skills gained from participation in PDP.

#### Age Eligibility Rule (AER)

The AER was implemented to regulate the participation of under-18 players in professional tournaments. The rule phased in adolescent players gradually, allowing them to compete in a limited number of events each year. The intention was to protect these athletes from the physical and emotional stress associated with the rigorous demands of professional sport. This rule also provided a structured pathway for talent development, meaning players were physically and mentally prepared for the pressures of elite competition.

#### Player Development Programmes (PDP)

Complementing the AER, the PDP provides a framework for the development of adolescent athletes. This includes organisational, physical and psychological education, skill building (e.g. media training), monitoring and support mechanism (e.g. mentoring and annual physical examinations).

With the goal of creating a safe and healthy environment, some elements of the PDP are targeted at members of the athletes' support system (this includes parent and coach education, coach registration and a code of ethics for player-support team members). As part of ongoing quality improvement efforts, player surveys have been conducted and used to identify, and meet, evolving player needs.

#### PDP Example Structure

Player development is in place to address each of the known stressors from the onset of an adolescent player's career. The programmes apply current

research and take a progressive approach to athlete education across three main domains — human development, tennis development, and business development.

<b>MENTOR PROGRAMME</b>	This brings together adolescent players with veteran and retired players who share their dynamic experience to help protégées make a smooth transition into their careers.
<b>ROOKIE HOURS</b>	Players learn about WTA and tennis-wide rules and services, and on-site realities. The player orientation ('rookie hours') helps players understand the building blocks of WTA business and services, and their responsibilities and opportunities.
<b>MEDIA TRAINING</b>	Players learn how to be prepared, professional and self-expressive in public-speaking opportunities.
<b>APPROVED SCHEDULE</b>	Routinely submit schedule, including details on the players' off-season, pre-competition weeks, active rest, recovery weeks and appropriate developmental blocks for review and approval by the WTA. Players and their support teams are required to complete online lessons on these principles of periodisation.
<b>PLAYER SUPPORT TEAM (PST)</b>	Orientation to the WTA and information to PST (parents, coaches and agents) including rules and expectations in the WTA environment. This includes adherence to the code of conduct, qualified coaching certification and safeguarding education.
<b>AGE ELIGIBILITY RULE (AER)</b>	The AER progressively phases athletes into professional tennis in accordance with their age, ranking and skills gained from player development.
<b>ANNUAL REQUIREMENTS</b>	Each player is required to complete a physical examination, complete the minimum educational requirements of her country and participate in related training and educational activities that promote her health, safety and career longevity.

#### Reflections for Girls' Football

Footballers face challenges similar to those in women's tennis, including intense competition and physical demands that can lead to injuries, burnout and early dropout. Adopting a model like the WTA's player development programme (PDP) can effectively address these issues by providing support that covers educational, psychological and social needs alongside athletic development.

## INTERNAL CLUB ASSESSMENT

**A**thlete care in girls' football is evolving, with clubs and organisations increasingly recognising the need for a professional approach to player development. While progress has been made in areas such as housing, education and safeguarding, significant challenges remain.

Balancing academic and footballing careers, addressing the lack of gender-specific research, and improving data management and communication are underlying areas that still need attention and innovation.

As women's and girls' football continues to grow, so must the approach to athlete care. By tackling these challenges and committing to continuous improvement, we can help players reach their full potential, both on and off the field.

Given the current gaps in medical and wellbeing practices, clubs can apply the following framework for internal assessment. This integrated model combines medical and wellbeing aspects, providing a structure for evaluating and improving athlete care in the girls' game.



Overleaf  
**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Athlete Care**



**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Athlete Care**

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
DESCRIPTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic structures are in place for medical care and wellbeing, focusing on immediate needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhanced focus on improving medical care and player wellbeing through expanding resources and structured programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systems with specialised staff and advanced resources addressing diverse medical and wellbeing needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pioneering, innovative approaches setting industry standards in both medical care and player wellbeing.</li> </ul>
MEDICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of basic injury assessment protocols.</li> <li>A combination of full-time and part-time staff in medical roles such as physiotherapists.</li> <li>Essential medical equipment and facilities are provided.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicated staff for specific medical roles (physiotherapists, for example).</li> <li>Advanced rehabilitation programmes support recovery and return-to-play protocols.</li> <li>Regular health monitoring and follow-ups are systematically implemented.</li> <li>Medical records and data management systems are introduced.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A team of specialised medical professionals, including nutritionists and orthopaedists, is in place.</li> <li>State-of-the-art injury prevention and treatment technologies are employed.</li> <li>Regular injury prevention workshops and educational sessions for players and staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruitment of elite medical practitioners and top specialists in various fields.</li> <li>Use of predictive analytics and advanced technologies for injury prevention and performance optimisation.</li> <li>Seamless integration with the performance department to align medical care with athletic goals.</li> <li>Pioneering approaches, such as personalised medicine and innovative rehabilitation techniques, set new industry standards.</li> <li>Strong partnerships with leading medical institutions and research centres.</li> </ul>
CARE AND WELLBEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A dedicated part-time welfare officer ensures essential support.</li> <li>Basic yet effective safeguarding procedures, including thorough background checks upon new staff hires, are in place.</li> <li>Support for educational needs is provided.</li> <li>Matchday nutrition and essential clothing, including training kits and optional dark shorts, are supplied.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safeguarding procedures are formalised with ongoing training for staff.</li> <li>Partnerships offer valuable academic support, including social media education.</li> <li>At least one nutritious meal is provided daily.</li> <li>Full-time schooling is provided, balancing academic and training schedules effectively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A full-time welfare officer and mental health counsellor are employed to provide dedicated care.</li> <li>Multidisciplinary team, including psychologists and nutritionists, supports player care.</li> <li>Safeguarding is rigorously enforced with robust procedures.</li> <li>A wide range of educational opportunities is made available, for example, online university courses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full-time psychological support help to enhance player wellbeing.</li> <li>Advanced wellbeing monitoring technology is used.</li> <li>Yearly background checks form part of the safeguarding procedure.</li> <li>Community engagement in mental health awareness.</li> <li>Daily breakfast and lunch are provided.</li> <li>Players receive media training and have controlled commercial activities.</li> </ul>



**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Athlete Care**

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of injuries assessed.</li> <li>• Number of hours dedicated to welfare activities.</li> <li>• Frequency of injury assessments.</li> <li>• Average time to injury diagnosis and treatment.</li> <li>• Percentage of injuries resulting in extended downtime.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of injuries treated by specialised staff.</li> <li>• Compliance with safeguarding policies.</li> <li>• Average recovery time for injuries.</li> <li>• Player health monitoring frequency.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in overall injury rate.</li> <li>• Return-to-play success rate.</li> <li>• Player satisfaction with support services.</li> <li>• Percentage of injuries treated with advanced technology.</li> <li>• Success rate of rehabilitation programmes.</li> <li>• Frequency of injury prevention workshops.</li> <li>• Effectiveness of injury prevention strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of recurring injuries predicted and prevented.</li> <li>• Adoption of innovative care practices.</li> <li>• Integration level of medical and performance data.</li> <li>• Player performance metrics in relation to health interventions.</li> <li>• Impact of advanced technology on injury reduction.</li> </ul>
RECOMMENDATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance training programmes for medical staff to improve injury assessment and treatment.</li> <li>• Gradually increase investment in specialised medical equipment and facilities to ensure better care.</li> <li>• Establish basic partnerships with medical institutions for foundational support and resources.</li> <li>• Provide flexible academic schedules and partnerships with local schools to help players balance education and football.</li> <li>• Implement regular workshops on time management and stress reduction to prevent player burnout.</li> <li>• Ensure staff are trained in managing sensitive health data to build trust between players and medical professionals.</li> <li>• Implement open-door policies for mental health care providing psychological and emotional support for athletes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce advanced technologies and specialised roles to improve rehabilitation and injury monitoring.</li> <li>• Develop comprehensive medical and rehabilitation programmes with regular updates tailored to female athletes.</li> <li>• Build strong relationships with academic and medical institutions for ongoing support.</li> <li>• Develop data collection systems for medical and performance tracking to build a foundation for effective care.</li> <li>• Create a clear medical onboarding procedure and return-to-play protocols for girls' teams.</li> <li>• Equip staff with training to provide early intervention for mental health issues.</li> <li>• Partner with local businesses to offer internships and vocational training, helping players prepare for post-football careers.</li> <li>• Increase collaboration with academic institutions to encourage research on gender-specific health concerns, such as menstrual cycle impact and injury prevention.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand the multidisciplinary team and integrate new technologies for advanced care.</li> <li>• Implement regular workshops and educational sessions on injury prevention.</li> <li>• Encourage mentorship programmes by connecting young players with older athletes or alumni.</li> <li>• Expand the multidisciplinary medical team and integrate new technologies for advanced care, focusing on injury prevention and recovery.</li> <li>• Focus on empowering players with knowledge about preventing common injuries.</li> <li>• Encourage former players to remain part of the club community, enhancing mentorship and career transition support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuously explore and adopt the latest advancements in sports medicine.</li> <li>• Invest in predictive analytics and personalised treatment options.</li> <li>• Foster a culture of innovation and collaboration with global experts.</li> <li>• Regularly review and update care practices based on industry standards and research.</li> <li>• Strengthen collaborations with leading research centres for cutting-edge solutions.</li> <li>• Establish a family support system offering financial hardship assistance.</li> <li>• Implement programmes such as offering retired players roles within the club.</li> </ul>

**Please find the Club Resources – key questions on page 265**

# ON-PITCH DEVELOPMENT

## Success Factors **Coaching, Performance**

On-pitch development in the context of girls' youth football academies refers to the direct training, coaching and performance-related activities that occur within the game, aimed at building the technical, tactical and physical skills of the players. As clubs across Europe attempt to evolve their programmes, the importance of structured, high-quality on-pitch development cannot be overstated. The effectiveness of these programmes directly affects the progression of young athletes through their pathway and helps to reduce the gap between the academy and senior women's football.



## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

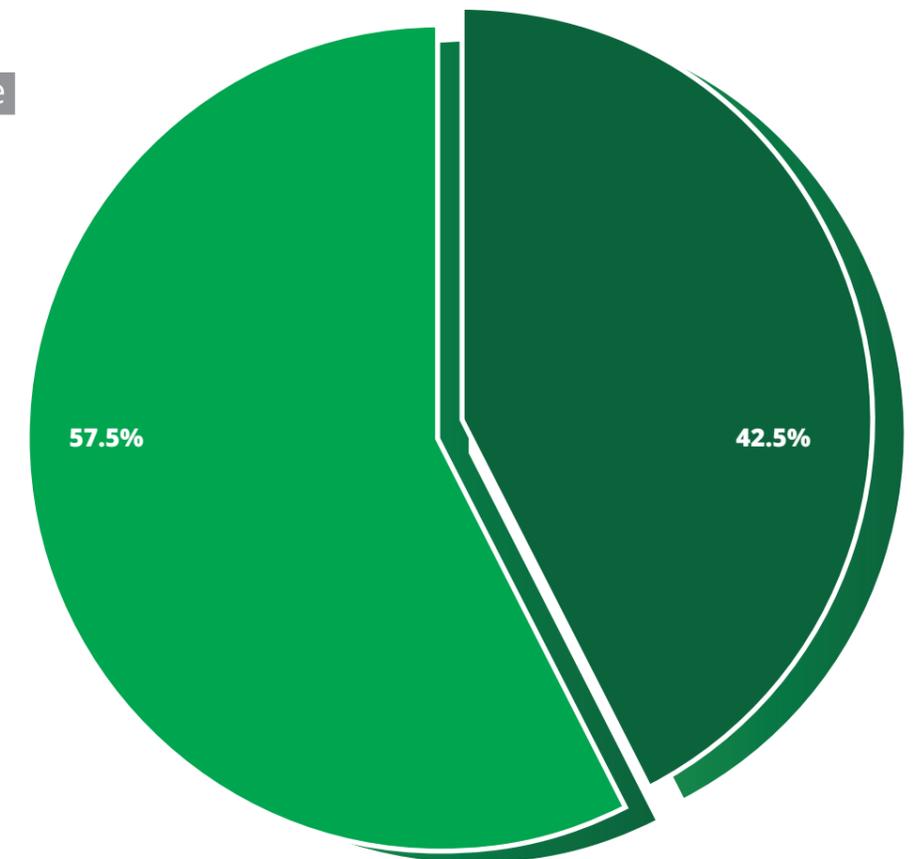
### Coaching Development and Education

A key aspect of producing young talent is the quality of the individuals responsible for player development — none more so than the coaches. Clubs that excel in on-pitch development place significant emphasis on the continuous education and growth of their coaching staff, recognising that the foundation of success lies in the capability and consistency of the coaches within the club. This commitment is evident through the provision of additional

training courses, workshops and professional development opportunities. These programmes ensure that coaches are not only up to date with the latest advancements in the game but are also continually refining their own coaching methods.

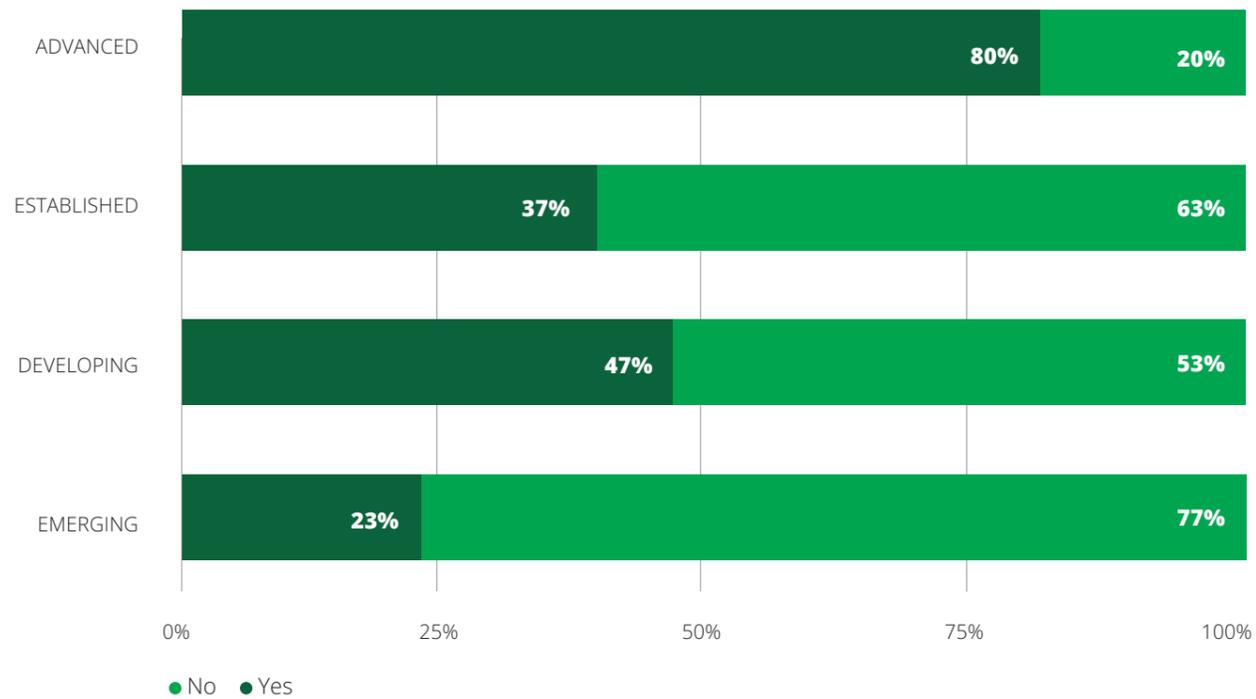
By prioritising the development of their coaching staff, clubs create a sustainable model where coaches are well prepared to deliver high-quality training sessions tailored to the specific needs of the players.

Does the club have a coaching education system in place for the girls' youth setup?

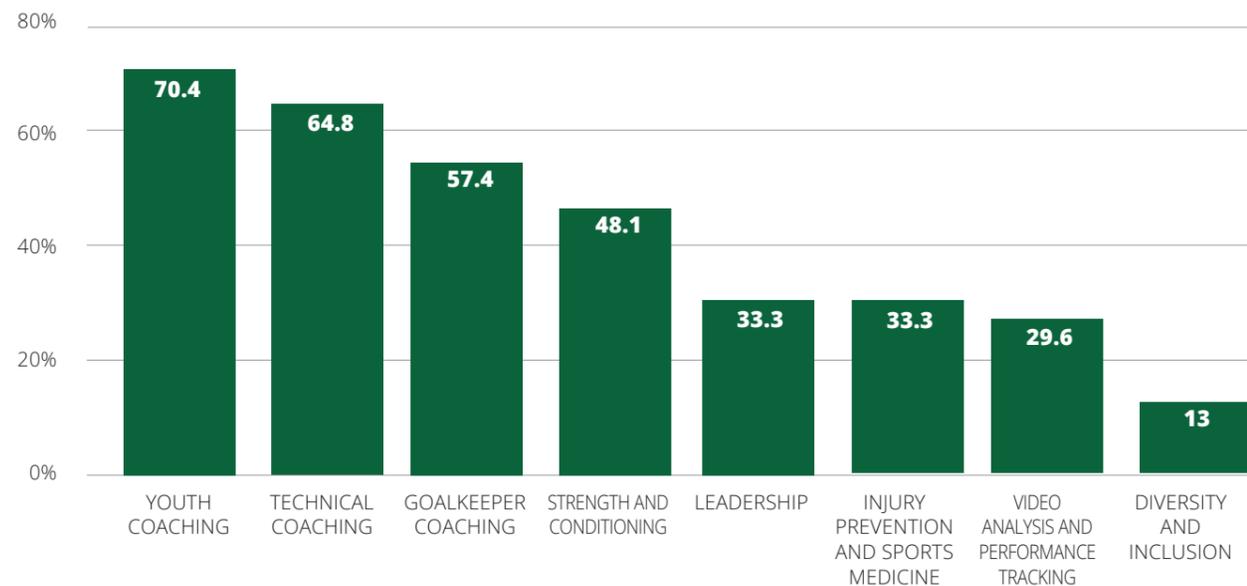


- No
- Yes

Does the club have a coaching education system in place for the girls' youth setup?



While just **42%** of the clubs have a specific coaching education system in place, **72%** offer coaches occasional additional football educational courses.



**Manchester City FC**

Manchester City has developed an innovative internal programme called 'football education', which aims to develop coaching staff who are already employed and familiar with the club and the Manchester City coaching methodology and approach. This has been helpful in providing a coaching pathway into their girls' and boys' youth system. Within this programme, if young aspiring coaches show promise, they are signposted towards the girls' and boys' academy programme for potential job opportunities. This approach motivates internal and future football education employees because they see a pathway of progression to develop their career.

By encouraging interaction between the coaching staff of different teams, Manchester City is fostering alignment in its football philosophy and training methodology across all levels of the club. This consistent approach ensures that players progressing through the academy are coached in line with the same principles that govern the senior teams, thus smoothing the transition to the first team. Moreover, this programme highlights the club's commitment to continuous professional development, ensuring that coaches remain at the forefront of modern football practices.



## Creation of Club-Wide Coaching Methodologies and Frameworks

In addition to ongoing education, leading clubs prioritise the creation of club-wide coaching methodologies that provide a unified approach to training across all age groups and teams. These methodologies ensure that every coach, from the youth system to the first team, follows a consistent set of principles, creating a clear and cohesive developmental pathway for players. The introduction of a standardised

coaching language allows for seamless communication between the coaching staff and players, minimising confusion and ensuring the club's playing philosophy is instilled at every level.

By adopting this systematic approach, clubs not only strengthen the individual development of players but also reinforce the shared identity and culture within the club, contributing to long-term success.



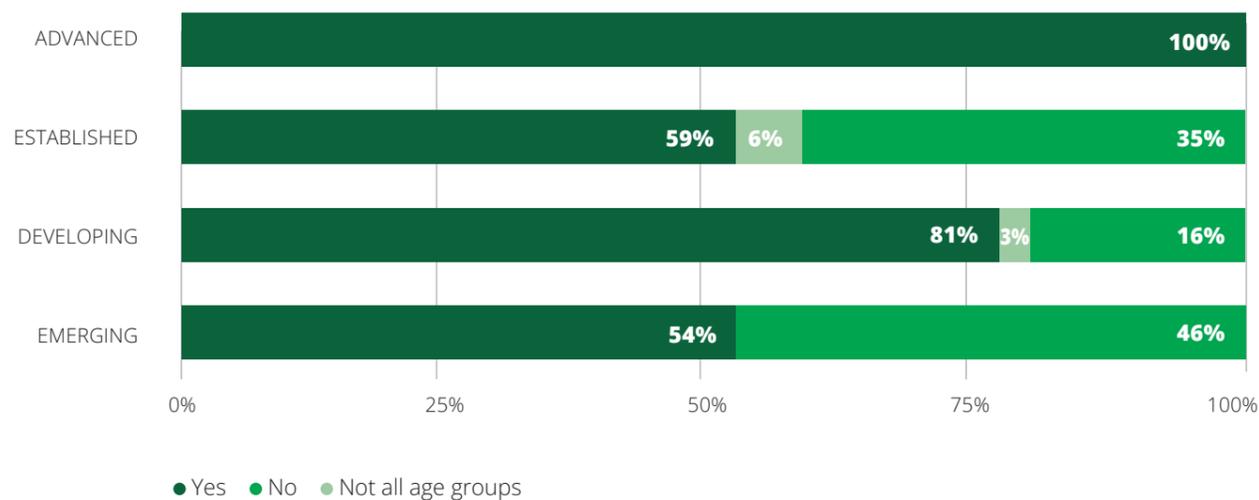
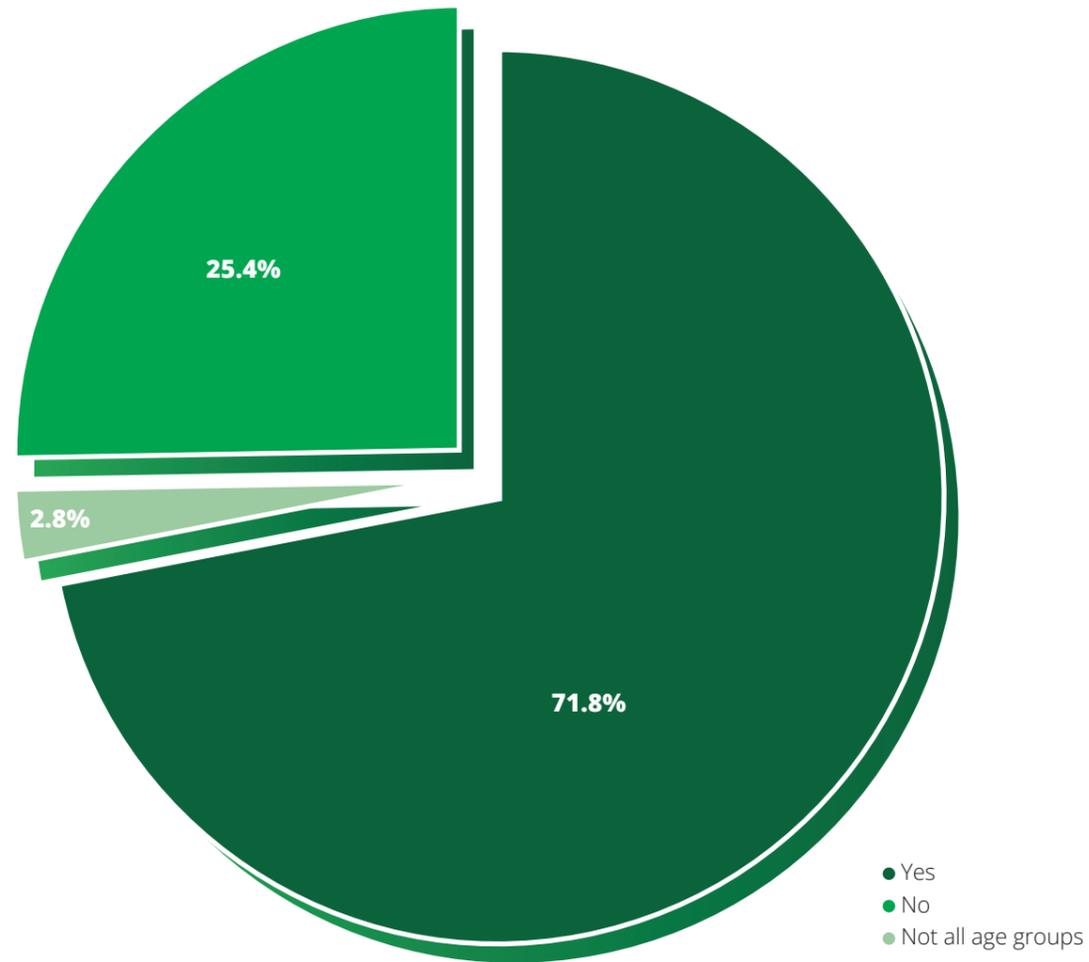
**“ The development of young players is directly tied to the coaching environment and quality of the coaching they receive in that environment. When clubs invest in the education and growth of their coaches, they are committing to continuously develop this. ”**



**Gemma Grainger**  
Norway Women's National Team,  
Head Coach



Does the girls' youth system have a clearly defined coaching methodology that is shared with staff across all age groups?



### Malmö FF

Malmö FF has developed a comprehensive club-wide methodology that is applied consistently across both its boys' and girls' academies. This methodology is documented in a detailed handbook covering a range of key areas critical to player development and is provided to all the teams' staff and people involved in the club to ensure alignment. It includes guidance on team identity, organisational goals and leadership development, as well as the technical, tactical, physical, mental and social growth of players. This unified approach ensures that players across all age groups and genders receive a consistent developmental experience aligned with the club's long-term vision.

The methodology supports the day-to-day training and development of players while also ensuring that all coaches, regardless of their team, work within a structured framework. This structure promotes a shared understanding of the club's football philosophy and ensures that key principles are applied consistently throughout the academy.

A key feature of Malmö FF's system is its emphasis on ongoing communication and alignment across the entire academy. This collaborative approach ensures that the players' development pathways are clear and that there is a smooth progression from the academy through to the first team, with all age groups benefiting from a cohesive set of principles and standards. By embedding this methodology, Malmö FF creates a strong foundation for long-term success, guaranteeing that all players, whether boys or girls, are developed under the same high standards.



## An Evolution in Coaching Methodologies

Many clubs are still in the process of fine-tuning these methodologies. Where possible, they often adapt existing frameworks from the men's first team/ boys' youth system, recognising the benefits of leveraging established systems. These structures, which have already proved to be successful, can offer valuable insights and foundational strategies that can be applied to the girls' programmes. Yet the process of simply transferring methodologies isn't always straightforward, as there are critical differences between the physical, tactical and psychological development of female players.

As a result, there remains an ongoing discussion on how best to tailor these programmes specifically to the girls' youth system. Customised programmes

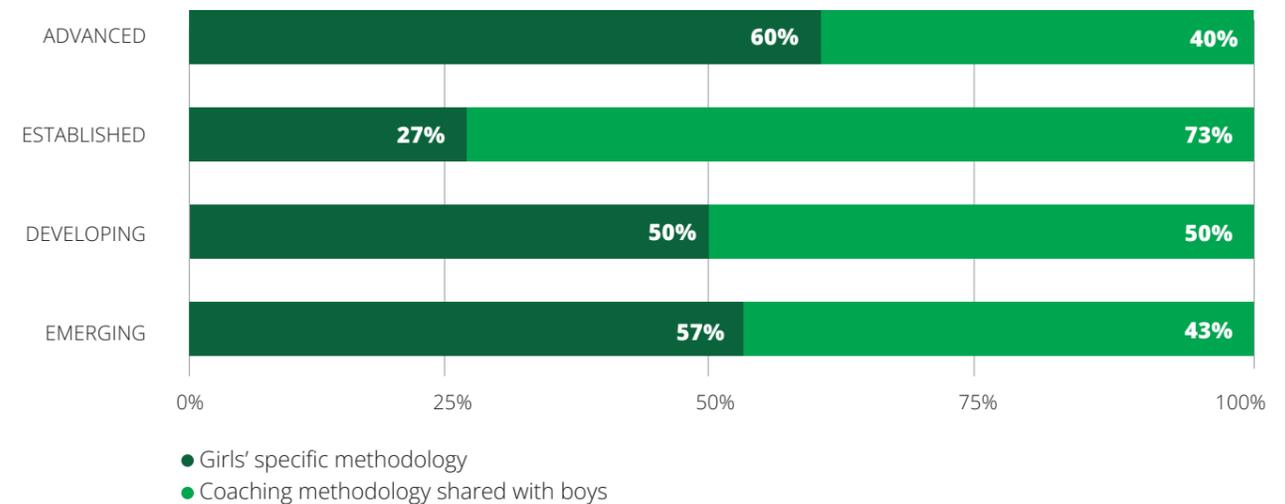
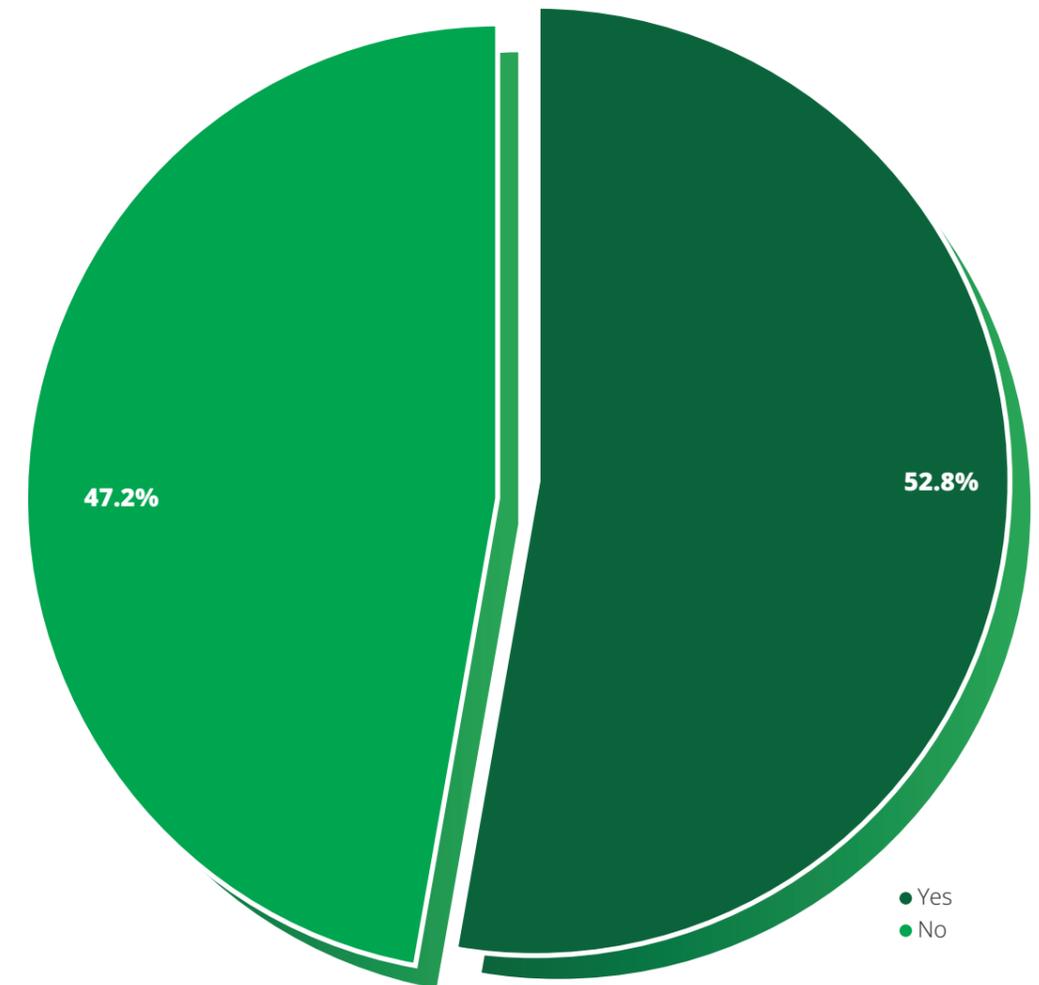
would need to account for the unique challenges faced by female players, ranging from physical development to social factors influencing their participation in sport.

This debate continues to shape how clubs develop their youth systems, prompting many to find a balance between integrating the best elements of the boys' academy model while making necessary adjustments to meet the needs of the girls' teams.

This ongoing evolution in coaching methodologies highlights the importance of flexibility and innovation in youth development. Clubs that can adapt and tailor their approach effectively are more likely to create an environment that puts the female athlete at the centre of their model while maintaining the overarching principles of their club-wide philosophy.



Clubs with methodologies that have a shared approach with the boys' youth system



## Focus on Individual Development Plans

Leading clubs recognise the importance of individualised development plans (IDPs) to address the unique needs of each player. These plans are generally built around the pillars of player development – technical, tactical, physical, psychological and social/behavioural. The key to successful IDP creation is to ensure that players have clear, concise and actionable targets. These goals should be easily integrated into both individual and team training programmes to make sure that players understand precisely which areas they need to focus on and improve.

A rudimentary factor in the success of IDPs is player commitment. Players must fully engage with their development plans, understanding the importance of owning

their progress. However, it is important to strike a balance, as overwhelming players with excessive information can dilute the main focus and hinder their development. Clubs should prioritise simplicity and clarity so that players are not overloaded, allowing them to concentrate on the most important areas for growth.

Consistency is another core component. Leading clubs emphasise the use of a standardised IDP framework across the youth system which can extend into the first team. This approach ensures players, regardless of the stage in the development pathway, receive consistent guidance and that the coaching staff operate with a unified strategy. By maintaining a cohesive structure, players can smoothly

transition through each stage of their development.

Ongoing feedback and monitoring of progress is essential to ensure IDPs remain relevant and effective. Regular check-ins between players and coaching staff provide an opportunity to assess progress, adjust goals accordingly and maintain alignment between the player's current capabilities and their long-term development objectives.

Collaboration between players and coaches is a deciding factor in creating a sense of ownership and accountability, which are fundamental drivers in the success of IDPs.

These regular coach-led IDP player touchpoints then feed into a series of macrocycle meetings with a broader

multidisciplinary team (MDT), which may include coaching, performance and medical, player care, nutrition and psychology staff. Regular communication between these teams helps to create well-rounded development plans that ensure no element of the players' progress is overlooked.

This structured cadence within the MDT and with players ensures that staff maintain consistent communication with all stakeholders allowing them to develop a 'no surprises' culture through regular touchpoints. By doing so, clubs create an environment where players benefit from holistic, player-centred support, ensuring that their development is carefully monitored and adjusted throughout their journey.



### AFC Ajax

At AFC Ajax, the girls' youth system is built around the concept of 'microdosing', which is a highly individualised approach to player development. This concept focuses on providing each player with training sessions specifically designed to address her unique needs in terms of physical development, technical ability and growth potential.

Microdosing allows for the gradual introduction of more intense training sessions, ensuring that the workload is adjusted to the player's readiness and helping to prevent injuries.

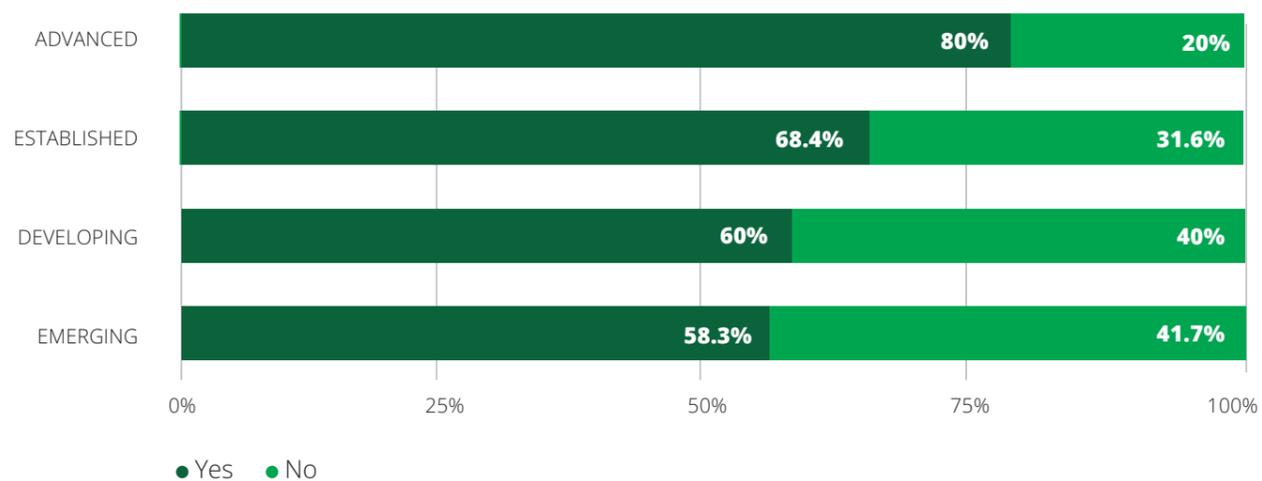
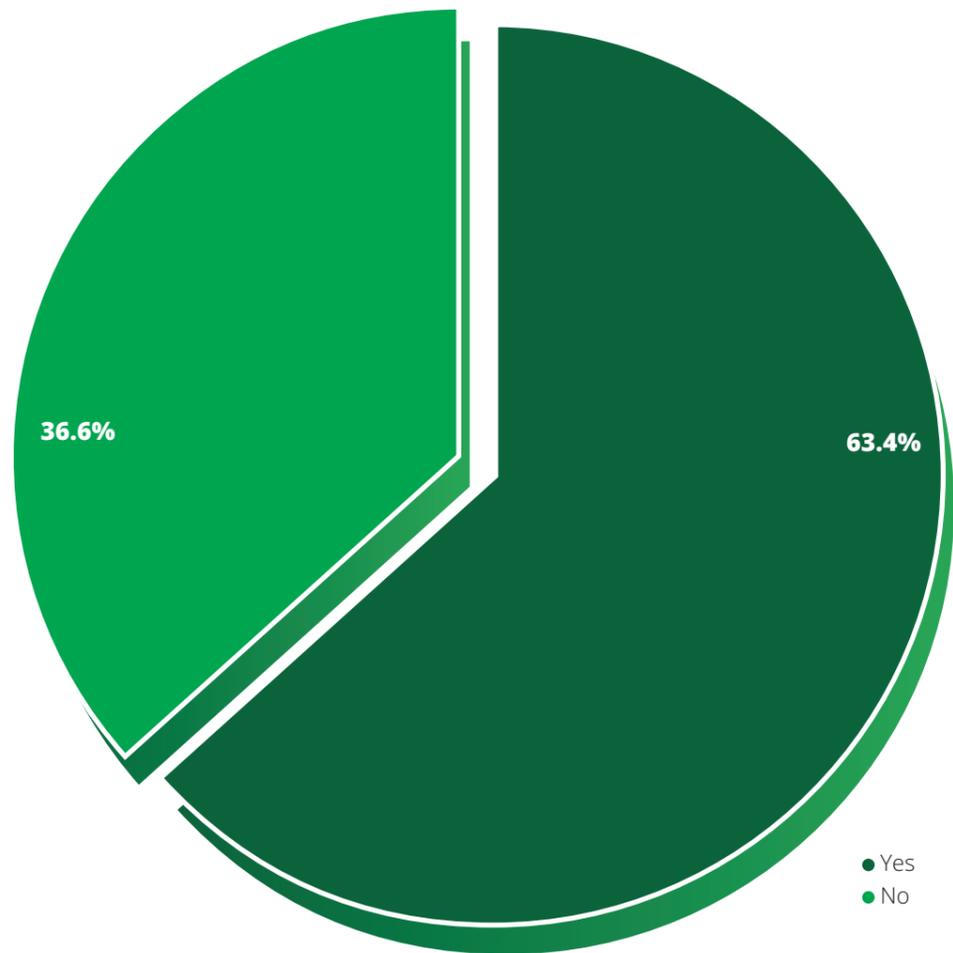
For players who are on the cusp of joining the first team, Ajax runs the Talent (+) Plus Programme. This

programme is designed to increase the intensity and workload of training, preparing players for the demands of senior football. It incorporates various development areas, including cognitive development, social and emotional growth and motorial development. By focusing on these diverse areas, Ajax ensures that players are not only physically prepared for elite football but also mentally and emotionally equipped to handle the pressures of professional competition.

This approach allows Ajax to nurture well-rounded athletes who can seamlessly transition to senior football, with each player following a personalised development plan tailored to her specific needs and long-term potential.



Clubs that produce individualised performance plans for players



**Club Atlético de Madrid Femenino**

Club Atlético de Madrid places a strong emphasis on individualised player development, recognising that each player has unique strengths and areas for improvement. The club has developed a system of tailored training programmes for its youth players, referred to as ‘club project players’. These players benefit from specialised technical and physical preparation plans designed to meet their individual development needs and enhance their overall progress.

In addition to these personalised training plans, the club provides individual video performance analysis. This allows players to review their match performances, identify key areas for improvement and work closely with coaches to make necessary adjustments. The club also holds monthly evaluation meetings where players are encouraged to reflect on their development and set personal goals, fostering a sense of ownership over their progress.

While the club closely monitors and guides player development, Club Atlético de Madrid is in the process of developing a standardised platform to track player progress more consistently across all age groups.

This step will enable the club to further streamline its player development and ensure that performance monitoring is consistent from the youth academy right through to the first team.



## KEY CHALLENGES

Despite the increasing investment in girls' youth football, several key challenges persist that hinder on-pitch development. From the availability of experienced professionals to managing player workloads and enhancing performance tracking, clubs continue to navigate a complex landscape.



### Limited Availability of Professionals Experienced in the Women's Game

While there has been significant progress in the professionalisation of girls' football, a major challenge remains: the lack of experienced professionals in the women's game. Although licencing requirements at some clubs have raised the baseline standards for coaches and performance staff, practical experience in the unique aspects of women's and girls' football is still relatively low. This gap affects the quality of on-pitch development as many professionals, despite having adequate certification, may not fully grasp the nuanced differences between the player development of boys and girls.

Clubs often face the challenge of hiring coaches who are experienced in dealing with the specific needs of female players, including the physical and psychological demands that can differ from the men's game. Developing coaching staff who have experience in the women's game is critical for improving the quality of training and overall player development.

## Representation of Women on the Coaching Staff

Linked to the issue of experience is the representation of women on the coaching staff in girls' youth systems across Europe. Despite efforts to promote gender equality in football, many clubs still face difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified female coaches. Representation matters — not only as a means of inspiring young female athletes, but also as providing role models who understand the specific challenges faced by girls in football.

Increasing the number of women in coaching roles could help to close the experience gap and enrich the training environment. Female coaches often bring valuable perspectives to player management and development, especially in addressing the mental and social challenges that girls face.

However, the pipeline for female coaches needs to be strengthened, with more opportunities for women to advance through coaching education programmes and into leadership roles within clubs.

In response to this, some proactive clubs are providing development opportunities for their own players to acquire the skills and certifications needed to pursue careers in coaching and other roles in the women's game. By offering education programmes and providing this career advice while they are still active in the game, clubs are helping to build the future generation of female coaches. These initiatives empower players to develop career pathways in coaching and contribute to a more sustainable pipeline of experienced professionals within the women's game.



### AC Sparta Praha

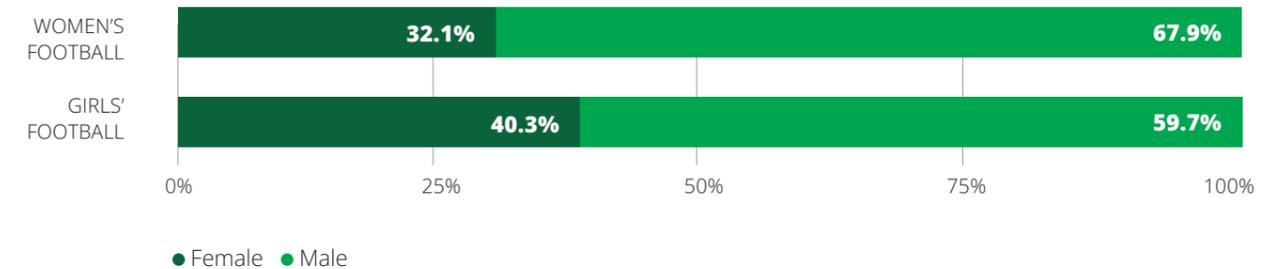
AC Sparta Praha has made a strong commitment to improving diversity within its coaching staff, particularly in the girls' youth system. The club has set a target to have at least one female coach represented within each age group. This initiative aims to create a coaching environment that reflects the diverse experiences of the players, recognising that different coaching styles can have a significant impact on player engagement and development.



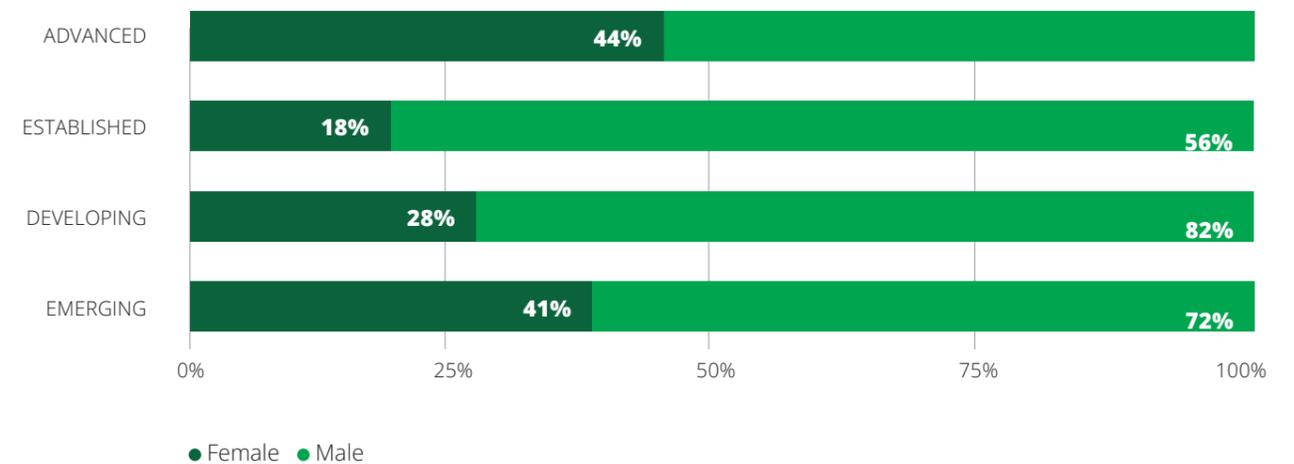
By making sure that female coaches are present at every level of the girls' academy, Sparta Praha is fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for its young players. Female coaches often serve as important role models, especially for young female athletes who may be navigating the unique challenges of growing up in the world of football. The club's strategy is to provide a balanced coaching cohort that can cater to the varying needs of each player, whether that be in terms of technical development, mental resilience or emotional support.

This approach improves the player experience and contributes to a more diverse and dynamic coaching environment. Sparta Praha's commitment to gender diversity in coaching is a key part of its long-term strategy for enhancing the quality of player development within the club.

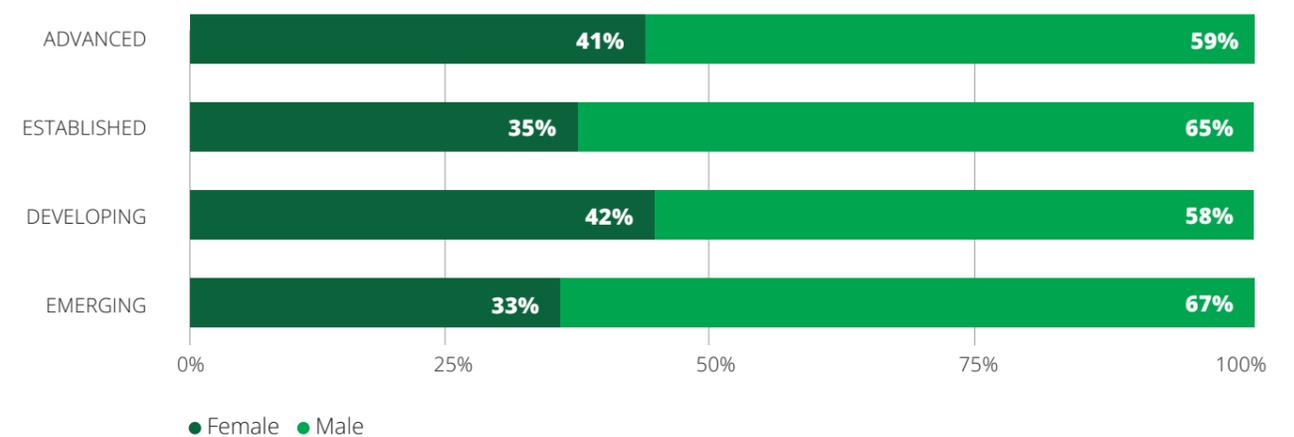
### Women's and girls' football coach gender balance



### Women's football coach gender balance



### Girls' football coach gender balance



## Extensive Player Workload

The issue of extensive player workload is another significant challenge in girls' football development. Young female players often face a demanding schedule, with frequent call-ups for national and regional team selections, tournaments and club commitments. With players needing to balance these footballing responsibilities with education or dual career paths, this can take a physical and mental toll.

Clubs must navigate this balance carefully, ensuring that players are not overworked to the point of injury or burnout. Managing workload involves close collaboration between the player coaches and performance and medical

staff to ensure that rest and recovery are prioritised alongside training. In particular, the demands of travel and competition at the regional and national levels can be intense for young players, and clubs need to have structured support systems to monitor and manage commitments effectively.

In addition to cost concerns, nearly half of clubs (49%) believe that the frequency and timing of national team call-ups disrupt the schedules of girls' youth system teams. A balance must be found for international competitions, as surveyed clubs reported that an average of ten girls' youth system players currently represent their national team.

Average number of club games played by each development group



**“Balancing education, national team duties and club commitments can put an immense strain on young players. Without structured support and careful workload management, the risk of burnout and injury increases dramatically. Rest and recovery need to be treated as priorities – not afterthoughts.”**



**Amy McDonald**  
Senior Auditor,  
PGAAC



## Lack of Established Performance Functions

**E**ffective performance tracking is an essential element when optimising player development, yet many girls' youth systems lack the necessary tools and systems to monitor progress comprehensively. In many clubs performance data is still manually recorded, often using spreadsheets or fragmented processes. This absence of structured performance KPIs and cohesive workflows hinders clubs' ability to consistently evaluate player development and adapt training programmes accordingly.

There is a growing awareness of the

need for more automated and structured performance tracking systems to evaluate the quality of on-pitch development. By incorporating technologies such as GPS tracking, video analysis and fitness monitoring tools, clubs can capture real-time data that offers a more detailed understanding of player performance.

These advancements enable clubs to make better-informed decisions regarding player development, injury prevention and workload management, allowing for a more data-driven and individualised approach to training.



**“ Technology is enabling us to adapt precise training programmes tailored specifically to female athletes. This data-driven strategy improves on-pitch performance, reduces injury risks and establishes a long-term framework for sustainable player growth and development. This is essential for clubs to effectively track progress so that every player has the opportunity to maximise their potential. ”**

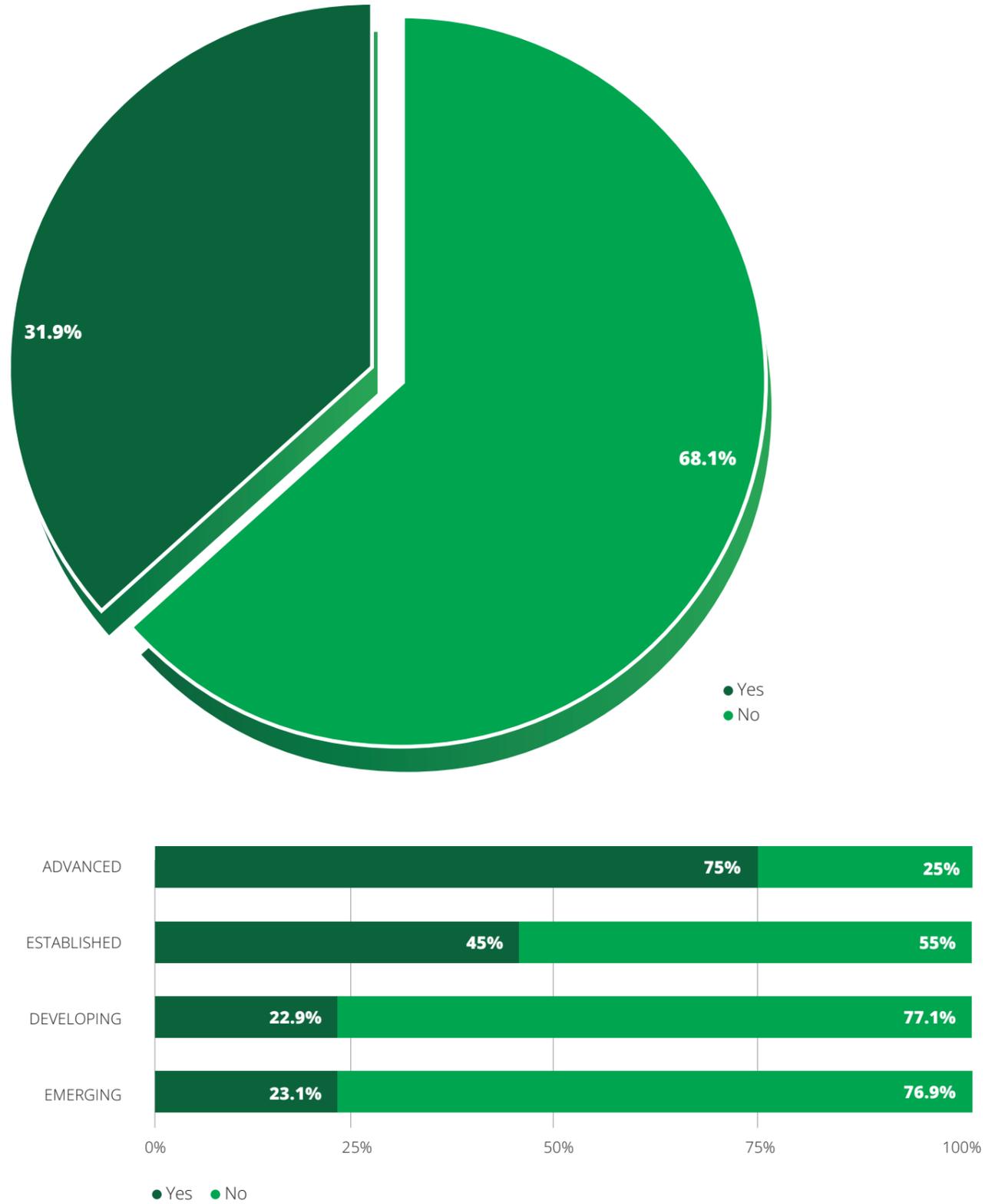


**Jack Sharkey**

Former Director of Innovation and Performance, OL Lyonnes



Do you track session RPE in the girls' youth system?



## Goalkeeping Development

Goalkeeper development is another area in girls' football that needs to improve. While it is now common practice for clubs to have dedicated goalkeeping coaches and to provide goalkeeper coaching at all stages of development, the overall quality of goalkeeper training may fall short.

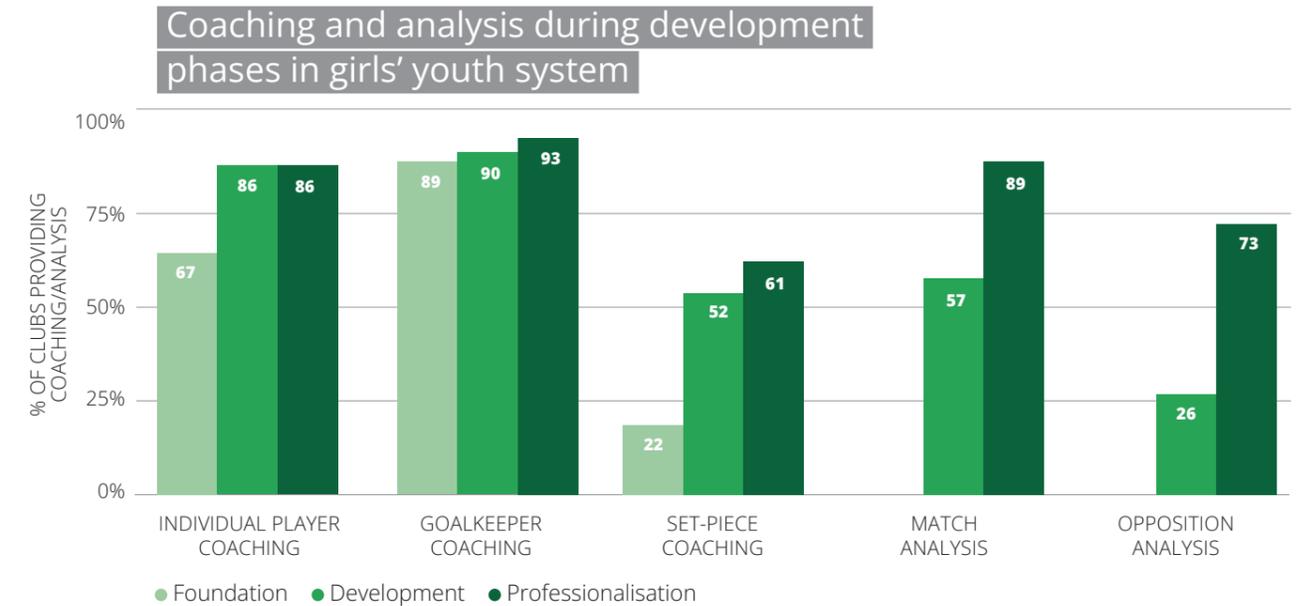
Ultimately, this has a negative impact on the number of talented goalkeepers at both academy and senior level.

The challenge lies in not only hiring dedicated goalkeeper coaches but ensuring that these coaches receive

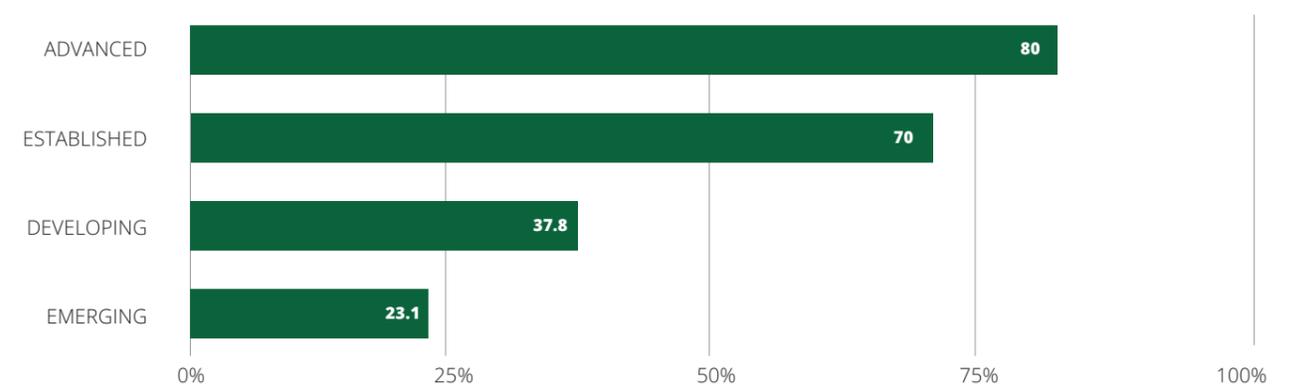
the necessary support, education and resources to raise the standard of training.

Clubs that invest in specialised training programmes and individualised development plans for goalkeepers are more likely to produce players who can meet the demands of the women's professional game.

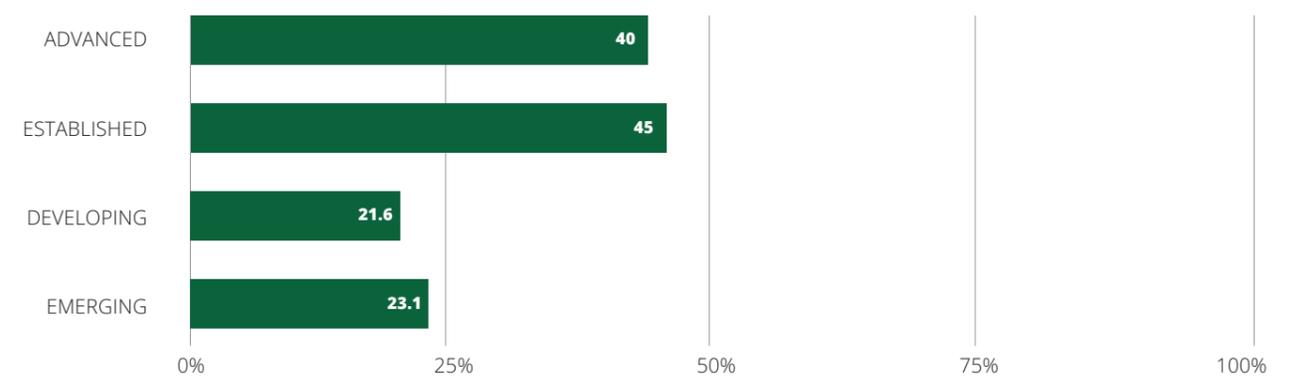
Addressing this gap is pivotal, as goalkeepers play a fundamental role in team performance and their development should have the requisite technical and tactical focus.



### Percentage of clubs with dedicated goalkeeping coaches in the girls' youth system



### Percentage of clubs with dedicated goalkeeping coaches in the girls' youth system (>1 FTE)



## INTERNAL CLUB ASSESSMENT

**G**iven the ongoing challenges in coaching, performance tracking and holistic player development within girls' football, clubs can benefit from implementing a structured framework for internal assessment.

This model focuses on key areas such as inconsistencies in coaching methodologies, underutilised performance data and the need for tailored development plans that address the unique needs of female athletes.

By integrating these elements into a comprehensive evaluation tool, clubs can systematically assess and enhance their coaching processes, performance systems and operational strategies.

The framework emphasises leading practices at every level, offering clubs clear, actionable steps to improve their on-pitch development capabilities and foster long-term success within their girls' football programmes.



Overleaf  
**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**On-Pitch Development**



# MATURITY MATRIX

## On-pitch development

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
DESCRIPTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic processes, such as athlete screening and foundational strength and conditioning (S&amp;C) programmes, managed by general staff and covering multiple areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicated staff in key areas such as S&amp;C and nutrition, utilising basic technology and data to inform individualised programmes, with a strong emphasis on injury prevention.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More specialised staff in key areas using modern technology and data analytics to create individualised programmes. Strong collaboration between coaching, medical and performance teams, with closer integration and alignment to the first team.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly specialised staff using advanced data analytics, predictive models and cutting-edge technology to optimise performance, with a strong emphasis on individualised training programmes.</li> </ul>
COACHING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each age group is led by a dedicated head coach, often supported by assistant or specialist coaches (eg the goalkeeper coach) shared across teams.</li> <li>Basic technical and tactical training sessions are implemented to build foundational football skills for players.</li> <li>Coaches begin to lay the groundwork for future collaboration with other departments (medical and performance staff, for example).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each age-group staff is expanded to include extra assistant coaches</li> <li>Individual development plans (IDPs) are introduced for key players, providing a more personalised approach to training.</li> <li>Early efforts are made to develop a shared coaching philosophy across teams, aligning age groups under a unified approach.</li> <li>Basic match analysis and tactical reviews begin to inform training sessions and game strategies.</li> <li>Increasing collaboration between coaching and other departments (for example the medical and performance staff) to align on player performance.</li> <li>Clear communication channels are established between coaching staff and players to discuss development plans and progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each age group benefits from a full coaching team, including head coaches, assistant coaches, goalkeeper coaches and analysts, ensuring specialised support.</li> <li>Individual development plans (IDPs) are formalised for all players and regularly updated to reflect each player's progress and needs.</li> <li>A structured coaching methodology is in place across all age groups, with clear pathways that link development stages to the first team.</li> <li>Regular use of tactical reviews, match analysis and data-driven assessments makes sure that training programmes are responsive and tailored to team and individual needs.</li> <li>Coaching staff work closely with performance and medical departments to optimise player development and ensure recovery strategies are aligned.</li> <li>Player feedback loops and performance reviews are regularly integrated into day-to-day coaching operations, keeping players informed and engaged in their development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full coaching teams, including specialist roles such as performance analysts, mental performance coaches and dedicated goalkeeper coaches, are fully integrated into the women's programme.</li> <li>Comprehensive, data-driven individual development plans (IDPs) are created – covering technical, tactical, physical and mental aspects of player development – and consistently integrated into both individual and team training sessions.</li> <li>A fully integrated coaching methodology is shared across all age groups, seamlessly linking development stages to the first team, ensuring smooth player transitions.</li> <li>Advanced use of video analysis, real-time feedback and tactical software ensures continuous refinement of both individual and team performance.</li> <li>Coaching staff collaborates closely with medical and performance teams to offer a multidisciplinary approach to player development and injury prevention.</li> <li>Regular coaching education programmes, workshops and knowledge-sharing initiatives maintain high standards and encourage innovation among coaching staff.</li> <li>Expanded recovery facilities and testing equipment.</li> <li>Tracking and management of individualised competitions and scheduling plans.</li> </ul>



# MATURITY MATRIX

## On-pitch development

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
PERFORMANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic S&amp;C programmes are established to focus on general fitness and physical development.</li> <li>• Athlete screenings are conducted to assess basic physical health and fitness levels.</li> <li>• Performance staff provide general support for multiple areas, ensuring basic recovery and conditioning processes are in place.</li> <li>• Initial efforts are made to begin collaborating with coaching staff to ensure training programmes meet basic physical performance needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated performance staff are assigned to key areas such as S&amp;C, nutrition and recovery, offering more specialised support for player development.</li> <li>• Individualised performance programmes are created for key players, incorporating data such as fitness levels, recovery needs and injury history.</li> <li>• Early adoption of technology such as GPS trackers and fitness apps helps collect basic data for performance analysis.</li> <li>• Collaboration between performance and coaching staff becomes more structured, with performance insights increasingly informing training programmes.</li> <li>• Basic injury prevention programmes are developed and sports science tools are introduced to track physical performance metrics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A larger, more specialised performance team is in place, including experts in S&amp;C, nutrition, sports science and injury prevention, working closely with all age groups.</li> <li>• Comprehensive, individualised performance plans are created for all players, using data to monitor fitness, workload and recovery management.</li> <li>• A centralised athlete management system (AMS) is implemented to collect, store and analyse performance data, driving informed decision-making.</li> <li>• Performance staff collaborate regularly with coaching and medical teams to align player development and optimise training plans based on data insights.</li> <li>• Bio-banding awareness developed around training methodologies.</li> <li>• Advanced sports science tools and recovery methods (eg GPS tracking) are integrated into daily operations, enhancing player performance and injury prevention.</li> <li>• Multidisciplinary collaboration between performance, coaching and medical teams creates a holistic approach to player development, supporting continuous improvement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly specialised performance staff overseen by the head of medical and performance operate across various roles, including S&amp;C, injury prevention, female health, mental performance and data analysis, fully dedicated to optimising player development.</li> <li>• Data-driven individual performance plans for each player are continuously updated based on real-time data, integrating technical, physical and mental aspects of performance.</li> <li>• Performance data is fully integrated into predictive analytics models to optimise training load management and injury prevention.</li> <li>• Implementation of bio-banding strategies to structure training around biological age and physical development.</li> <li>• Menstrual cycle tracking with adapted training programmes integrated to optimise player performance.</li> <li>• Advanced recovery programmes are used and real-time performance tracking tools are applied across all age groups to ensure optimal workload and player health.</li> <li>• Data from performance tracking is used proactively to adjust programmes, and players are educated on their own development and recovery through specialised performance workshops.</li> </ul>
KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation rates.</li> <li>• Number of training programmes offered.</li> <li>• Re-injury rate.</li> <li>• Number of players meeting basic physical performance benchmarks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of athletes meeting programme goals.</li> <li>• Programme completion rate.</li> <li>• Injury reduction rates.</li> <li>• Data collection frequency and accuracy.</li> <li>• Number of individualised plans implemented.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of injury reduction.</li> <li>• Comprehensive player progress metrics.</li> <li>• Return-to-play time reduction.</li> <li>• Player availability.</li> <li>• Data-driven programme adjustments.</li> <li>• Number of players successfully transitioning to the next level or professional teams.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predictive model accuracy.</li> <li>• Data-informed decision-making.</li> <li>• Number of players using advanced individual performance plans.</li> <li>• Long-term player progression and injury prevention metrics.</li> <li>• Success rates of player transitions to professional or senior teams.</li> </ul>



## MATURITY MATRIX

# On-pitch development

RECOMMENDATIONS

### EMERGING

- Formalise collaboration between coaching and performance teams. Building strong communication lines between coaches, medical staff and performance analysts from the start ensures that decisions around player development are more informed and holistic.
- Introduce foundational technology for basic data collection. Begin with simple performance tracking systems to capture key data on fitness, injury prevention and player progress. This will lay the foundation for a more structured approach in the future.
- Establish regular player screenings and S&C programmes. Making sure that players are regularly assessed for fitness and injury risks helps clubs to better manage player workloads and prevent early burnout.
- Increase focus on gender diversity in coaching. Encourage female representation on coaching staff by offering internal pathways for players to develop into coaching roles, setting the stage for more women in leadership positions.

### DEVELOPING

- Invest in more specialised staff (eg performance coaches and analysts). Bringing in staff experienced in women's football will enhance the quality of training, particularly in addressing the specific physical and psychological needs of female players. Specialised roles, including goalkeeper coaches and analysts, help to narrow the experience gap.
- Expand the use of data and technology (such as GPS) to monitor performance. Use basic GPS tracking and video analysis tools to begin systematically capturing performance data. This will also help to address the workload issue by tracking player fatigue and workload more accurately.
- Implement regular communication between departments (for example medical, performance and coaching). Structured meetings between departments help to optimise player workload and ensure recovery is prioritised, reducing the risk of injury from overworking players.

### ESTABLISHED

- Establish centralised systems (eg athlete management systems) for tracking and evaluating player performance. Unified systems can address the lack of structured performance functions by integrating data from GPS, physical assessments and video analysis, ensuring the data is used to inform decision-making around player development and training plans.
- Maintain data-driven adjustments to individual plans. Regularly update individual development plans based on real-time performance data. This is particularly important for managing the workload of young players who are balancing club and national team commitments.
- Focus on goalkeeper-specific development programmes. Address the gap in goalkeeper training by creating specialised development plans for goalkeepers, investing in dedicated coaches and providing them with the necessary resources to improve technical and tactical skills.
- Encourage continuous education for both coaching and performance staff. Ongoing development opportunities for coaches and performance staff are deciding factors for ensuring that they stay current with best practices and can meet the specific demands of developing female players.

### ADVANCED

- Leverage advanced analytics and predictive models for training load and injury prevention. Incorporating predictive analytics will help clubs to manage player workloads more effectively, reducing the risk of injury and improving performance. This is particularly useful for managing the demands of players involved in multiple competitions.
- Expand collaboration across departments (medical, performance, coaching, player care and so on). Ensuring that there is multidisciplinary collaboration is key to building a holistic approach to player development, allowing clubs to monitor player wellbeing and performance more comprehensively.
- Maintain continuous innovation in training technology and staff education programmes. Invest in cutting-edge technology and advanced methods like bio-banding to tailor training to the physical development stages of players. Keep staff training up to date to ensure that they are equipped to use these innovations effectively.
- Enhance representation and recruitment of experienced female coaches. To address the limited availability of professionals experienced in the women's game, clubs should make a sustained effort to recruit more female coaches and provide internal career pathways for female players to transition into coaching roles.

Please find the Club Resources – key questions on page 266

# INFRASTRUCTURE

## Success Factors **Operations, Facilities, Competitions and Scheduling**

As clubs build up their youth systems for girls, a broad spectrum of logistical and organisational considerations — from internal communication systems, teams' operations and administration to facilities and games programme planning — needs to be accurately managed and delivered. Operations and facilities are essential to an effective girls' development process. Clubs are increasingly adopting centralised communication systems for players, parents and staff, trying to facilitate information sharing while taking the initiative to arrange competitive matches, including games against boys, to enhance player development. However, challenges persist due to limited team operations support, insufficient dedicated facilities, a lack of international competition opportunities and the need for more structured domestic leagues, all of which hinder the development and equal resource allocation for girls' academies.



**“The growth and strengthening of academies is a crucial next step in the professionalisation of the women’s game. By understanding the unique challenges and opportunities in girls’ pathways, we can build a robust foundation that not only nurtures talent but also elevates the entire ecosystem of women’s football.”**



**Patricia González**  
Women’s Technical Director,  
Club Atlético de Madrid



## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

### Club Operations and Communication

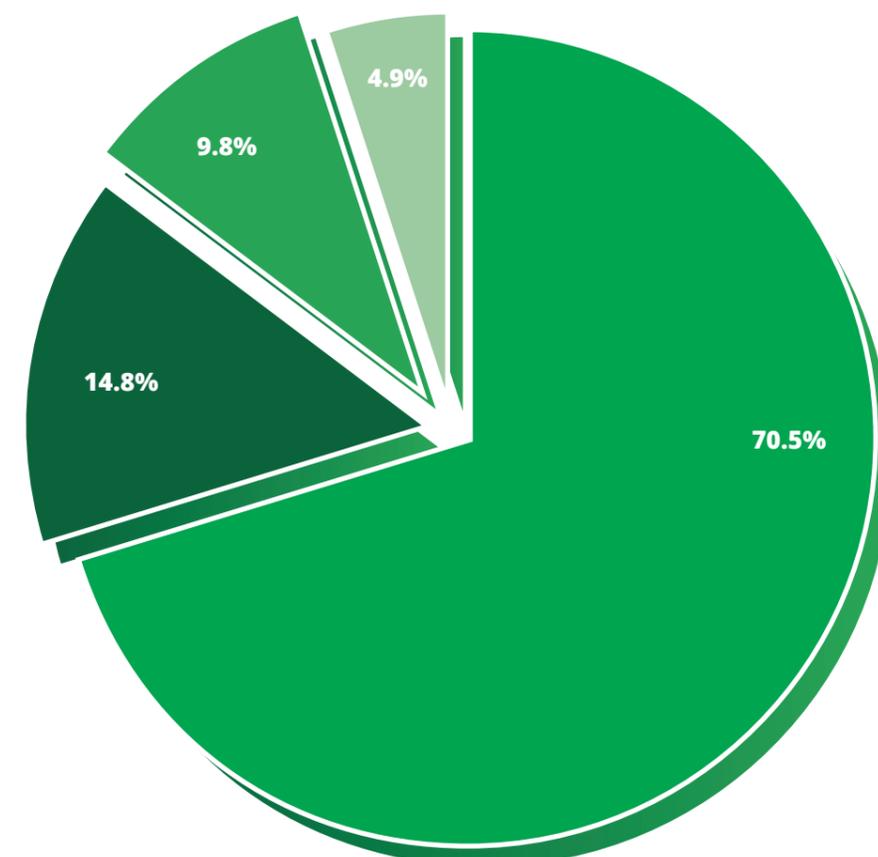
**A**cross Europe, clubs have started adopting more streamlined communication processes to improve operational efficiency and manage day-to-day logistics. While some clubs have introduced dedicated systems to manage scheduling, store player data (such as ID, passport, date of birth, contact details and so on) and centralise communication, many still rely on more manual methods.

These systems provide operational

clarity, helping staff, parents and players to stay informed and reducing miscommunication.

Many clubs rely on their coaching staff to communicate schedules and kit requirements to players and parents. In addition, a lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities and accountability for communication can lead to confusion, misalignment and operational inefficiencies, ultimately affecting resource management.

Schedule communication with players’ supervisor



- Coaches/managers
- Club executives
- Secretary/comms
- Ops/player care



### Arsenal FC

Arsenal FC uses TeamWorks as its primary communication platform for staff, players and parents. TeamWorks provides solutions for the everyday challenges of both players and staff by centralising key information, such as weekly schedules and important documents, meaning that players and their families have easy access to the appropriate information at the right time. By directing all communications through a single platform, Arsenal streamlines its operational processes and improves the efficiency of information flow, allowing staff to focus more on the key aspects of player development rather than administrative tasks.



Arsenal Football Club

## The Importance of Dedicated Facilities

The quality and availability of facilities are critical to player development, and while a majority of surveyed clubs provide access to training and matchday facilities (such as training and match pitches, changing rooms, treatment rooms and gyms) for their girls' programmes, these are often shared with boys' academies or the women's first team. This can lead to scheduling conflicts and a sense of being deprioritised, which affects the development of young female players.

While shared facilities are common,

clubs are increasingly recognising the importance of investing in dedicated infrastructure. Over the past five years, there has been a push to improve girls' facilities, with renovations reflecting the growing recognition that good infrastructure plays a pivotal role in the growth and professionalisation of girls' football. However, despite these improvements, the overall quality of facilities remains a key area for further development, and many clubs still lack specialised spaces that cater to the unique needs of their girls' programmes.

## Competitions and Scheduling

The lack of competitive leagues for girls remains a major issue in many countries, which often forces clubs to have their girls' teams compete in mixed leagues with boys, particularly at younger age groups. While this offers a higher level of competition, it brings challenges in terms of physical and tactical mismatches.

To overcome the lack of dedicated girls' competitions, clubs are taking the initiative and organising friendly

matches to expose their players to different styles of play.

Additionally, the trend of clubs seeking international competitions is on the rise, although financial and logistical challenges limit this option for many. Nevertheless, clubs that can afford to do so are sending their girls' teams abroad to participate in elite tournaments, further boosting their players' development with a diverse range of competitive experiences.

## KEY CHALLENGES

The progression of girls' clubs is inhibited by some significant logistical and practical problems, including a lack of travel provision or public transport links for players and families, a lack of competitive opportunities, and shared or substandard facilities.

### Lack of Dedicated Staff for Team Operations

**A**lthough there is a general desire to raise the level and professionalise girls' youth systems by providing them with adequate resources, the operations departments (admin, team managers, kit managers, players' transportation services and so on) are limited in their staffing for the girls' academies, resulting in communication and management challenges.

Only **28.8%** of teams have dedicated operations staff for the girls' youth system, while the majority of teams use operational resources from the wider women's football staff, where **64.4%** of clubs have dedicated staff.

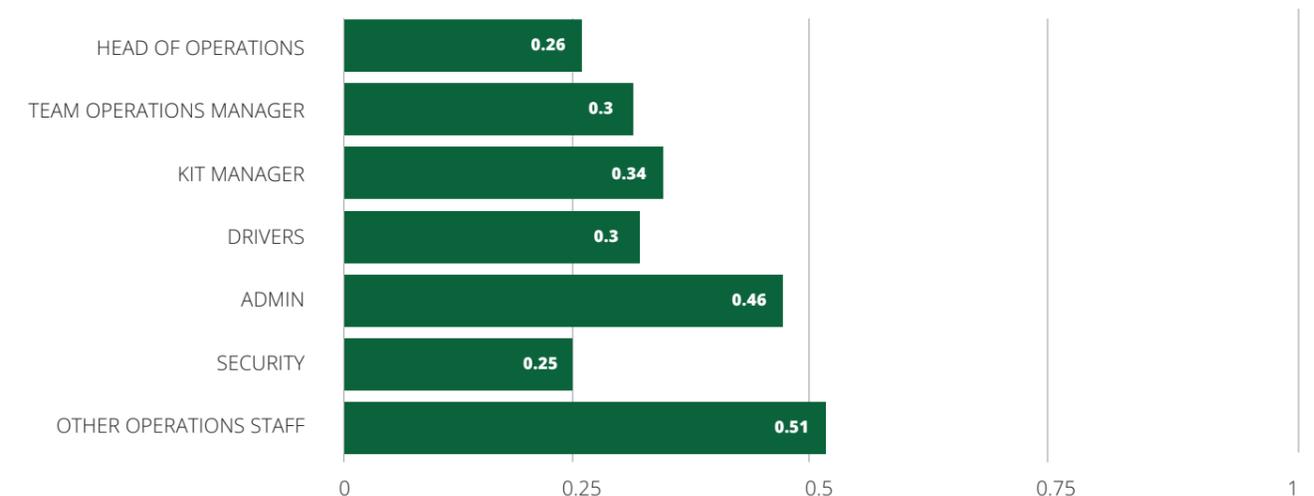
Roles dedicated to the teams' administrations are consequential for the appropriate and professional functioning of the system, and their presence with clear and defined responsibilities is non-negotiable for clubs aiming to further professionalise their operations.

This lack of structured support can create bottlenecks as the burden of administrative duties often distracts coaching staff from their primary responsibilities. Clubs are faced with a need to invest in team managers and dedicated operational roles to alleviate these issues and aid the professionalisation of girls' football at every level.



### Average full-time equivalent operations staff in the girls' youth system

Excluding staff dedicated only to women's first team and staff shared with men's and boys' academy



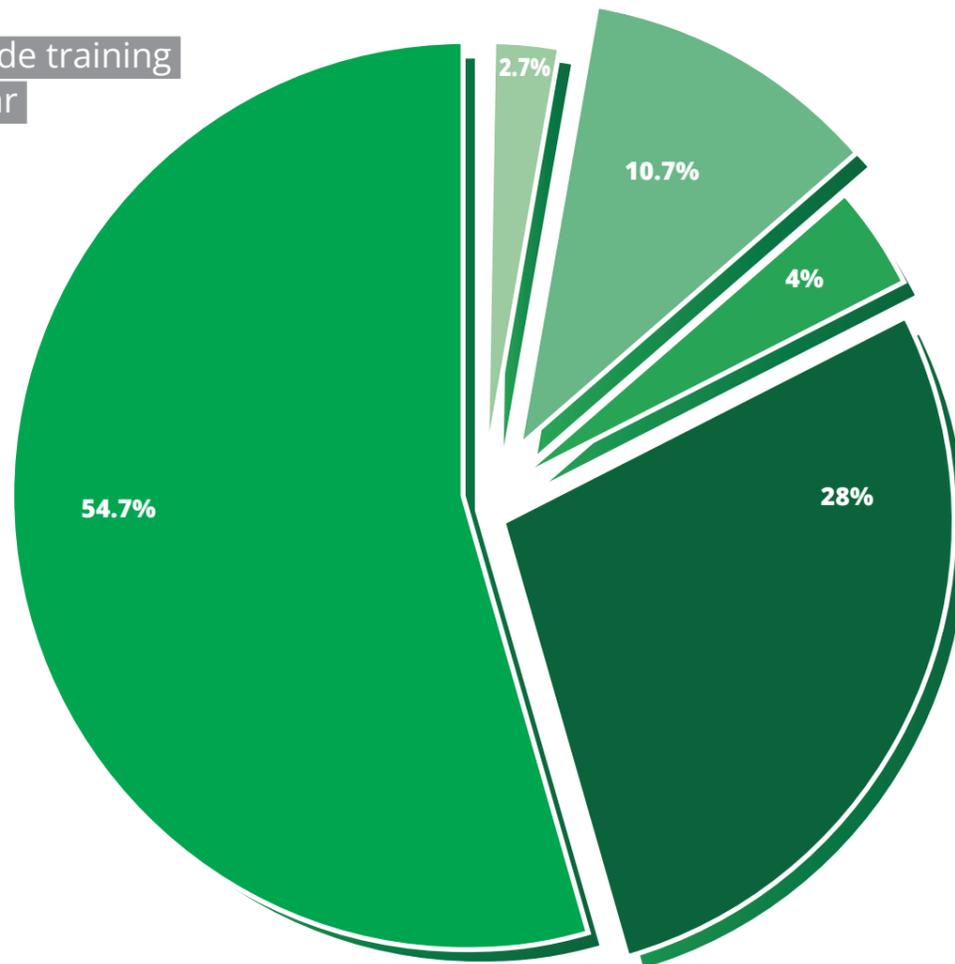
## Kit and Transportation Systems

**K**it management and transportation services are two significant topics when referring to operations, and clubs have different ways of approaching these two areas. Just over half of the clubs that were surveyed provided free kits for all ages, while most of them sold the kits to girls through an annual club membership fee or some sort of package, including other benefits (eg discount rate or stadium tickets) as well. Indeed, as part of the annual registration fee the players pay to be part of the club, they are provided with the training kit and clothes for the entire season. This happens more

frequently with the younger age groups, while the kit management from U17 up tends to be more structured and aligned across clubs, from providing everything for free to players getting closer to the first team and professional football environment.

Correspondingly, different approaches are taken into account when considering players and transportation services. Clubs are often in a situation where young girls are struggling to reach training facilities due to distance, lack of public transport connections and/or financial challenges.

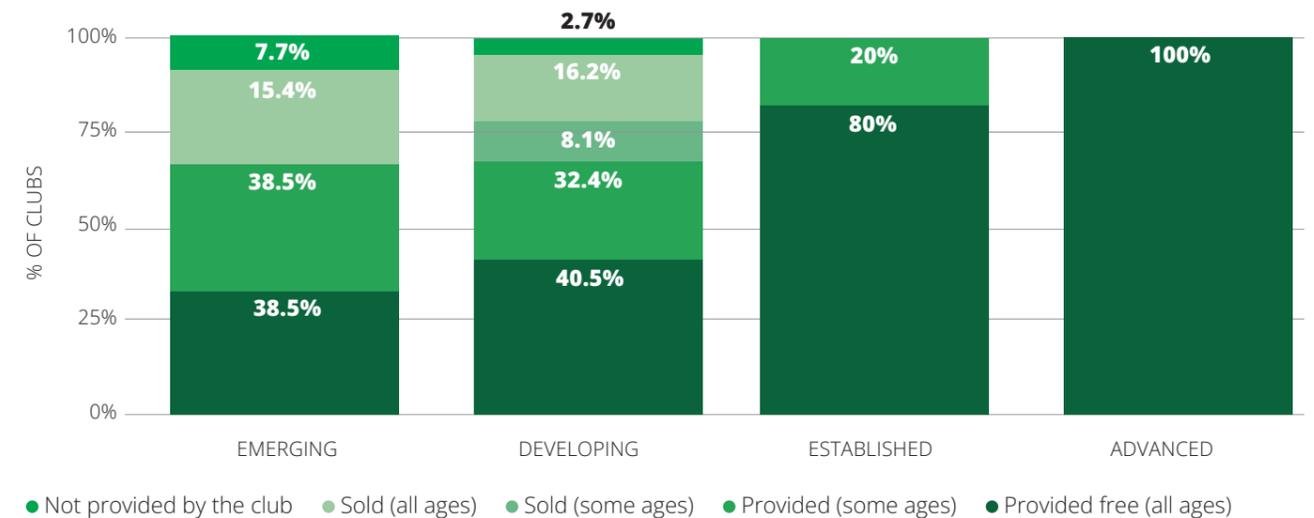
Clubs who provide training kit or leisurewear



- Free for all
- Free (some ages)
- Sold (some ages)
- Sold (all ages)
- Not provided



Clubs who provide training kit or leisurewear (by category)

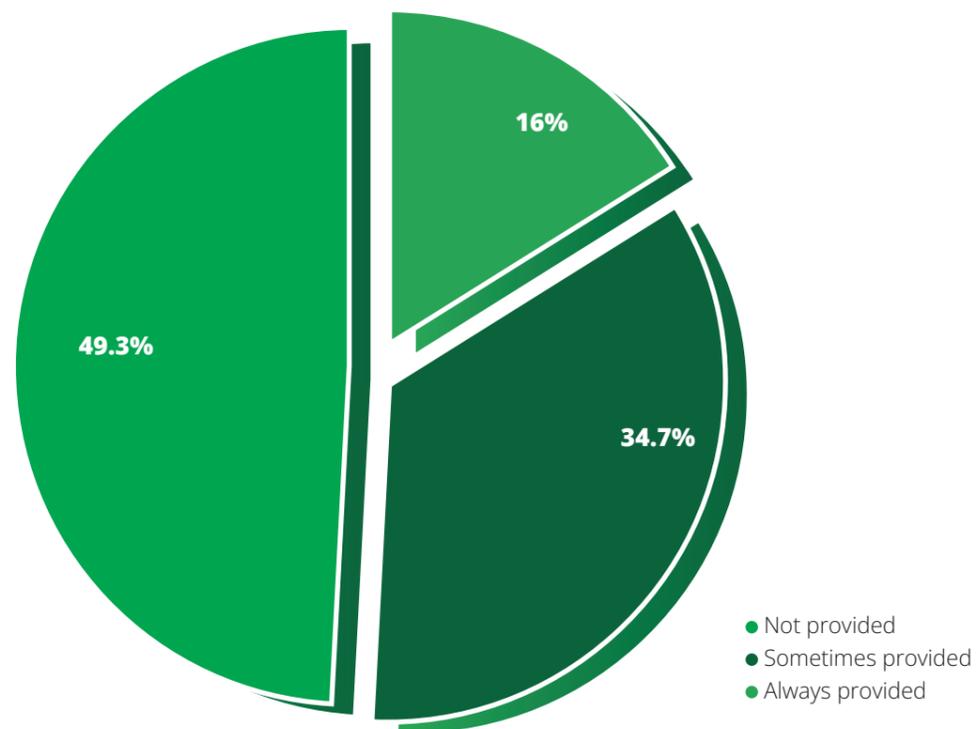


When these logistical issues exist, clubs are, in a sense, expected to take care of transporting and supporting girls to reach facilities for training sessions.

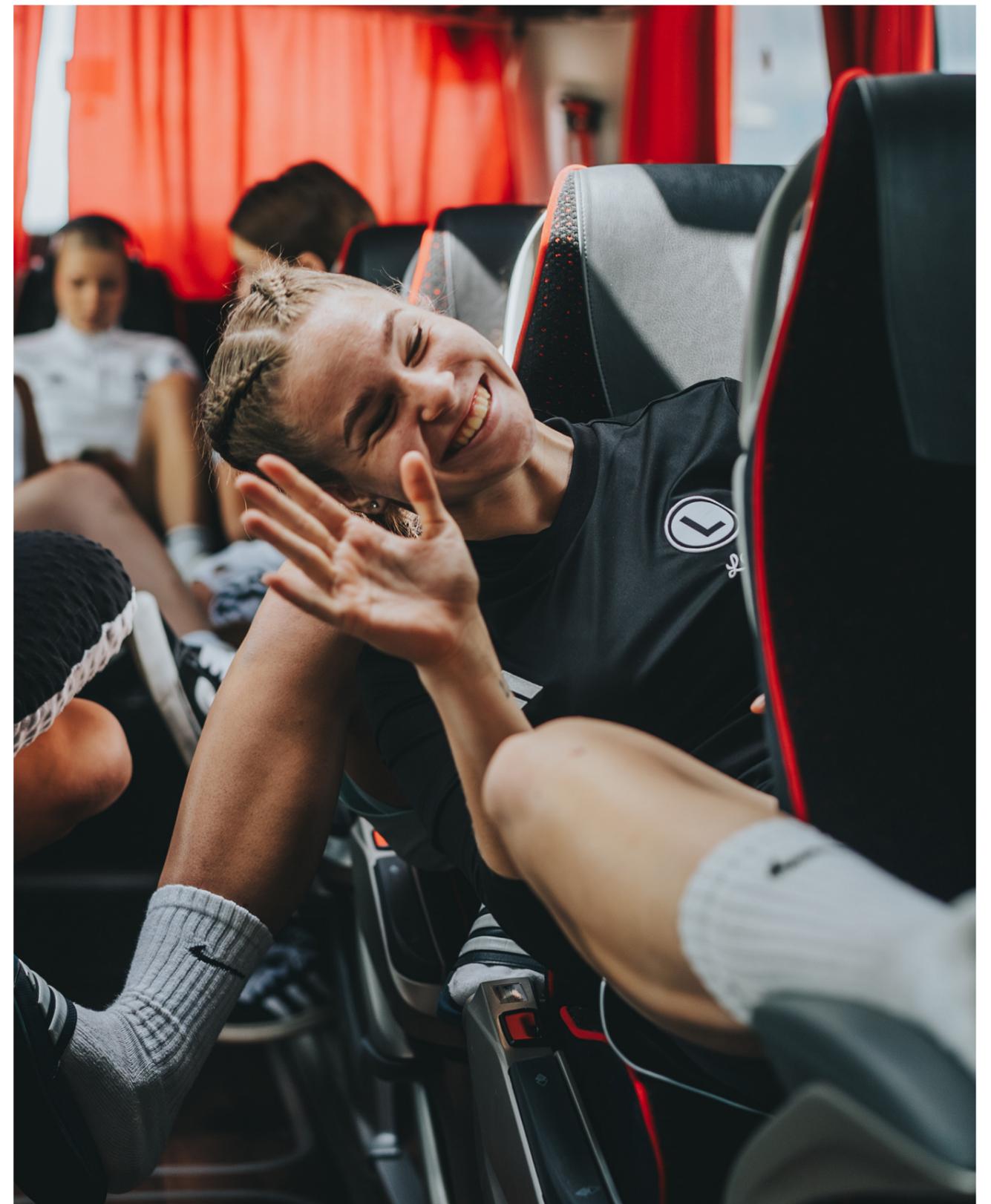
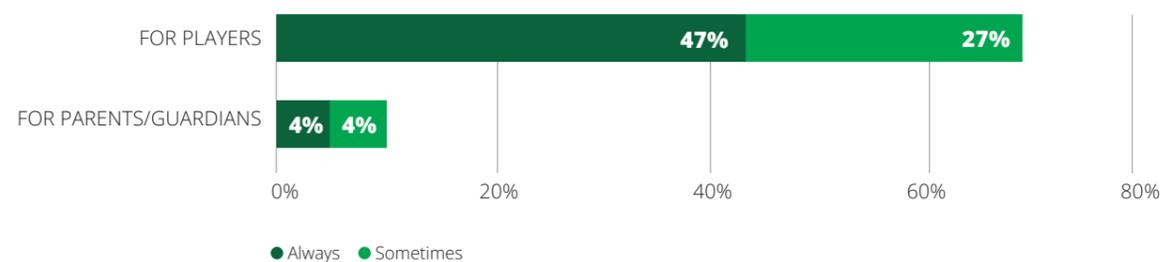
However, clubs' resources and staffing are not always in line with the needs (in almost **50%** of the cases, travel to and from facilities on training days is not provided), often leaving parents and coaches to manage scheduling and transportation for games and training sessions. As part of the professionalisation process that

women's clubs are undertaking, they have to find solutions to create a supportive and more accessible environment for young girls. The location of facilities plays an important role in overcoming these logistical issues.

This is particularly true on match days, with only **47%** of clubs saying they always provide transportation for players, while very few clubs do so for parents or guardians. Parents are often left in charge of travel plans, leaving clubs desperate to find facilities with public transport links.



Transportation assistance offered to girls and their families on match days



## Shared Facilities with Limited Investment

For girls to reach their full potential and perform at the highest level, access to high-quality, safe and inclusive training and competition facilities is essential. However, many clubs still face challenges in this area.

The majority of these facilities are shared with the boys' youth system or the women's first team. This sharing does not

always lead to positive synergies, often resulting in scheduling conflicts and girls' programmes being deprioritised. These situations, where facilities are not fully available or tailored to girls' needs, can create dissatisfaction and hinder development, leading to a risk of losing talented players.

In shared environments, scheduling

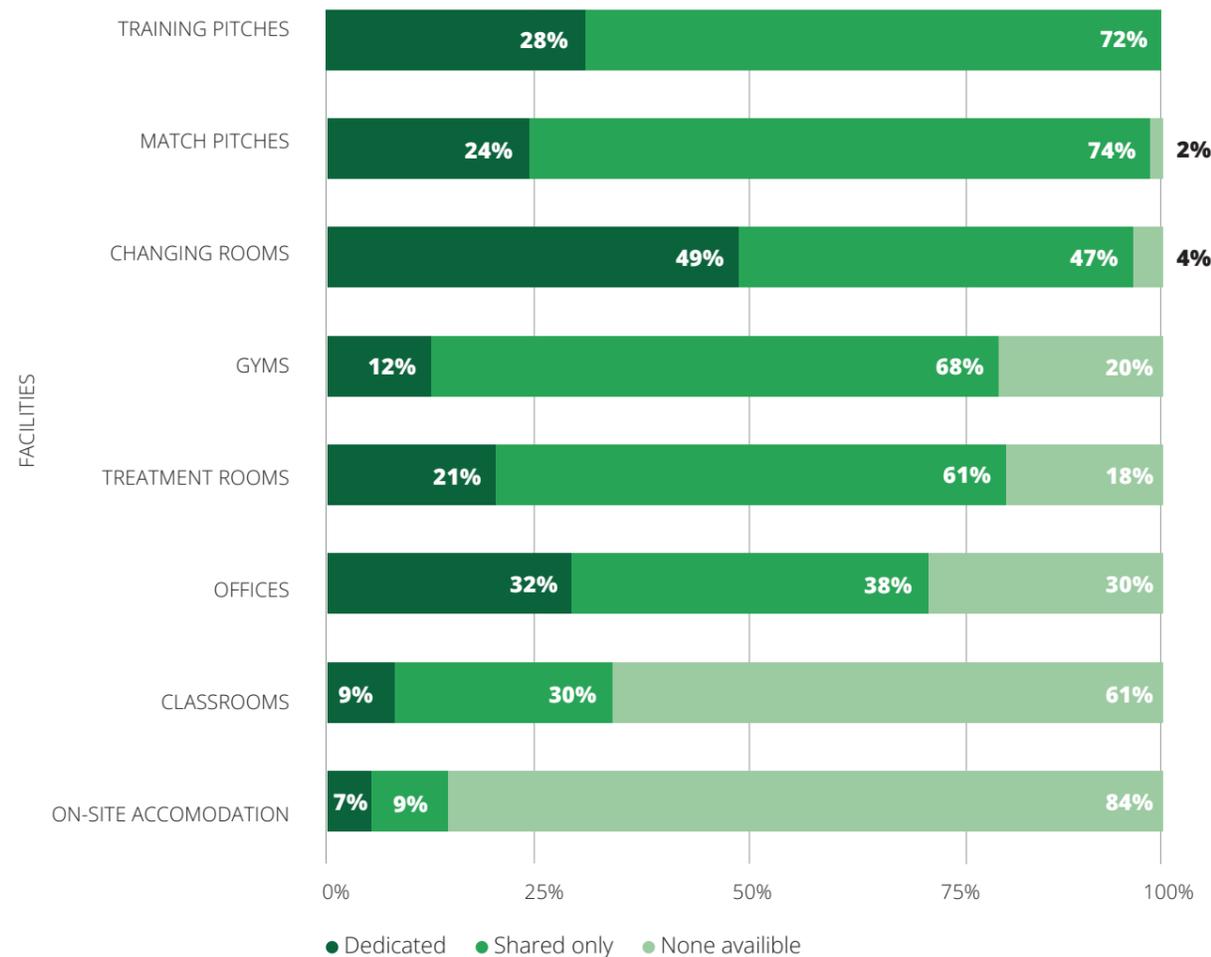
becomes critical. Many clubs rely heavily on scheduling compromises to ensure sufficient access for all teams, but girls' programmes are often seen as a lower priority than first teams or boys' academies.

This lack of prioritisation can negatively impact the quality of training and preparation, and can lead

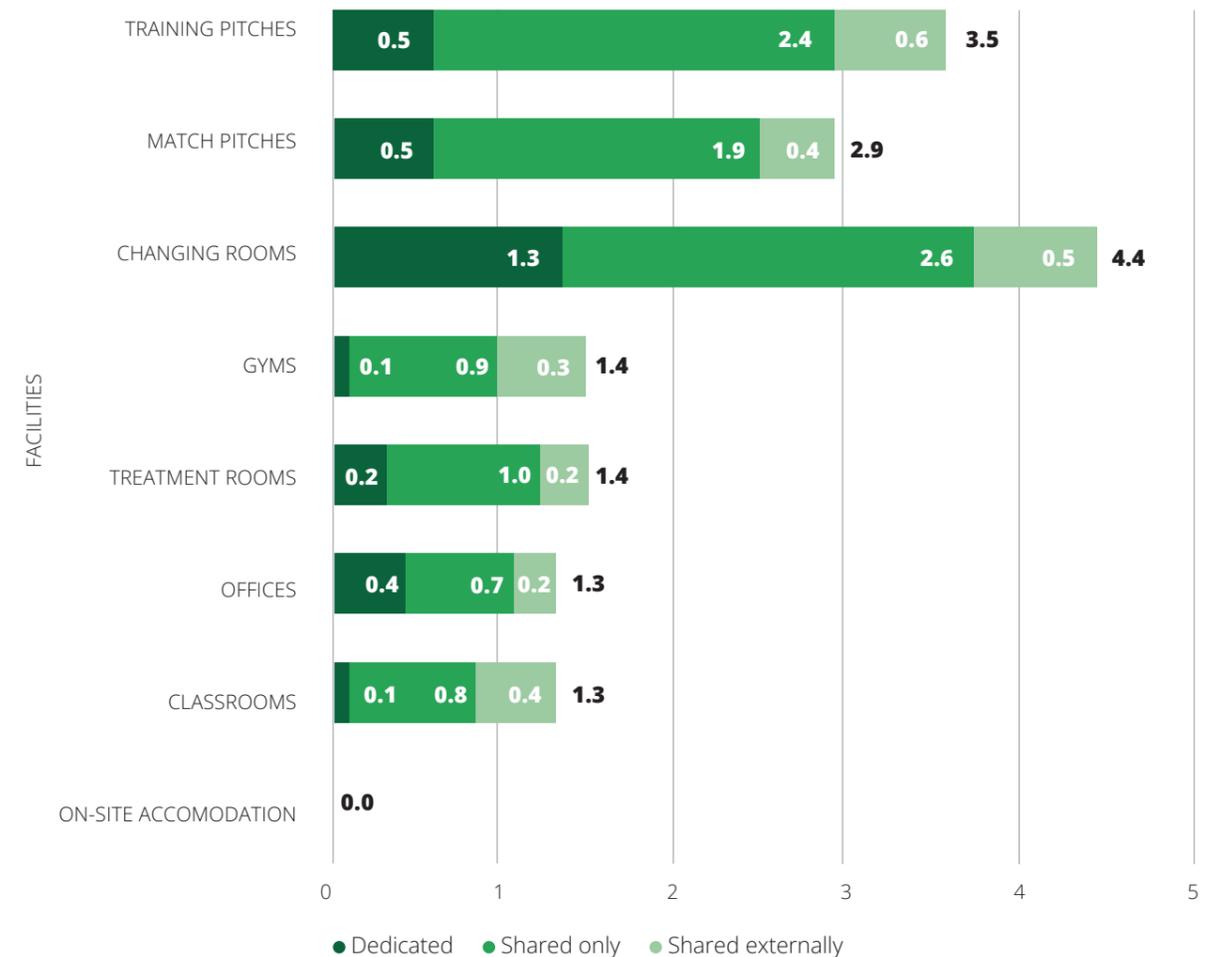
to a sense of neglect among players.

Despite these challenges, clubs are increasingly recognising the role that functional, dedicated facilities play in youth development. In fact, **72%** of clubs have renovated their girls' youth facilities over the past five years, with **32%** of those renovations occurring within the past two years.

Clubs with dedicated facilities vs those who rely on sharing



Average number of facilities per club (denoted by figures at the end of bars)



## Clubs' Priority For Investment in Facilities

1  Training pitches

2  Match pitches

3  Changing room

4  Stadium

5  Gyms

6  Treatment rooms

7  On-site accommodation

8  Offices

Despite growing financial commitments from clubs towards facilities development, girls' youth programmes are often dispersed across multiple locations, reinforcing the sense that they are not a priority. Insufficient investment in women's and girls' facilities continues to be a concern, as many believe that their programmes receive less attention and resources than those of their male counterparts.



### Malmö FF

The entire area surrounding the Eleda Stadion is dedicated to women's and men's training and educational facilities, and the whole club operates on-site. Boys' and girls' age groups are fully integrated and can benefit from three training pitches, an indoor practice facility, a gym, rehab and medical area, and analysis rooms. To complete the Malmö FF ecosystem, two community schools dedicated to boys and girls aged 12-19 are on-site (beside and inside the stadium) and there is a cafeteria/restaurant where they can have their meals between training and classes.



### AFC Ajax

The rebuilding and reconfiguration of the Sportcomplex De Toekomst will facilitate a perfect integration of all the women's and men's departments at the club. Three main buildings will be dedicated to all teams, with the women's first team and men's first team sharing the same facility. Inside the complex, the school and the canteen dedicated to full-time girls' players will play a pivotal role in the pathway development.



## Insufficient Competitive Match Opportunities

One of the primary challenges faced by clubs in the girls' game is the limited availability of formal, high-quality competitions. In many countries, the lack of robust domestic leagues forces clubs to rely on mixed-gender leagues or friendly matches to provide players with competitive opportunities. While mixed leagues with boys' teams can offer a higher level of competition, they also present challenges by requiring female players to adapt to a different style of play, which may not always be conducive to their long-term development.

The central focus of girls' youth systems is to prepare players for professional football. However, a key challenge remains to provide adequate competitive matches to help players elevate their level of play and be continually challenged. Many clubs report that the competition level within domestic girls' leagues is insufficient for proper player development, leaving them seeking other solutions. A common approach is balancing girls-only competitions with mixed boys' and girls' games.

Playing against boys is often considered a crucial part of the player development pathway, especially for younger groups (typically up to 14 or 15 years old). Several clubs emphasised the importance of maintaining a balance between girls-only

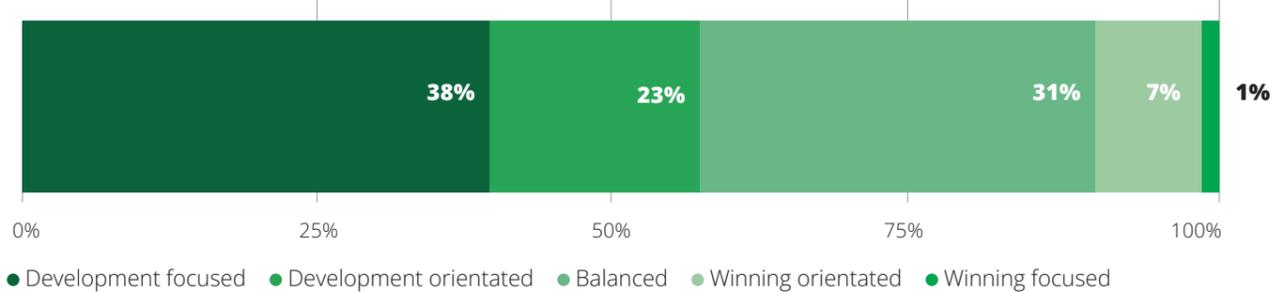
and mixed competitions during these formative years. Competing against boys offers increased physicality and pace, fostering a competitive environment.

In some regions, clubs are forced to compete in boys' or mixed leagues due to the limited number of girls-only teams. To further raise the level of competition, many clubs arrange friendly matches, exposing their players to different playing styles and more challenging opponents.

However, the competition landscape for girls' football remains broad and inconsistent. Clubs continue to question the most appropriate competitions for their teams, particularly regarding when to use mixed competition and when the gap between boys and girls becomes too large. As players progress into the older age groups, the level of competition within girls-only leagues tends to improve, but the challenge of securing high-level matches persists.

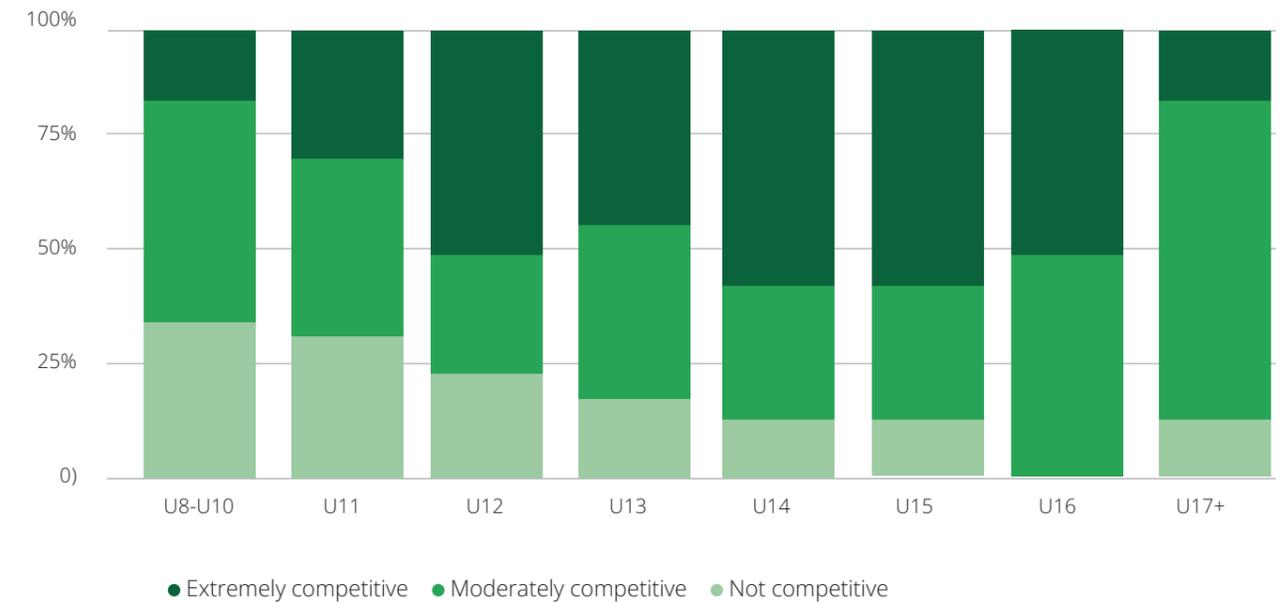
Furthermore, the cost of international competitions restricts many clubs from participating, even though these opportunities are important for player growth. Financial and logistical barriers make it difficult for clubs to offer their girls' teams consistent access to top-tier competition, resulting in limited match experience and stunted player development.

Primary focus of girls' youth system teams

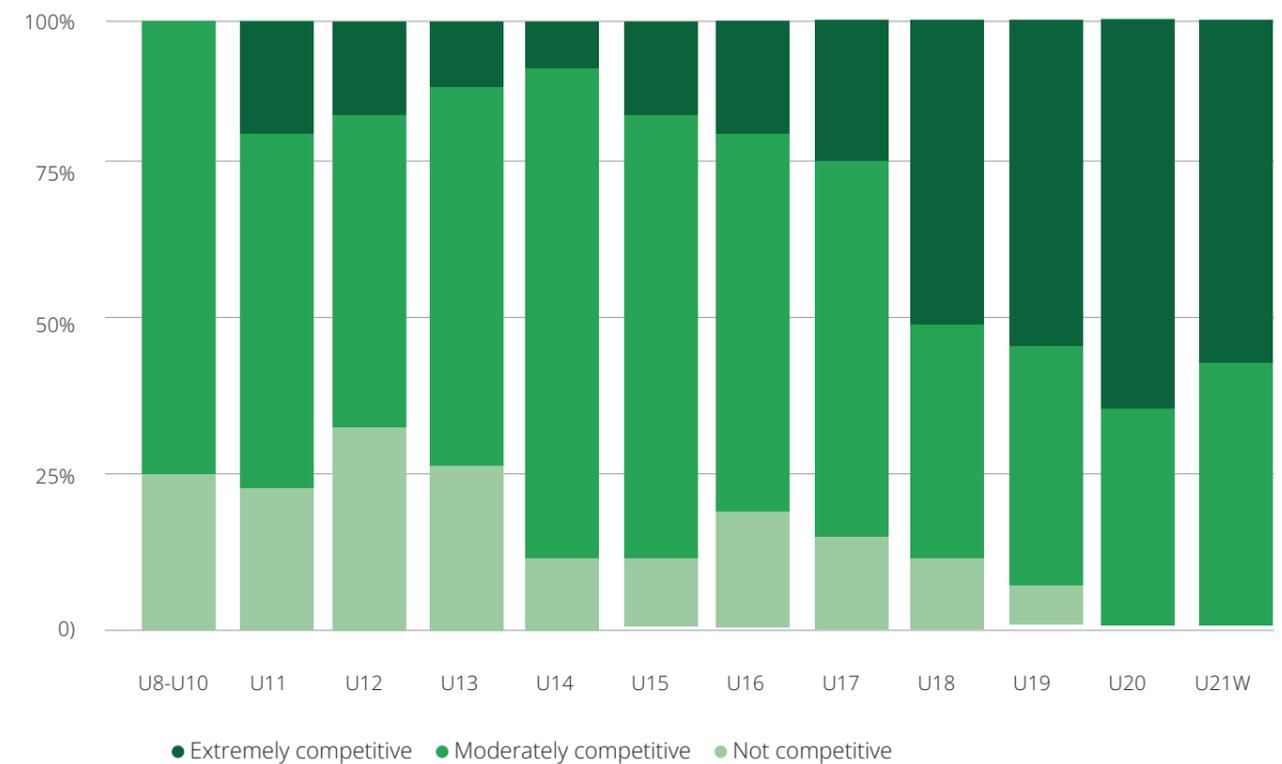


Comparing competition levels between mixed and girls-only games

### Girls'/boys' mixed competition



### Girls-only competition





### Women's Basketball in the United States

When considering whether girls should compete against boys at various ages, examples from other sports where mixed competition has long been practised demonstrate the value of such an approach.

In women's and collegiate basketball in the United States, it is normal for male athletes to be included on practice teams. These men typically have significant basketball experience, often having played at high levels in high school or college and, in some cases, professionally, and they are integrated into the training process as part of the staff or as dedicated practice players.

The primary purpose of using men's practice teams is to simulate high-level competition, offering an additional layer of intensity in training that helps to prepare female players for the physicality and speed of games.

The presence of male practice players is particularly beneficial in enhancing the pace and physical demands of training. Since men generally possess greater physical attributes such as height, speed and strength due to biological differences, competing against them in practice can push female athletes to improve their agility, reaction time and ability to adapt under pressure. This heightened challenge helps to refine the women's skills, forcing them to make quicker decisions on the court, execute plays more efficiently and handle contact more effectively. The goal is not just to mimic the opposition they will face in actual games but to exceed it in training, ensuring that game situations feel less overwhelming and more manageable.

What's more, male practice teams contribute to improving overall team

dynamics and tactical execution. By playing against opponents who might be physically stronger or faster, women's teams can develop effective strategies for managing defensive pressure, improving ball movement and navigating physical mismatches — key elements that translate into competitive success on the court.

The experience of competing against these practice players helps women to sharpen their decision-making skills under the kind of pressure they will face during high-stakes games.

In addition to the physical and tactical benefits, having male practice teams can help when it comes to injury prevention. By providing stronger

resistance in drills and scrimmages, the male practice players help the female athletes become accustomed to intense physicality, making them more resilient and better prepared to withstand the rigours of professional or collegiate play.

While some may view the use of male practice players as unconventional, it is a well-established and widely accepted strategy in women's basketball. The arrangement is carefully structured to ensure that the male practice players contribute to a supportive role, helping the women's team prepare while respecting the professional and competitive environment of the female

athletes. In this way, the practice players become an integral part of the team's preparation and contribute to the overall development and success of the programme.

This approach has fostered collaborative learning environments, where male practice players often share insights with their female counterparts, helping to elevate the overall level of basketball IQ in the team. Ultimately, the use of male practice teams is not just about adding a physical edge to training but about creating a more challenging and dynamic environment that pushes female athletes to reach their potential.





**“As elite women’s football grows, stakeholders must also focus on grassroots: strong foundations in girls’ football development are key to ensuring future success at all levels. Clubs with well-established youth programmes will raise the quality and sustainability of the game, whilst competing for the most prestigious titles.”**



**Sofia Teles**

Director,  
Portuguese Football Federation





### F1 Academy

In an effort to strategically maximise resources and increase visibility for the F1 Academy — a women-only, junior-level single-seater racing championship — Formula 1 has integrated F1 Academy events into the calendar of established Formula 1 (F1) Grand Prix races.

Aligning the F1 Academy race schedule with F1 events leverages the immense global attention surrounding F1 weekends, helping the new competition to benefit from the large audiences, media presence and commercial infrastructure in place at these circuits.

This strategy allows the F1 Academy to capitalise on the existing momentum of F1 races. With top-tier racing operations, sponsors and fans already present, the F1 Academy doesn't need to start from scratch when it comes to drawing an audience or managing logistics. Instead, it can tap into the excitement of an F1 race weekend, gaining instant access to fans who are already engaged in the world of

motorsport. This exposure is critical for the growth of the F1 Academy, as it helps introduce women's racing to a broader and more diverse audience, many of whom may not have otherwise been familiar with the championship.

Beyond increasing fan engagement, this alignment is also designed to provide young women drivers with a platform on the sport's biggest stage. Competing in parallel with F1 races allows these emerging female talents to showcase their skills in front of the motorsport community, including key industry stakeholders, sponsors and teams. It is a unique opportunity for F1 Academy drivers to make their mark in the highly competitive world of motorsport, increasing their chances of being scouted or gaining sponsorship opportunities that could further their careers.

From a logistical perspective, this integrated scheduling significantly reduces the administrative burden of organising separate race weekends for F1

Academy events. By piggybacking on the infrastructure already set up for F1 races — such as track preparations, broadcasting setups and media operations — F1 Academy can minimise costs and operational complexity. This resource-sharing approach means that the women's races can run smoothly without needing to duplicate efforts, making the overall execution of the championship more efficient.

Furthermore, the F1 Academy benefits from the media attention and sponsorship opportunities that naturally surround F1 weekends. With major sponsors, media outlets and brands already invested in F1, the F1 Academy can more easily attract partnerships and financial support. This integrated approach helps ensure that the F1 Academy has access to high-quality broadcasting and promotional opportunities, increasing visibility for both the championship and its drivers on a global scale.

By scheduling F1 Academy events alongside F1 races, F1 is effectively using its most valuable resources — its fanbase, infrastructure and media presence — to amplify women's racing. This approach not only boosts the profile of the F1 Academy, creating interest, awareness and broadening participation, but also supports the long-term development of female talent in motorsport, providing young women with invaluable experience and exposure at the highest levels of the sport and contributing to the elimination of barriers to female success.

In support of raising the level of competition, ECA provides a tool that simplifies the process of arranging friendly national and international matches and tournaments. The ECA Fixture Hub leverages data from the leading analytics platform TransferLab, enabling clubs to search for and organise fixtures based on location, team strength and calendar availability.

This platform also allows clubs to arrange or request to join tournaments with up to 30 teams. A notification system ensures that clubs are alerted when invited to friendlies or tournaments, streamlining the process and providing more competitive match opportunities.



### ECA® FIXTURE HUB

6 EASY STEPS TO REGISTER FOR THE ECA FIXTURE HUB

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6



1. Visit the ECA Fixture Hub website. Here you can click on the **Login** button (shown below) which will take you through to the ECA Fixture Hub's login page.

2. Once on the login page you can click on the **Sign up now** link which we have highlighted.

3. Enter your email address (the one provided to ECA) into the email field highlighted. Next click the **Send verification code** button. This will trigger a verification code being sent to your email address and a new field will appear under the button.

4. Check your email. If you have not received your verification email within 30 seconds please check your **Junk Folder**. The email contains a verification code and will look something similar shown here.

5. Enter your verification code and click on the **Verify code** button.

6. Once verified you will need to enter a password and confirm it. The given name field is required but is not used by the ECA Fixture Hub / ECA. Click the **Create** button to complete your registration and enter the tool.

## INTERNAL CLUB ASSESSMENT

Despite some of the success factors analysed in this chapter not directly correlating with the growth and development of youth players (e.g. logistical administration, kit management, transportation and so on), they still play a key role in the professionalisation of the environment in which youth athletes live. That is why it is so important that these roles and elements are not underestimated or ignored by clubs.

The women's and girls' football landscape is evolving, with clubs and organisations increasingly recognising the need for a professional approach not just in player development but also in the internal and facilities organisations.

People in clubs working off the pitch, the communication and information-sharing processes and the training venues provided to players all need to be aligned with the clubs' goals and vision, and contribute to elevating the level of the players' development path. While progress has been made and clubs are starting to familiarise themselves with new tools and organisational structures, significant challenges remain. The lack of sophisticated team operations and insufficient dedicated facilities for girls are issues that need attention and investment.

Given the current gaps in operations practices and facilities, clubs can apply the following framework for internal assessment. This integrated model provides a structure for evaluating and improving the club's current state.



Overleaf  
**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Infrastructure**



**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Infrastructure**

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
DESCRIPTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General staff effectively manage a variety of essential processes, such as match organisation and team and player management, ensuring foundational operations are in place.</li> <li>Basic but necessary facilities are available for women's football, making efficient use of existing synergies across the club.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicated staff members are in place for key areas such as administration and kit management, enhancing the organisation of logistical operations.</li> <li>Facilities for women's football are available and shared with other entities, maximising resources while supporting further growth and development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A larger team of specialists are now in place, using modern tools and covering all key departments, including administration and player services, enhancing overall operations.</li> <li>Significant investments are made to provide dedicated or shared facilities for women's football, improving infrastructure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly specialised staff are in place, supported by clear operating procedures and efficient communication processes, ensuring smooth and professional operations at every level.</li> <li>Facilities are fully dedicated to women's and girls' football, offering exclusive, high-quality resources to support the sport's continued growth.</li> </ul>
OPERATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff collaborate across the academy, ensuring that key responsibilities are covered, even if roles are shared across the boys' academy and/or women's first team.</li> <li>The team atmosphere is cooperative, with volunteers stepping in when additional resources are needed, ensuring the smooth running of essential tasks.</li> <li>Transportation logistics are managed informally, with the support of families and personal arrangements providing flexibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The staff is expanding, with clear efforts to define key roles and assign responsibilities, bringing more structure to operations.</li> <li>Volunteers continue to play a valuable role, for example as team managers, while efforts to formalise their contributions are improving overall coordination.</li> <li>The operations department is making strides in defining roles, though occasional overlap persists, and there is ongoing progress in streamlining communication and logistics processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The club has introduced a structured approach, with key roles clearly defined across the operations department, supported by data management tools for efficient player record keeping.</li> <li>Kit managers are assigned to specific age groups, ensuring focused support during training sessions and matches, improving overall organisation.</li> <li>Each academy team has a designated team manager, facilitating smooth communication between coaching staff, players and club administration.</li> <li>A centralised transportation system provides reliable, accessible options for players and families, enhancing convenience for training and matches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A highly organised operations department is in place, with all key roles — kit managers, team managers and sport admin — clearly defined and functioning seamlessly.</li> <li>Kit managers are dedicated to specific age categories each season, providing consistent support during training and match days, ensuring efficiency and attention to detail.</li> <li>Each team has a designated team manager, meaning there is fluid communication between team staff, players and club administration.</li> <li>A robust, centralised transportation system is fully operational, making it easy for players and families to attend training sessions and away matches.</li> <li>All areas of the operations department are led by designated supervisors, ensuring clear alignment and communication across departments.</li> </ul>



**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Infrastructure**

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
FACILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic facilities such as training pitches, match pitches and changing rooms are provided for women's football.</li> <li>• These facilities may be shared with other entities (for example, men's football, municipality or other clubs), allowing the club to maximise synergies.</li> <li>• Facilities are functional and meet immediate needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Club provides facilities for women's football (training facilities, changing rooms, accommodation, medical area, offices and so on) by sharing synergies with other entities (such as men's football and municipality).</li> <li>• The club exploits synergies with other entities in terms of facilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilities dedicated to women's football are now in place, with priority access for women's teams. The club is simultaneously improving and investing in fully dedicated facilities to support long-term development.</li> <li>• Tailored training facilities for the girls' academy are being developed, including dedicated pitches, on-site accommodation, medical areas and offices, reflecting the club's commitment to providing support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully dedicated facilities for women's football are provided, including training grounds, changing rooms, accommodation, medical areas and offices, guaranteeing a top-tier environment for all teams.</li> <li>• The girls' academy benefits from a dedicated training facility with everything from pitches to medical areas and offices, promoting optimal development.</li> <li>• There is close proximity between the women's first team and older youth groups, fostering connections and a seamless pathway between academy and senior football.</li> </ul>
COMPETITIONS AND SCHEDULING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The club participates in regional domestic competitions, providing foundational game experience for women's teams, even as the competitive structure evolves.</li> <li>• Friendly matches are organised for all age groups, offering valuable additional game time for the girls to develop their skills, with a focus on growth rather than high competition levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domestic competitions now include both regional and some national championships for specific age groups, creating more structured and challenging opportunities for players.</li> <li>• Friendly matches are organised with the goal of increasing competition levels, helping players to grow technically and physically.</li> <li>• The club is exploring ways to create development pathways, allowing some girls to play with older age groups to support their football and physical growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The club competes in regional and national phases of domestic competitions, helping players to gain experience across different competitive levels.</li> <li>• Specific age groups participate in international tournaments, giving players exposure to higher-level competition and helping them grow further.</li> <li>• A second team is introduced, bridging the gap between the youth system and the first team by competing in the third or fourth division, providing more opportunities for player development.</li> <li>• The club uses data analysis to make informed decisions, ensuring girls are regularly playing at a competition level that best supports their growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domestic competitions are fully organised across all levels, from regional to national, with professional clubs actively participating and providing a high-quality competitive environment.</li> <li>• Multiple youth age groups participate in international tournaments, consistently facing high-level competition that accelerates their development.</li> <li>• The second team is competing regularly in the second division of the domestic league, strengthening the connection between the youth system and the first team and ensuring a clear path for player progression.</li> </ul>



# MATURITY MATRIX Infrastructure

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turnaround time for resolving kit-related issues.</li> <li>• Frequency of communication breakdowns or errors in scheduling.</li> <li>• Percentage of training sessions and matches affected by logistical challenges due to inadequate transportation or communication.</li> <li>• Percentage of shared facilities used.</li> <li>• Frequency of maintenance and upgrades.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage increase in dedicated staff roles within the operations department.</li> <li>• Number of formalised processes and procedures implemented to streamline operations.</li> <li>• Feedback from players, coaches and staff regarding improvements in communication and logistical support.</li> <li>• Progress in facility investments.</li> <li>• Level of integration of women's football facilities with existing infrastructure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of staff roles filled by dedicated professionals within the operations department.</li> <li>• Efficiency metrics, such as time saved or cost reduction, resulting from streamlined processes and improved logistics.</li> <li>• Player and staff satisfaction surveys regarding the effectiveness of communication and operational support.</li> <li>• Implementation of new tools used to store players' personal data.</li> <li>• Level of autonomy in women's football facilities.</li> <li>• Satisfaction levels among players and staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benchmarking against industry standards for operational efficiency and effectiveness.</li> <li>• Recognition and awards received for excellence in organisational management.</li> <li>• Continued improvement in KPIs related to communication, logistics and overall operational performance.</li> <li>• Level of completeness and sophistication in women's football facilities.</li> <li>• Benchmarking against industry standards and best practices.</li> <li>• Possibility to host international tournaments/competitions etc.</li> </ul>
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft and implement an operations department with roles and responsibilities assigned to specific figures, and with the human resources already available.</li> <li>• Build a plan outlining roles and figures needed to improve and professionalise operations.</li> <li>• Start to formalise basic communication processes to facilitate the sharing of information between off and on-pitch staff.</li> <li>• Investigate the possibility of increasing the investment in facilities or of exploiting synergies with other organisations.</li> <li>• Focus on finding competitive local/regional matches to complement and support the development plan of young girls.</li> <li>• Navigate the opportunity to participate in regional/national tournaments to offer more competitive matches and playing time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidate the operations departments with key roles responsible for each area based on the club's needs and resources (for example, admin, player registration, player services and so on).</li> <li>• Implement tools to improve communication processes and players' data gathering with procedures to streamline operations.</li> <li>• Define a facilities development and improvement plan based on the club's needs and resources.</li> <li>• Consolidate club participation in regional and national competitive tournaments to keep raising the level of matches.</li> <li>• Start building personalised player paths based on players' ability to keep up with older age groups in more competitive matches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure and integrate the operations department with additional functional roles to further professionalise the environment (for example team managers, drivers and kit managers).</li> <li>• Invest and/or innovate in communication and data storage tools to facilitate internal processes.</li> <li>• Measure the level of satisfaction of players and staff members regarding internal procedures and resources to understand gaps.</li> <li>• Move towards a high level of autonomy/prioritisation in women's football facilities.</li> <li>• Focus on finding more international tournaments to offer critical growth opportunities for youth system players.</li> <li>• Investigate the possibility of establishing a second team as an incremental step in the development of young girls.</li> <li>• Innovate and develop tools to better assist teams' staff in making informed decisions around personalised player pathways.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in human capital education and training to create a best-in-class operations department with leads, clear roles, reporting lines and responsibilities.</li> <li>• Consolidate a transportat system and player service procedures to fully support players 360 degrees.</li> <li>• Research, develop and implement new tools to improve communication and storage processes and make them more efficient.</li> <li>• Invest in state-of-the-art facilities for women's and girls' football.</li> <li>• Consolidate the strategic role and position of the second team as a means through which girls can better transition and get prepared for senior football.</li> <li>• Consolidate and continuously innovate the process around personalised player development paths during competitive matches using analytics and metrics.</li> </ul>

**Please find the Club Resources – key questions on page 267**

# PLAYER PATHWAY

## Success Factors **Recruitment, Professional Transition**

In the current landscape of girls' football, clubs generally have a strong and growing desire to invest in the sport's development. This commitment is seen as imperative to nurturing the next generation of footballers who can compete at both national and international levels. Clubs recognise the importance of establishing robust infrastructures, such as youth academies and training programmes, to cultivate talent from an early age. This effort is part of a wider global push to raise the profile and professionalism of women's football.

## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

**A**cross the clubs engaged in this study, there is a shared goal of building a well-structured talent pipeline. The vision is to identify and

nurture young female players who have the potential to progress through the ranks and eventually represent the club at senior level.



## Support Beyond Professional Playing Careers

The definition of success in girls' football is evolving to encompass more than just the number of players who make it into the first team. Increasingly, clubs are recognising the importance of preparing players for a range of careers within the football industry, ensuring that even those who do not transition into professional playing careers can remain involved in the sport.

Currently, only **15%** of clubs offer structured support for girls' youth players when they do not progress into professional football following their exit. It is, therefore, imperative to help players explore alternative career paths, such as coaching, sports science and football management during their time in the

girls' youth system. This approach equips players with skills and knowledge that can open doors to various roles within the football industry, contributing to the long-term growth and professionalisation of the sport. This is particularly crucial given that only **7.8%** of girls' youth system players secure full-time professional playing careers in women's football.

By investing in the education and development of girls within the sport, clubs enhance player welfare and also tackle pivotal industry challenges, such as the shortage of staff with experience in the women's game. Clubs that provide educational pathways for girls to pursue qualifications in coaching, sports science, physiotherapy and management are

actively contributing to the development of a future workforce that understands the unique demands of women's football.

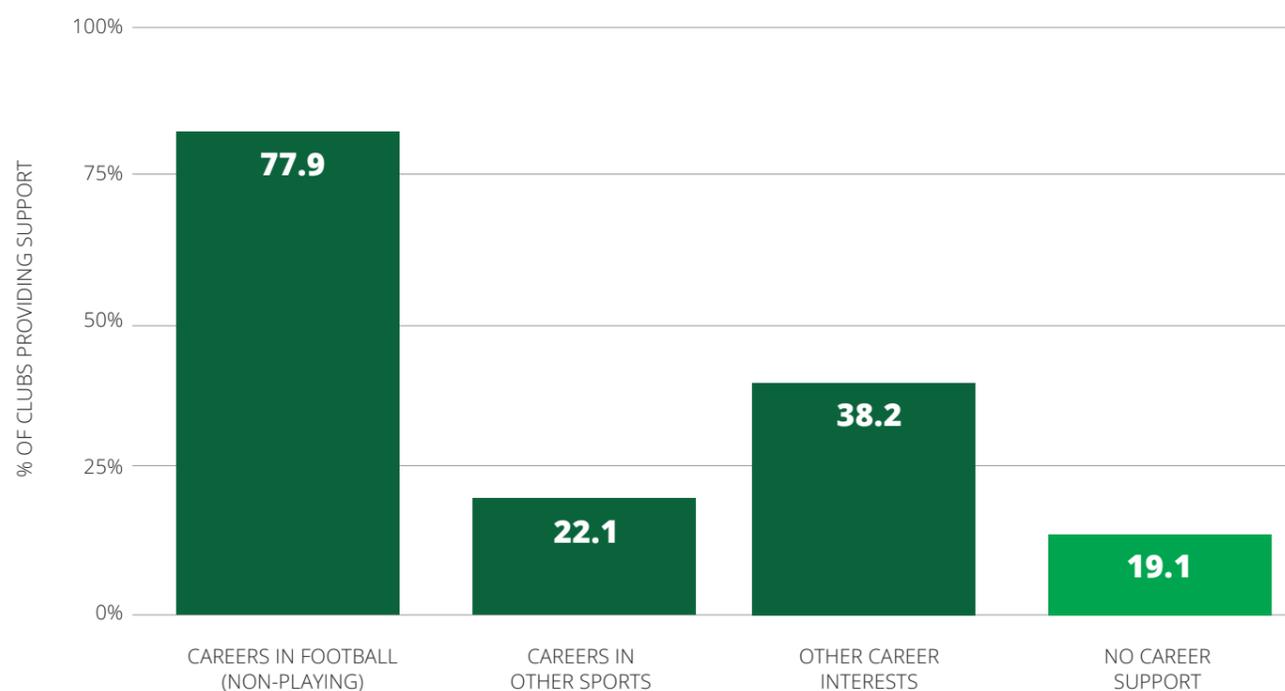
This approach helps to address the growing need for experienced professionals in the women's game. Female players, having spent years within the girls' football system, are ideally positioned to transition into coaching or other support roles where their first-hand experience can benefit future generations. Moreover, these pathways offer a direct route for women to enter the football industry, helping to close the gender gap in coaching and leadership roles and creating a more diverse and inclusive environment.

The education and training offered

by these clubs can cover a wide range of topics, from tactical and technical coaching skills to sports science, performance analysis and football administration. Equipping players with these skills means that clubs prepare them for successful careers off the pitch while also ensuring the continued growth and professionalisation of the women's game.

In the long term, this forward-thinking approach will contribute to creating a sustainable pipeline of female professionals who are well versed in the intricacies of the women's game, capable of addressing the specific challenges that arise within it, and prepared to lead the sport into its next phase of growth.

Types of career support provided for players



## Elite Player Transition Model

A significant challenge facing clubs is the size of the gap between youth football and the professional environment. In an attempt to bridge this gap, advanced clubs are developing elite player transition models within their girls' youth systems. These models are designed to provide the most talented players with structured and fully individualised development plans tailored to accelerate their readiness for the professional game. Overseen by a senior member of staff, the transition process ensures players are adequately prepared, both physically and mentally, to thrive in the professional women's football environment.

During this phase of development, players are integrated into first-team training sessions alongside their existing youth training and match schedules. This allows for a more seamless transition to the professional environment, while continuing to focus on specific areas of personal development. The transition phase requires careful management to balance the increased demands of first-team football with the development needs of youth players. Regular development plan reviews are made to adjust training loads and development targets, ensuring players can step up without compromising their wellbeing or long-term growth.



### Arsenal FC

Arsenal Women has implemented a comprehensive transition model designed to accelerate the development of elite players and bridge the gap between girls' youth football and the senior women's first team. This well-defined and structured approach tailors each player's development programme around six key themes, ensuring a holistic alignment with the demands of professional women's football:

- **Athletic Development** High-potential players follow a bespoke physical programme across all aspects of strength, conditioning and injury prevention to ensure they are physically ready for the senior game.
- **Training Development** This makes sure that players are able to meet the highest expectations in the women's first team.
- **Matchplay Development** A diverse range of match-day environments will stretch, challenge and develop players, preparing them for top-tier competition.
- **Performance Development** Players are offered early exposure to all aspects of the senior environment to gain valuable experience and insights into the expectations and culture of professional football.
- **Personal Development** This focuses on developing individuals with a deep connection to the club and the community, nurturing well-rounded people on and off the pitch.
- **Career Development** The aim is to create individuals who excel in their football careers and in life beyond the sport, equipping them with the necessary skills for success.



Arsenal Football Club

A significant factor in the success of Arsenal's transition model is the close alignment between the academy and the senior team. Coaching and performance staff work collaboratively to ensure that development objectives at the youth level are fully aligned with the demands of senior women's football.

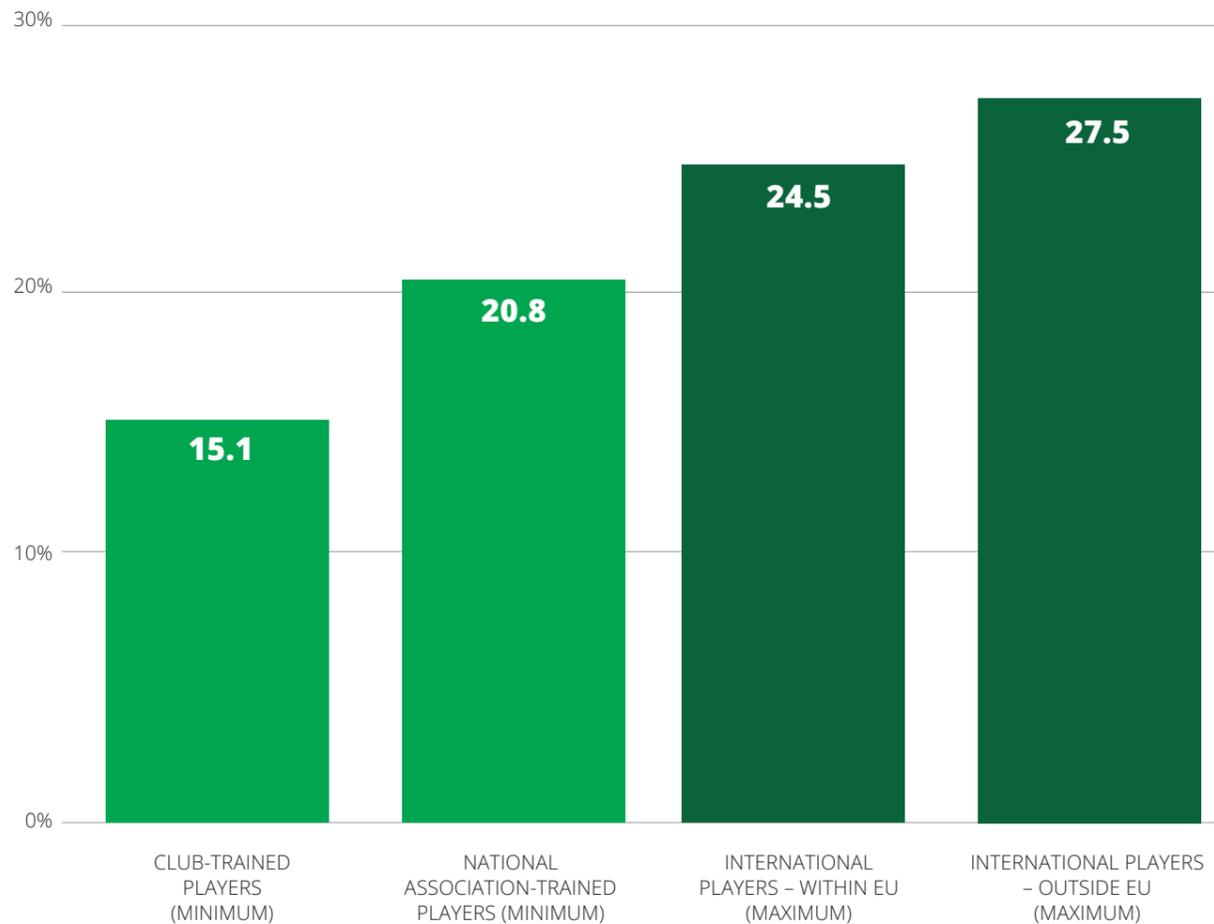
This integrated approach means that players are consistently prepared for the step up to professional competition, enabling smoother transitions and long-term success in the women's game.

## Domestic Regulations of Club-Trained Players

As players get more exposure to training with the first team or join the squad list, they can be affected by the need to follow the national association rules. Clubs need to adhere to domestic regulations set by the league, in order to participate with a women's first team. This can lead to situations where clubs are forced to expose girls to senior team environments prematurely, primarily to comply with national association regulations.

The survey data shows that more than 35% of clubs operate under some sort of regulations imposed by governing bodies, enforcing minimum or maximum numbers of club-trained, national association-trained or international players. This highlights the substantial need for clubs to establish and professionalise their youth pathways, helping them to follow these regulations by improving the development of homegrown talent.

Percentage of clubs with domestic regulations when registering first-team players for league participation



**“ Early exposure to senior-level football can be detrimental to a player’s development, as girls may not be physically or mentally prepared for the challenges. Players can become more vulnerable to potential injuries and/or nervousness to perform on the big stage. ”**



**Amy McDonald**  
Senior Auditor,  
PGAAC





### SFK 2000 Sarajevo

The club's mission has always been to develop young players, both for the first team and for the international scene. In order to facilitate the transition and support players in their growth, they form talent teams (approximately 15 girls, aged 13 to 19) and assist them with specific team training and additional specialised personal sessions. This helps the club to achieve important domestic league results, and now some club-trained players are part of "elite" leagues in Europe (for example Maja Jelcic, Marija Ana Milinkovic and Gloria Sliskovic, who are all playing in Serie A).

## KEY CHALLENGES

Easing the transition from youth side to the senior set-up helps to avoid overwhelm and injury, and prepares girls for a long career. But being called up to play with the first team before they are ready can also be detrimental.

### Addressing the Quality Gap Between Youth and Senior Teams

There is an evidential gap between the readiness of players to transition from youth football to the professional game in terms of tactical, technical, physical and cognitive development. However, clubs should celebrate their successes and make sure that KPIs are being tracked.

For players transitioning from girls' youth systems to senior teams within the same club, there is a noticeable difference between the club categories. Advanced and established clubs have lower

transition rates (1.8% and 3.8% of their players, respectively) compared to developing and emerging clubs (10% and 7.6%).

This disparity is likely to be due to the intense competition in larger clubs, making it harder for youth players to break into the first team.

In contrast, smaller clubs may rely more on academy players to fill first-team roles as a cost-saving measure, given their limited financial resources for acquiring players from other teams.

5

girls' youth players training with the first team at a club per season, on average.

6

players, on average, making their competitive debut at each club in the past three seasons.

11

is the average number of players transitioning to senior football per season within a club. On average, five transition to other clubs' first teams.

**“ We need to set up players for success by giving them a clear pathway and specific feedback on their progress and development. Communication should be detailed and provide them with clarity about proposed minutes and positions, potential loan and/or first-team opportunities, and more. ”**



**Carys Dalton**  
Head of Player Care,  
Chelsea FC





## USL Super League/USL W League

### Bridging the Gap Between Amateur and Professional Soccer

In the American sports landscape, efforts to mitigate the transition from academy to professional play are becoming increasingly sophisticated, particularly in soccer. One such initiative is the USL W League, a pre-professional amateur league designed to bridge the gap between youth development and the professional ranks. By offering players a competitive platform without forcing them to forfeit their NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) eligibility — a crucial consideration for many aspiring athletes and even more so for many female athletes — the USL W League provides an essential stepping stone that enhances the progression to the professional level.

The USL W League allows players to gain valuable experience in a pre-professional environment while maintaining their amateur status, which keeps the door open for opportunities in collegiate soccer. This is especially significant in the United States, where the college system remains one of the key developmental pathways for athletes. Without a formalised pre-professional structure, many talented players faced the difficult decision of either going straight into professional play — often prematurely

— or staying within the confines of youth or college soccer, which might not offer enough exposure to elite-level competition. The USL W League addresses this by providing a platform where players can test themselves against high-calibre opposition without compromising future opportunities in college or other leagues.

### Exposure to a Higher Level

One of the core advantages of the USL W League is the ability for players to face a wider range of age levels and skill sets, which mirrors the type of competition they will encounter in the professional game. In academy and youth systems, players often compete against peers of a similar age, limiting their exposure to the varying styles and physical challenges presented by older, more experienced players. The USL W League broadens this spectrum, pitting young, up-and-coming talent against seasoned players, some of whom may be former professionals or experienced collegiate athletes. This mixed-level competition is essential for players' growth, as it sharpens their tactical awareness, adaptability and ability to manage the physical demands of the game — all of which are critical for a successful transition to the professional level.

Another key benefit of the USL W League is the increased number of competitive matches available per season. In many



academy systems or lower-level leagues, the volume of competitive games can be relatively low, with players often getting only a handful of matches that push them to their limits. The USL W League, by contrast, offers a more rigorous schedule with multiple high-stakes games, allowing players to accumulate match experience, hone their skills and develop the consistency needed to perform at a higher level. This regular exposure to competitive environments helps players refine both their technical and mental

attributes, which are necessary to excel in professional soccer.

### Increasing a Player's Visibility

The USL W League serves as an important scouting platform for professional teams at the Division 1 professional level, including the USL's own USL Super League, offering a pathway for players to showcase their talent in front of professional clubs, coaches and scouts.



For players who may not be in a position to immediately join the professional ranks, the USL W League acts as a middle ground where they can build a portfolio of performances against top-tier competition, increasing their visibility and improving their chances of signing a professional contract when the time is right. This is particularly beneficial for players who may not have come through the traditional elite academy systems or those who need a bit more time to develop before making the jump to the professional level.

#### Creating the Right Access

Additionally, the league plays a vital role in addressing the gaps in player development across different regions. Historically, the pathway to professional women's soccer in the US has been uneven, with access to high-quality training and competitive matches often concentrated in a few geographic areas. The USL W League, with its focus on regional play and expansion into

new markets, helps to decentralise opportunities and give more players across the US a chance to compete at a high level, regardless of their location.

#### Growing the Women's Game

The USL W League also plays a role in the growth and professionalisation of women's soccer in the US. By creating a structured, competitive environment at the pre-professional level, it elevates the standards of women's soccer across the board. Players in the league not only benefit from increased competition but also from better access to coaching, facilities and support systems that are essential for player development. This, in turn, raises the level of play at the collegiate and professional levels, contributing to the long-term success of the sport.

#### Bridging the Gap

In conclusion, the USL W League has been an influential addition to the American women's soccer ecosystem, effectively bridging the gap between academy development and the professional game. By offering players competitive matches, exposure to varied age levels and the chance to maintain NCAA eligibility, the league provides a crucial platform for development and growth. This has made the transition to professional soccer smoother for young players while also contributing to raising the overall standard of women's soccer in the US.



**USL W League alumni are competing in the inaugural USL Super League season**

## Underdevelopment of Scouting and Recruitment

Several key challenges hinder the full realisation of further professionalising the player pathway in the women's game. One of the primary issues is the underdevelopment of scouting practices for girls' football. The majority **(62.5%)** of clubs do not have a defined and written recruitment strategy for the girls' youth system. Due to limited resources, clubs face difficulties in covering the extensive geographical areas required to effectively identify talent.

This problem is compounded by the lack of reliable data from other markets, making it difficult for clubs to track and scout potential talent outside their immediate region. The shortage of dedicated scouts for girls' football highlights a gap in the talent identification process, which has to be addressed by clubs for the sport to progress.

The choice of scouting-data-gathering systems follows a distinct trend from

advanced to emerging clubs. More expensive and sophisticated tools, such as apps or dedicated systems, are prevalent among advanced clubs but are much less common in emerging clubs, where outsourcing these functions is often financially unfeasible.

In established clubs, the selection of methods tends to be more balanced. Conversely, in developing and emerging clubs, simpler tools such as spreadsheets and forms are the preferred choices, as they usually require fewer specialised skills and less initial investment.

The disparity in women's football scouting departments is striking, especially considering that less than half of all clubs have dedicated resources for it. Among the more advanced clubs, **80%** have a scouting department, while established and developing clubs hover around **40%** with a presence of scouting practices.



### Standard de Liège

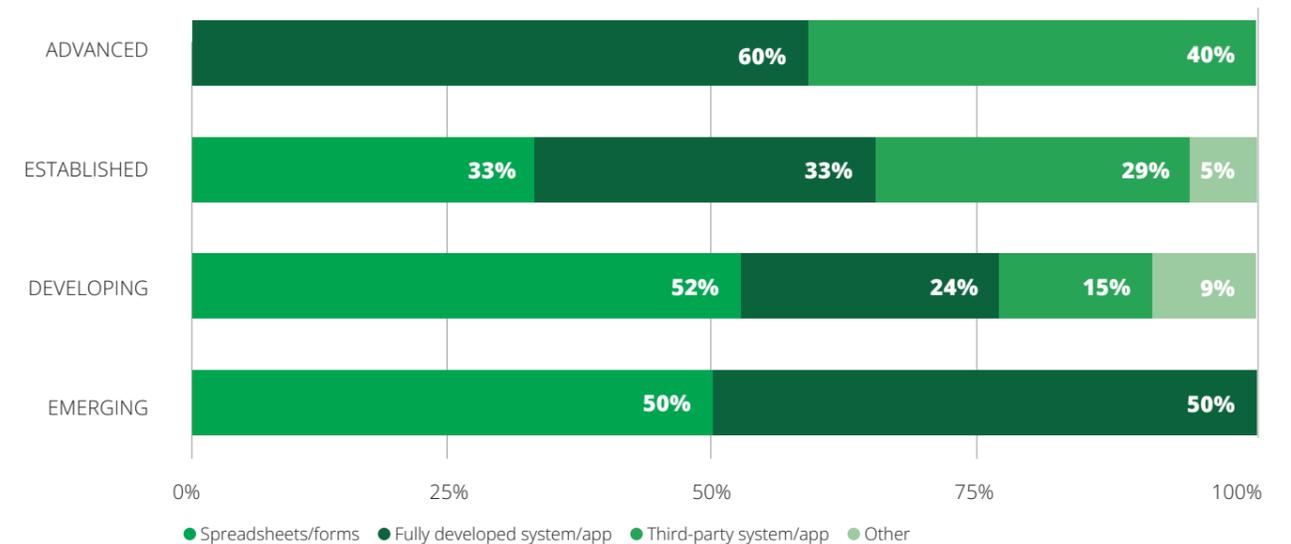
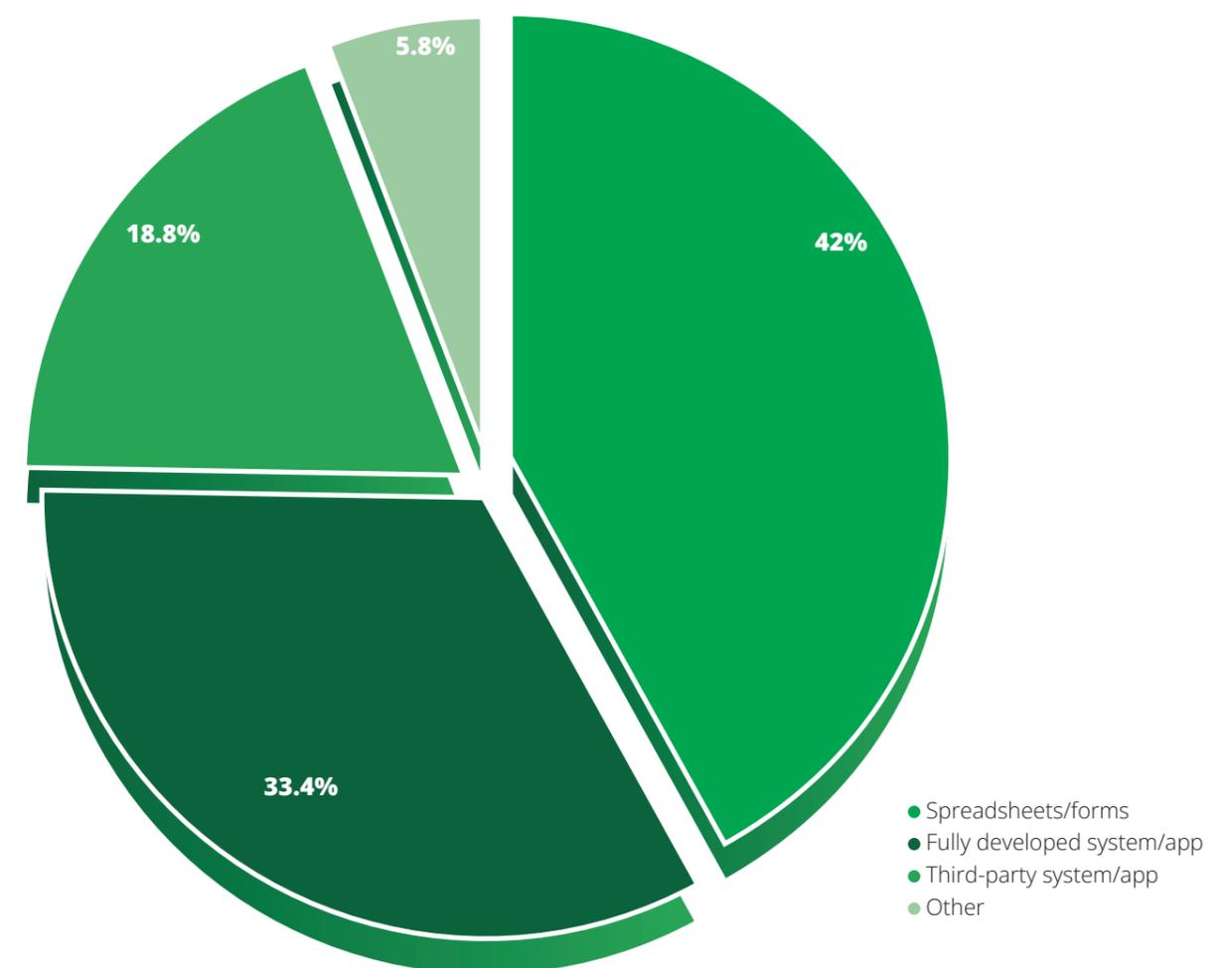
Continuous monitoring of talented girls' youth players and KPIs are set in order to have credible and measurable objectives in terms of players transitioning from the academy to the first team. KPIs are normally based on the percentage of minutes played in the first team by academy players:

- **34%** in 2022/23
- **36%** in 2023/24
- **38%** in 2024/25
- **40%** in 2025/26

In 2023/24, academy players played approximately 52% of minutes.



Methods to gather and manage scouting and recruitment data on players



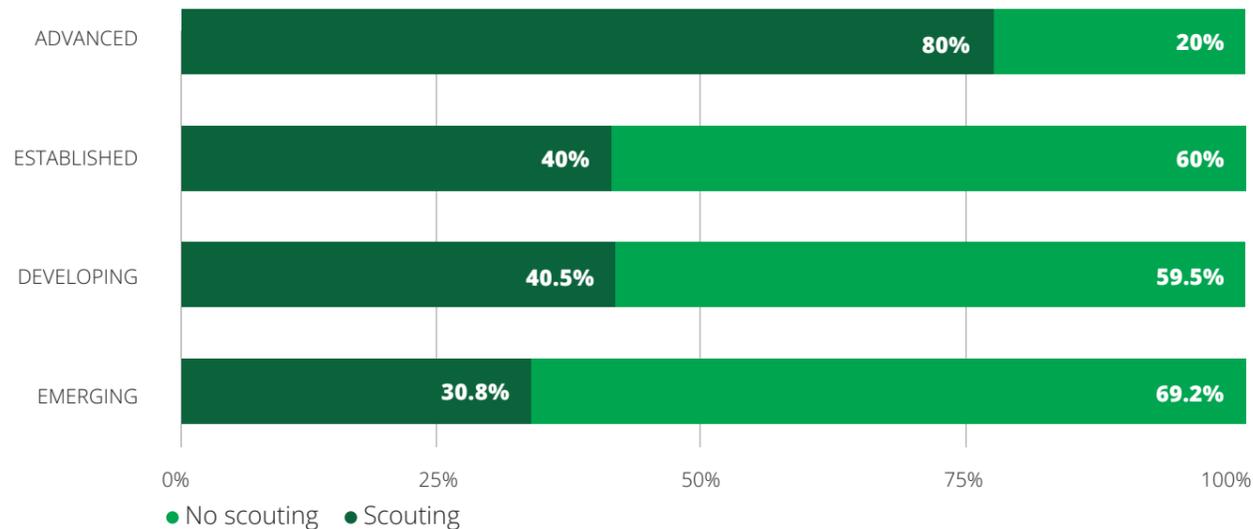
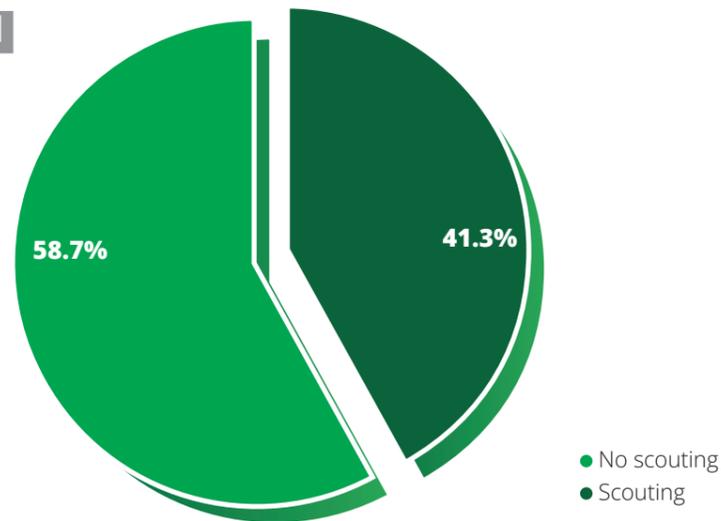
The average number of scouts in women's and girls' departments reveals an unexpected pattern. Developing clubs report an average of **3.15** scouts, which is higher than the advanced clubs (**2.40**), established clubs (**1.63**) and emerging clubs (**0.46**). This figure is largely driven by a few developing clubs with unusually large scouting teams, which have made a significant commitment to scouting in women's football.

The percentage of clubs involved in scouting for women's football noticeably

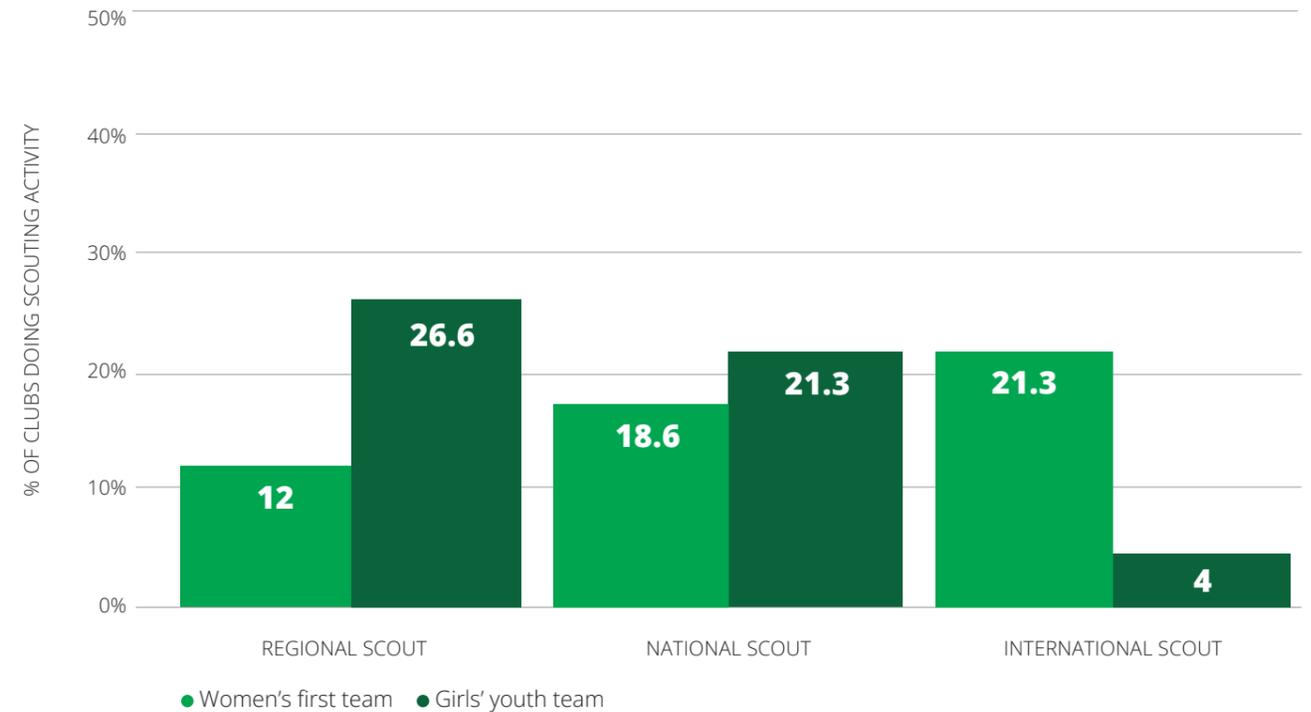
increases as the focus shifts from regional to national and international levels. However, for girls' football, the trend moves in the opposite direction.

Girls' football scouting is primarily conducted at the regional or national level, focusing on identifying and developing more local talent. In comparison, scouting for women's football tends to shift more towards the national and international stage, where clubs aim to recruit players ready for the professional game right away.

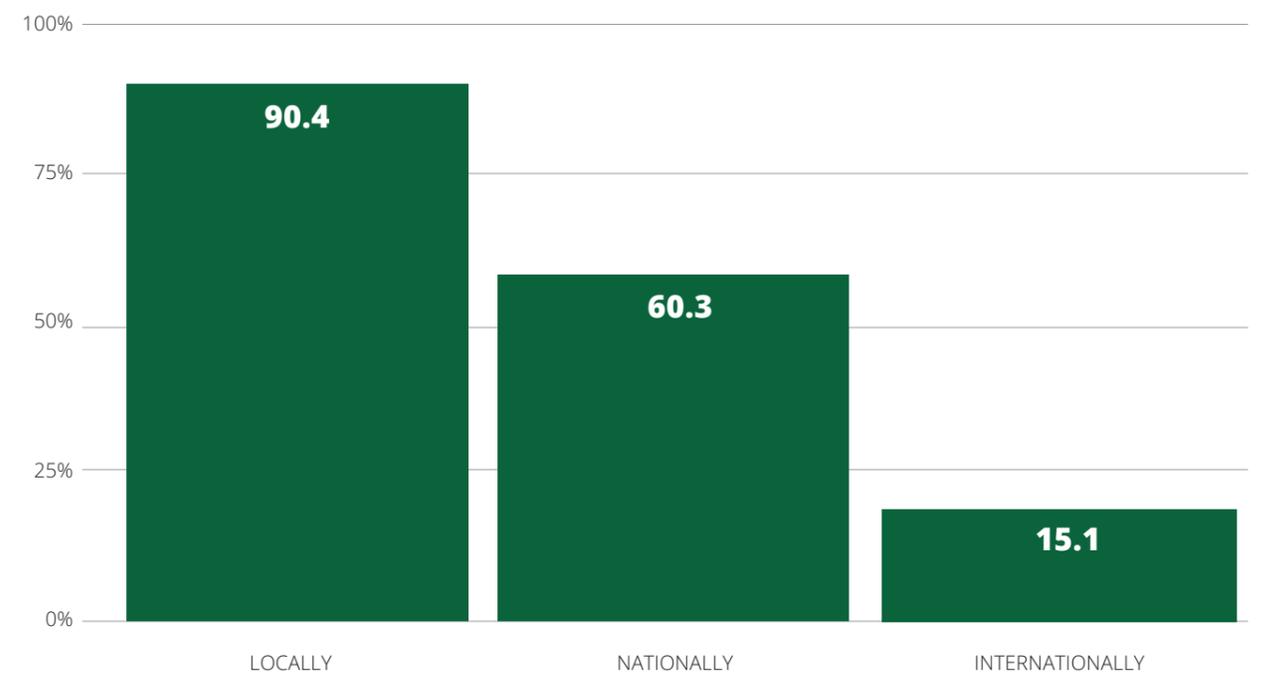
Clubs scouting in women's and girls' football



How are women's football scouting roles structured (FTE)?



Recruitment sources



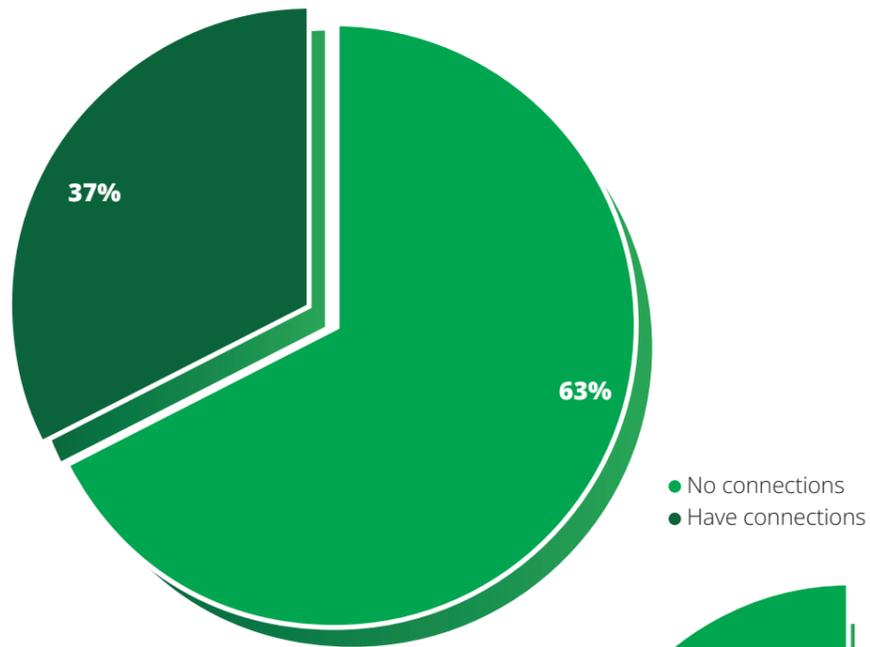
**D**ifferent methods are applied to scout talent for the girls' youth system, including hosting training camps and collaborating with schools.

Among these scouting methods, collaborating with local schools is a widely used strategy for sourcing players locally, with **63%** of clubs

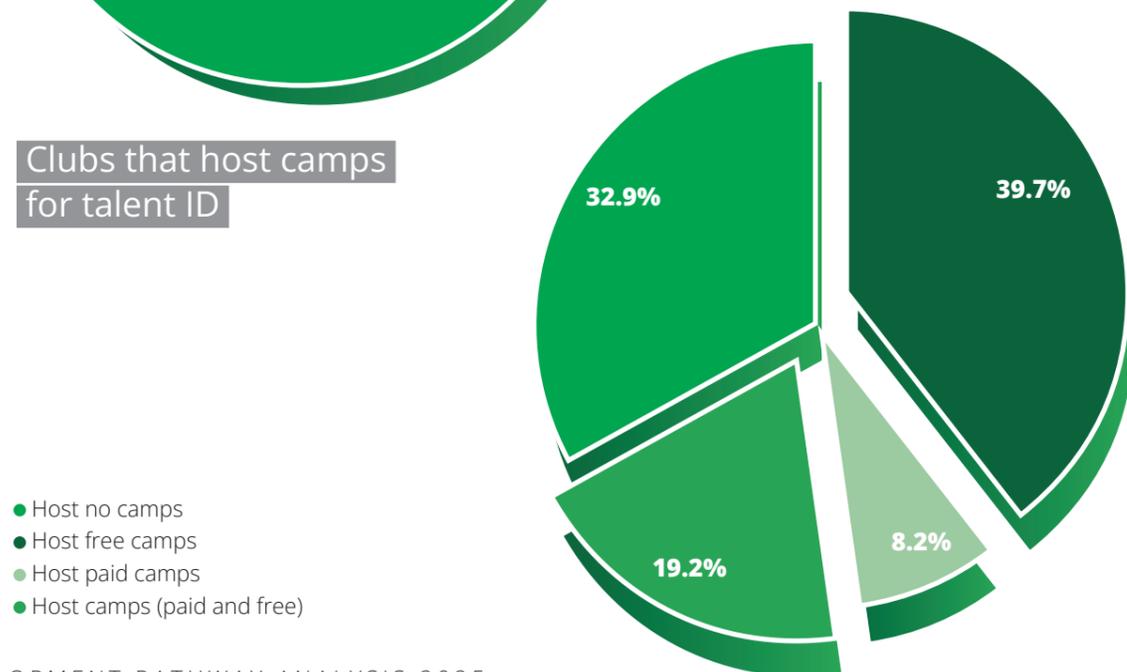
reporting to have such partnerships.

Hosting training camps to identify young talent is also a common practice, confirmed by **67.1%** of clubs. Training camps are primarily hosted for clubs to unearth local talent and engage the community with girls' football.

Clubs that have connections to local schools to identify potential talent



Clubs that host camps for talent ID



### FC Bayern München

Bayern München's approach to the recruitment strategy is evidence-informed. The whole strategy and philosophy of the club are built around scientific research on talent identification and development, as well as anecdotal evidence, e.g. clear patterns highlighting successful first-team transitions have come from no further than two hours away from Munich. Promoting internal talent across the club's age groups and a growth mindset are prioritised. The strategy through which to increase homegrown players is articulated across three main areas:

- **Traditional Scouting** Organisation of open trial days at the club and continued monitoring of Bavarian regional and German youth national teams.
- **Community Presence** Proactive approach to supporting and developing the local and regional ecosystem (for example delocalised training sessions, visits to schools and local clubs, hosting and participating on festivals and intra-regional tournaments and so on).
- **Networking** Developing a network of regional partner clubs with opportunities for coach development and knowledge-exchange on scouting and training methodology.



## The introduction of Training Compensation

**T**he lack of domestic regulations that incentivise the development of club-trained players presents another significant obstacle. Unlike in the men's game, where mechanisms such as training compensation and solidarity payments help to justify investment in youth development, the absence of such incentives in women's

football makes it difficult for clubs to build a strong case for investing in girls' youth programmes. Without these financial incentives or dedicated resources, clubs struggle to justify the costs associated with running youth programmes, which in turn hampers the overall growth and sustainability of girls' football.



### FIFA Training Compensation System

FIFA's training compensation regulations, as set out in the Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players (RSTP), currently do not apply to women's football. However, a landmark shift is on the horizon — one that has the potential to redefine youth development across the women's game.

The introduction of a tailored training compensation mechanism represents a critical step in strengthening the business case for greater investment in the development of young female players. As outlined in



ECA's Be a Changemaker strategy, ECA have been working closely with FIFA and other key stakeholders across the global football ecosystem to co-create a system designed specifically for the realities of women's football. This initiative aims not only to protect and reward the clubs that invest in training and development, but also to contribute to the long-term sustainability, competitiveness, and professionalisation of the game worldwide.

**“ The sustained growth of women's football depends on bold regulatory reforms that prioritise the development of young female players. This is more than development — it's a strategic long-term investment in the future of the game. ”**



**Martina Pavlová**

ECA Vice Chair /  
AC Sparta Praha



## INTERNAL CLUB ASSESSMENT

Given the existing challenges in scouting, player development and regulatory support in girls' football, clubs can benefit from employing a structured framework for internal assessment.

This model addresses fundamental issues such as underdeveloped scouting practices, the gap between girls' academies and senior teams, and the lack of incentives for developing club-trained players.

By integrating these elements into the evaluation tool, clubs can systematically assess and improve their scouting methods and broader talent development strategies.



Overleaf  
**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Player Pathway**



**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Player Pathway**

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
DESCRIPTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The club is building its foundation by using basic talent information with early pathways for youth talent progression. Recruitment and professional transition are in the initial stages of development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is increasing alignment between recruitment and transition processes as the club expands its recruitment network and actively enhances pathways for youth talent progression.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The club has well-defined recruitment and transition processes with structured systems for talent identification and player development. Both areas are integrated and managed effectively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cutting-edge, integrated systems set a benchmark for talent development and player progression, and the club is a leader in recruitment and professional transition.</li> </ul>
RECRUITMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The club has a foundational understanding of the domestic football landscape, leveraging local knowledge to identify talent.</li> <li>A small talent ID team is in place, focusing primarily on individual scouting efforts.</li> <li>There is a basic system for tracking potential talent, which offers early insights but requires refinement for scalability and accuracy.</li> <li>Boys' and men's teams' scouts support with identifying young talent for the women's game.</li> <li>Scouts are employed on a voluntary basis but receive incentives such as match tickets and kit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The recruitment network is expanding, with growing relationships with local clubs that enhance talent identification opportunities.</li> <li>The club is increasingly using technology, such as video analysis and performance tracking tools, to monitor and assess talent.</li> <li>Broader collaboration with scouting teams is fostering more established talent reviews.</li> <li>The club is beginning to define clear position profiles to better align recruitment efforts with team needs.</li> <li>Public trials are organised where scouts and coaches can spot talent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a robust and well-established recruitment network, featuring strong partnerships with local clubs, regional associations and other talent sources.</li> <li>Data and video analysis play an integral role in informing scouting decisions, making the recruitment process more data-driven and objective.</li> <li>Clear and complete positional profiles guide scouting efforts, ensuring that recruits align with the tactical and technical needs of the team.</li> <li>There is full integration between the recruitment, technical and player development departments, leading to more cohesive talent management strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The club boasts an extensive international recruitment network, allowing it to scout top talent across diverse football markets.</li> <li>A centralised talent identification platform powered by advanced analytics offers a 360-degree view of possible recruits, considering their performance, potential and fit within the club's culture.</li> <li>The club's network of scouts is strategically placed worldwide, ensuring full market coverage and optimal identification of emerging talent.</li> </ul>
PROFESSIONAL TRANSITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A small number of academy players make the transition to the senior team, reflecting the early stages of a structured development pathway.</li> <li>Transitions to other clubs are mostly informal and a result of relationships with other clubs.</li> <li>Set up a formal strategy for supporting players' off-pitch careers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a gradual increase in the number of academy players progressing to the senior team as the club refines its development pathways.</li> <li>Initiatives are in place to support transitions to other clubs, with growing coordination and formalisation of external relationships.</li> <li>The focus on developing club-trained players is strengthening, and more structured efforts are being made to integrate these players into the senior team.</li> <li>Off-pitch career support is gaining traction, with the introduction of early programmes aimed at helping players to prepare for life beyond football.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A significant number of academy players are transitioning to the senior team, reflecting the club's mature player development system.</li> <li>Processes for transitioning players to other clubs are highly efficient, with well-established relationships across the football ecosystem allowing players to move seamlessly when necessary.</li> <li>The club meticulously tracks the progress of club-trained players, regularly assessing their development and contribution to the senior team.</li> <li>Off-pitch career development strategies are in place, offering players opportunities for personal growth, education and career exploration outside of football.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A majority of academy players transition smoothly to the senior team, following highly structured and innovative development pathways that are regarded as a model in the industry.</li> <li>The club sets the standard for seamless transitions to other clubs, with a global network that facilitates the successful placement of players in top-tier teams worldwide.</li> <li>Rigorous analysis of academy KPIs, including progression rates, player impact and retention, ensures continuous improvement in player development.</li> <li>The club's career development programmes are pioneering, providing support for players' off-pitch aspirations, from education to business ventures, media opportunities and philanthropic endeavours.</li> </ul>



**MATURITY MATRIX**  
**Player Pathway**

	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED	ADVANCED
COMPETITION AND SCHEDULING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The club participates in regional domestic competitions, providing foundational game experience for women's teams, even as the competitive structure evolves.</li> <li>Friendly matches are organised for all age groups, offering valuable additional game time for the girls to develop their skills, with a focus on growth rather than high competition levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic competitions now include both regional and some national championships for specific age groups, creating more structured and challenging opportunities for players.</li> <li>Friendly matches are organised with the goal of increasing competition levels, helping players to grow technically and physically.</li> <li>The club is exploring ways to create development pathways, allowing some girls to play with older age groups to support their football and physical growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The club competes in both regional and national phases of domestic competitions, ensuring players gain experience across different competitive levels.</li> <li>Specific age groups participate in international tournaments, giving players exposure to higher-level competition and helping them grow further.</li> <li>A second team is introduced, bridging the gap between the youth system and the first team by competing in the third or fourth division, providing more opportunities for player development.</li> <li>The club uses data analysis to make informed decisions, ensuring girls are regularly playing at a competition level that best supports their growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic competitions are fully organised across all levels, from regional to national, with professional clubs actively participating, providing a high-quality competitive environment.</li> <li>Multiple youth age groups participate in international tournaments, consistently facing high-level competition that accelerates their development.</li> <li>The second team is competing regularly in the second division of the domestic league, strengthening the connection between the youth system and the first team and ensuring a clear pathway for player progression.</li> </ul>
KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost per player scouted.</li> <li>Number of players scouted.</li> <li>Club reach rate.</li> <li>Time to identify talent.</li> <li>Percentage of youth football matches recorded.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of academy players transitioning to the senior team.</li> <li>Number of academy players transitioning to other clubs.</li> <li>Success rate of identified talent.</li> <li>Percentage of youth football matches recorded.</li> <li>Number of players engaging in off-pitch career development programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing trend in academy player transition.</li> <li>Successful placement of academy players in other clubs.</li> <li>Number of career development opportunities provided for players off the pitch.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centralised talent ID platform.</li> <li>Recognition for exceptional player development practices.</li> <li>Expansion of career development opportunities.</li> <li>Highest percentage of academy players transitioning to the senior team.</li> </ul>
RECOMMENDATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue building a strong system for scouting and tracking talent.</li> <li>Develop early pathways for youth talent progression.</li> <li>Begin formalising professional transition plans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand recruitment networks and use technology for improved talent identification.</li> <li>Strengthen partnerships with local clubs and scouting teams.</li> <li>Establish structured transition and off-pitch career support programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimise recruitment and transition processes.</li> <li>Leverage data-driven insights for continuous improvement.</li> <li>Strengthen alignment between scouting, player development and career support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovate and set the standard in recruitment and transition systems.</li> <li>Lead the industry in talent management and player development.</li> <li>Use advanced analytics to drive player progression.</li> </ul>

**Please find the Club Resources – key questions on page 268**

# STAFFING



As girls' youth football programmes across Europe continue to evolve, meeting the increasing demands on staff has remained one of the key challenges. Effective staffing structures are essential to support both operational and developmental goals within clubs. Understanding the current allocation of resources within clubs offers valuable insights into their strategic priorities, particularly regarding the integration of dedicated staff for girls' football.

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## Moving to Dedicated Teams for Girls' Programmes

Data reveals a significant disparity in staffing allocation between clubs at different stages of maturity. In emerging clubs, where resources are typically limited, generalist staff are often shared between boys' and girls' programmes. These clubs operate with an average of only 3.92 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, which limits the level of tailored support that girls' programmes can provide. As clubs progress towards more advanced levels, the focus shifts to specialised teams dedicated to girls' youth development.

In established clubs, the number of dedicated staff increases to an average of 10.78 FTEs, while advanced clubs boast more than 30 full-time staff. This reflects a strategic shift towards

turning girls' football professional, with specialised roles not only for coaches but also for medical professionals, performance analysts and player welfare officers. These expanded roles enable the creation of more comprehensive training programmes, enhanced player wellbeing initiatives and increased performance support.

In particular, many advanced clubs are reducing their reliance on men's football resources and moving towards fully dedicated teams for their girls' programmes. These clubs demonstrate the greatest independence in staffing, ensuring their programmes are fully resourced with professionals who understand the specific needs of female athletes.



## Optimising Staffing Allocation Across Departments

For clubs to succeed in advancing their girls' youth systems, they must strategically allocate staff across essential departments such as coaching, medical and performance, recruitment and player care and welfare. As clubs progress along the maturity scale — from emerging to developing and on

to established and advanced — the focus gradually shifts from shared resources to specialised, dedicated teams.

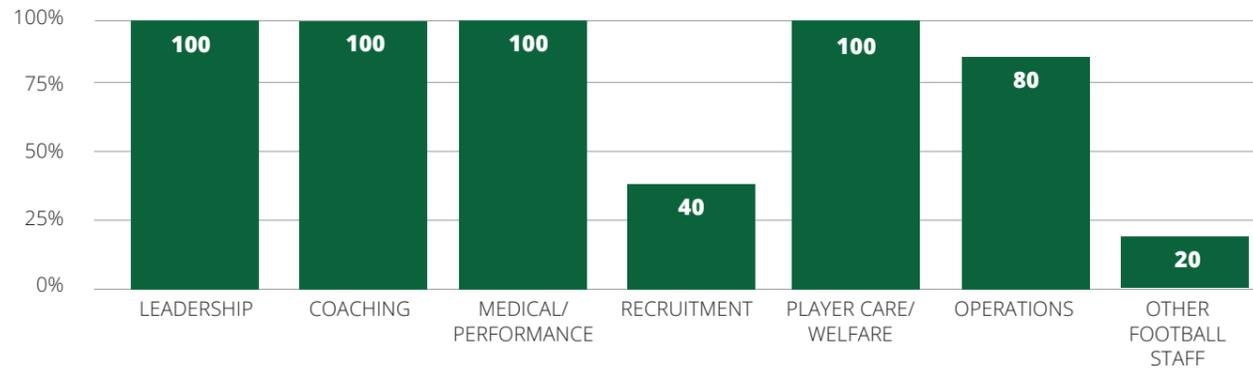
In emerging clubs, generalist staff are often shared between the boys' and girls' programmes, limiting the ability to provide tailored support and targeted development for girls.

As clubs grow, dedicated full-time roles begin to emerge within key departments, marking a transition towards more advanced operations that are foundational for long-term success. Unsurprisingly, advanced clubs exhibit the greatest depth in staffing, with a clear emphasis on specialisation.

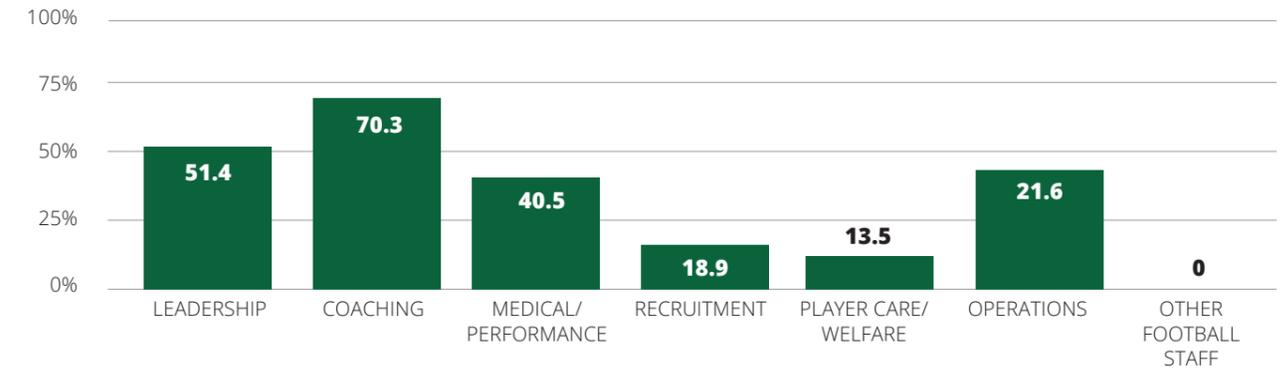
These clubs allocate full-time, dedicated staff not only to coaching but also to medical care, performance analysis and player wellbeing. This expansion allows for the development of comprehensive training programmes and robust support systems, ensuring players receive holistic development and care.

The percentage of dedicated staff in each department

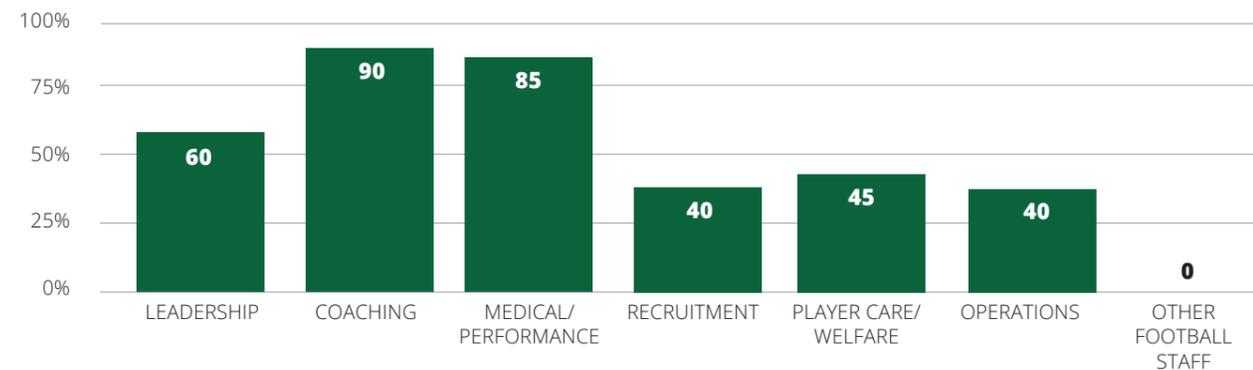
### Advanced clubs



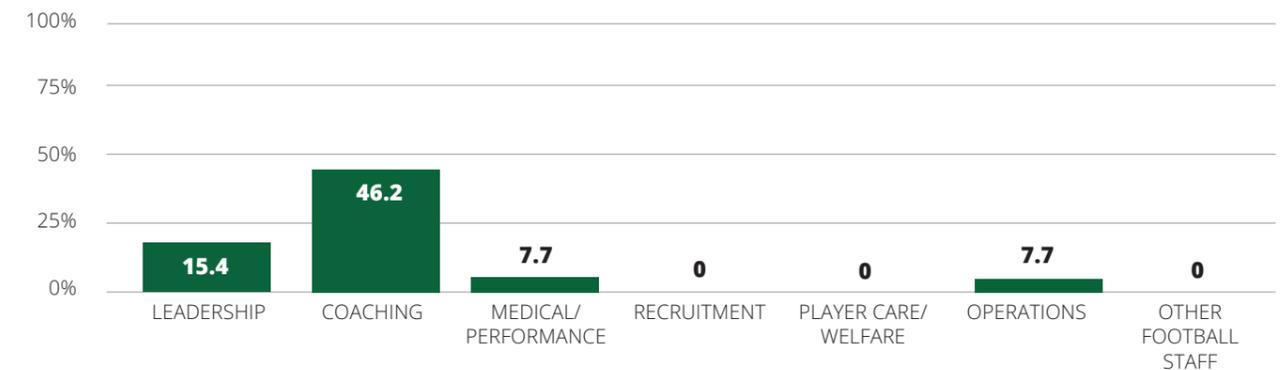
### Growing clubs



### Established clubs



### Emerging clubs



## Scaling Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staffing

Staffing allocation can be quantified through full-time equivalent (FTE) measurements. This metric provides a clear picture of how clubs are staffing their girls' youth systems, with roles being counted as either full-time (1.0 FTE) or part-time/shared (0.5 FTE). Emerging and developing clubs generally have lower

average FTEs, with most resources concentrated in coaching roles.

However, as clubs mature, there is a sharp increase in FTE allocations, particularly in more specialised areas such as medical and performance support.

For advanced clubs, the average FTE for girls' programmes exceeds 30,

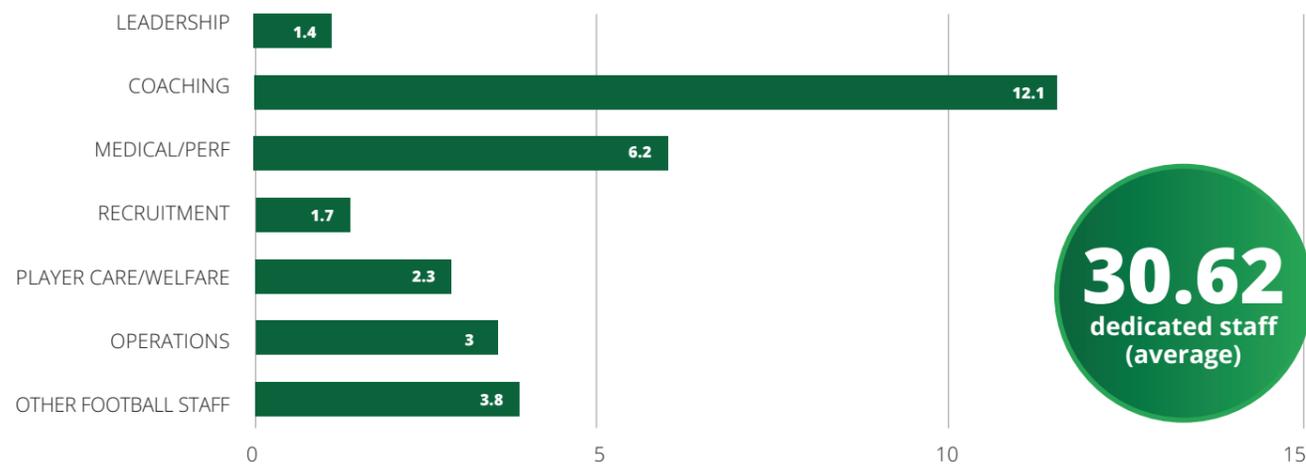
highlighting a strong commitment to providing comprehensive support to players across all facets of development.

This contrasts with emerging clubs, where FTE numbers can be as low as 3.92, indicating a greater reliance on generalist staff and shared resources.

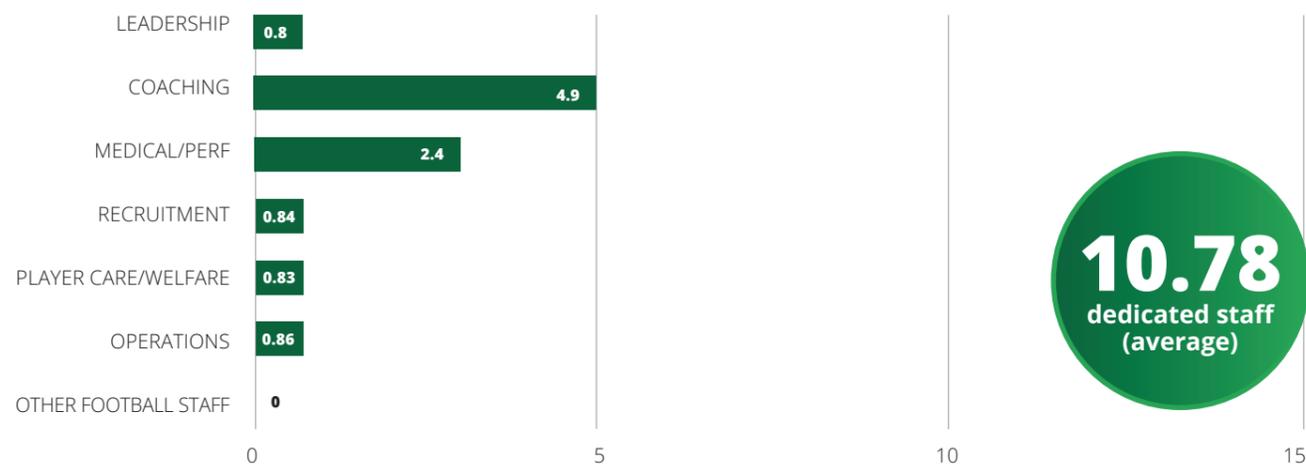


### Average staff numbers

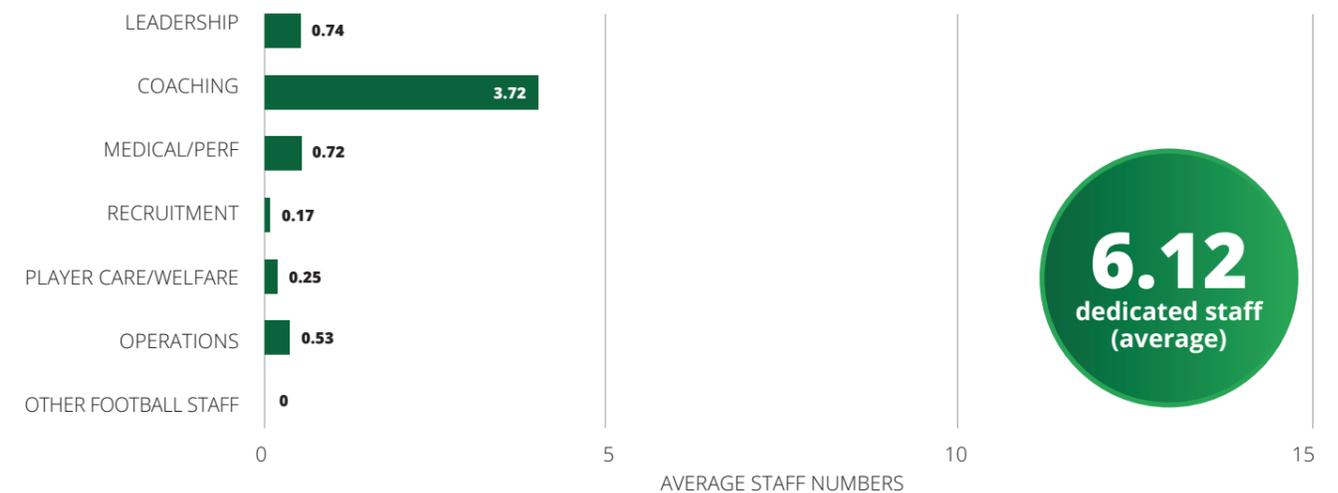
#### Advanced clubs



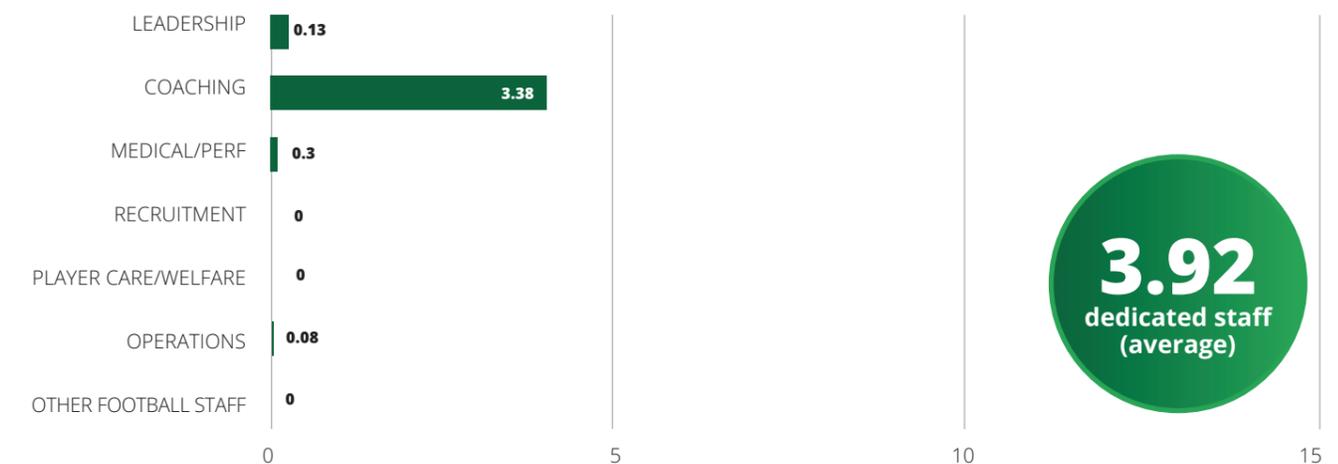
#### Established clubs



#### Developing clubs



#### Emerging clubs



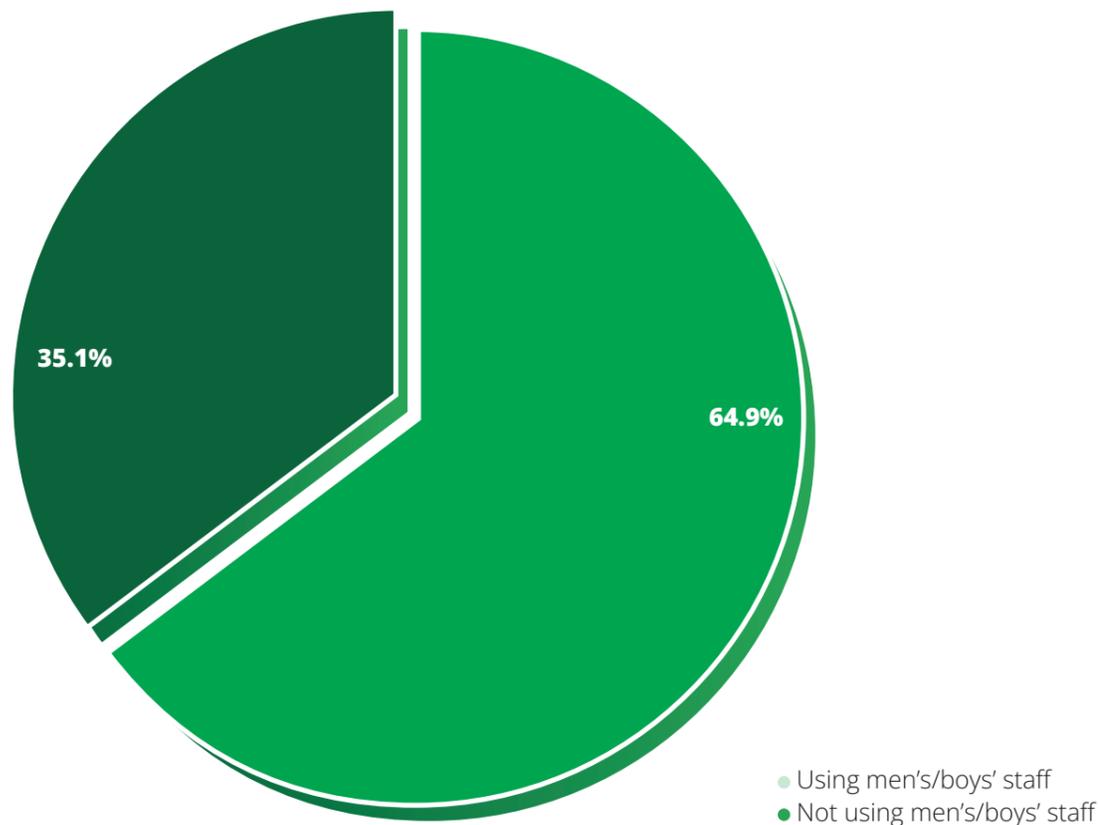
## Leveraging Men's Football Resources for Girls' Programmes

Another component of staffing in girls' youth systems is the use of resources from men's football. Many clubs leverage existing infrastructure, particularly staff from the men's or boys' programmes, to support their girls' teams. While this can provide access to high-quality coaching and medical expertise, it does also present challenges. Clubs that rely too heavily on shared resources may find that girls' football is not always prioritised and

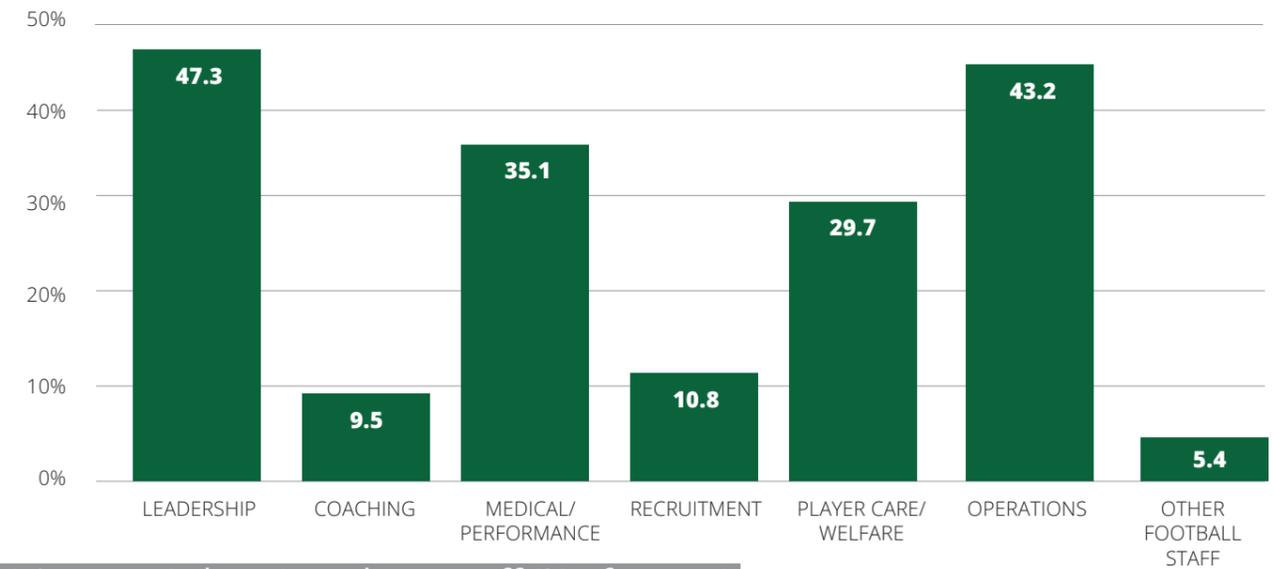
that the specific needs of female players are sometimes overlooked.

As clubs mature, there is an expectation that they will reduce their reliance on staff from the men's programmes and move toward establishing their own dedicated teams for girls' football. Advanced clubs show a high degree of independence in staffing, ensuring that the girls' programme is fully resourced with professionals attuned to the specific requirements of female athletes.

Girls' youth systems using men's/boys' academy staff

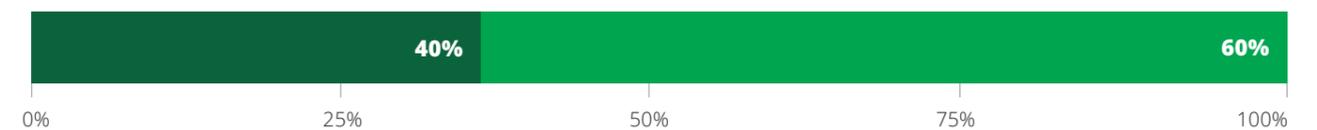


Departments using staff from men's team/boys' academy

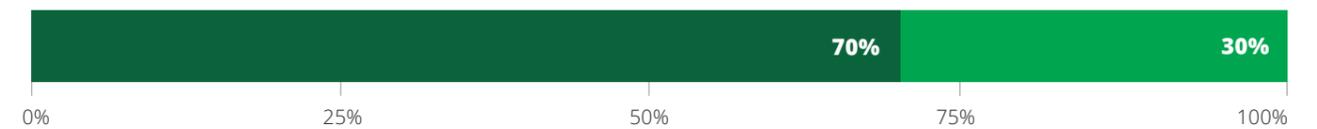


Using men's/boys' academy staff (% of teams)

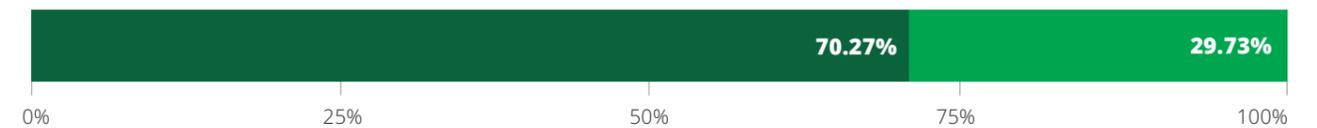
### Advanced clubs



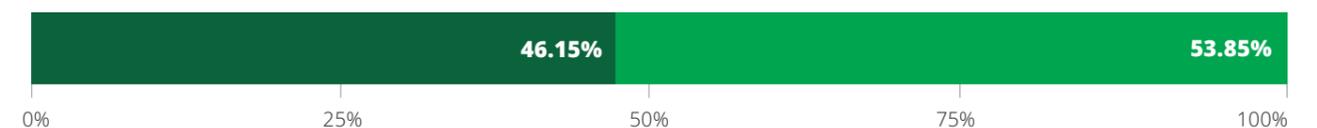
### Established clubs



### Developing clubs



### Emerging clubs



## The Path Forward

To meet the growing demands of girls' football and continue improving the quality of their youth systems, clubs must focus on building dedicated staffing structures. By strategically increasing the number of specialised staff and reducing their reliance on resources from men's football, clubs can ensure that girls' programmes receive the attention and support necessary for sustained success.

In particular, investing in full-time staff across key departments such as performance analysis, medical care and player wellbeing will be fundamental for clubs aiming to drive their girls' youth systems to the next level.



Arsenal Football Club



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As an imperative part of this project, site visits were conducted to various clubs across European markets. These visits facilitated interviews and highlighted exemplary practices in youth development within the women's game. Although facilities and staffing resources differ among clubs, each has developed its own approach and success stories in recruiting, retaining and nurturing players.

**“ It's important to recognise the efforts clubs are making to integrate girls' football into their operations and to champion women's football from the grassroots up. ”**



**Martina Pavlová**

ECA Vice Chair /  
AC Sparta Praha

# PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN



Paris Saint-Germain has established itself as a leader in women's and girls' football, with a comprehensive and strategic approach to player development. The girls' academy, which focuses on players from U16 to U19, embodies the club's philosophy of holistic development, combining athletic training with educational and personal growth for the players. Currently, the academy houses all 34 players across three age sides – U16, U17 and U19.



## PSG Campus to Provide Top-Class Facilities for Girls to Develop and Learn

A key component of PSG's success in developing young female talent is the set-up of on-site educational facilities and accommodation. This arrangement allows players to balance their academic responsibilities with the demands of elite sports training in just one place.

The on-site school is a cornerstone of the girls' academy, ensuring that education remains a priority alongside football development. The curriculum is designed to be flexible, accommodating the training schedules and travel commitments of the players. By having the school located within the campus,

PSG reduces the logistical challenges that often arise when balancing school and football, allowing players to focus on both their academic and footballing growth.

This close integration between education and football has a material impact on maintaining high standards, ensuring that players do not have to sacrifice one for the other.

Accommodation is provided on-site, offering a safe and supportive environment for the academy players. Living within the club's facilities fosters a sense of community and belonging, which is integral to PSG's 'one club' mentality.

The shared living space stimulates team building and social connections, and in turn fosters a strong team culture. The shared facilities between the girls' and boys'

academies and the women's first team highlight the club's inclusive approach. Using the same gym, medical facilities and dining areas reinforces a unified club identity where all players and staff feel connected.

Being together in one place on campus also stimulates collaboration between departments. This is evident in the daily interactions between, for example, the coaching, medical and performance teams to make sure that each player's development is holistic and well-rounded.

Morning meetings between medical staff, coaches and performance specialists allow for the discussion of individual player needs and adjustments to training schedules.

## In Conclusion

Paris Saint-Germain's girls' academy is a benchmark for youth development in women's football. The integration of on-site schooling and accommodation is a best practice that ensures players can thrive both academically and on the pitch. Coupled with a well-coordinated operational structure that promotes collaboration across all departments, PSG provides a professional environment that is determined to develop the next generation of football talent. Through these efforts, PSG not only nurtures elite athletes but also well-rounded individuals who are prepared for success both on and off the pitch.

# ARSENAL FC



Arsenal is a club with a rich history of success in English women's football, spanning decades. Building upon this legacy, the Arsenal Youth Academy is a key pillar in ensuring the club has the foundations for future success by focusing on the next generation of talent. The youth academy continues to align its developmental pathways with the club's broader vision, creating a well-resourced structure that supports on and off-field development.

## Integration of Standardised Individual Development Plans (IDPs)

The integration of standardised IDPs across the academy is central to its approach to player development. IDPs are developed for each player in collaboration with the multidisciplinary team (MDT), which includes coaches, performance and medical staff, and player care specialists. These plans address various aspects of a player's development, emphasising human development, psychological wellbeing and personal growth as well as athletic performance. Players are encouraged to actively participate in the creation of their IDPs, helping them develop a common football language to articulate their development goals and progress. This player involvement ensures IDPs are not merely top-down mandates but personalised roadmaps for individual growth.

## Development Model

The academy's game model is designed to transition players effectively from the

youth development phase (U9 to U16) to the performance phase (U21) and eventually to the first team. While the team identity and style reflect a club-wide approach, there is recognition that formations must be adopted to suit the development needs at each level. This flexible approach allows the academy to maintain its core playing principles while developing the fundamental building blocks needed to suit the demands of the professional game.

A critical component of this pathway is the academy's transition model, which ensures players are adequately prepared to progress to the first-team environment. This model includes a high-potential group where bespoke programmes are developed, with the head of player development overseeing discussions with department heads. A comprehensive handover document is created for the first team head coach, ensuring that the transition is as seamless as possible.

The model also tracks the progress of loan players, making sure that their development remains aligned with the academy's overarching goals. ▶



Arsenal Football Club

### ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

High-potential players follow a bespoke physical programme across all aspects of strength, conditioning and injury prevention to ensure they are physically ready for the senior game.

### TRAINING DEVELOPMENT

The club makes sure that players are able to meet the highest expectations in the women's first team.

### MATCHPLAY DEVELOPMENT

A diverse range of match-day environments are used to stretch, challenge and develop players, preparing them for top-tier competition.

### PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT

Players are offered early exposure to all aspects of the senior environment to gain valuable experience and insights into expectations and culture of professional football.

### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Focus on developing individuals with a deep connection to the club and the community, nurturing well-rounded people and players.

### CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Develop individuals who excel in their football careers and in life beyond the sport, equipping them with the necessary skills for success.



### Consistency and Alignment

Coaches at Arsenal are equipped with standard session planner templates that allow them to create engaging and varied sessions within a clear, academy-wide framework.

To further enhance this consistency, the club has developed a comprehensive coaching glossary creating a common language so there is clarity and consistency in communication across the academy.

This approach supports a cohesive learning environment where all staff members are aligned to the same developmental objectives, regardless of the age group or phase they work with.

Additionally, the use of third-party platforms for communication and organisation further ensures that all planning and execution are seamlessly integrated throughout the academy.

### Individual Player Support

Player welfare and support are fundamental elements of the Arsenal youth academy. The academy's player care strategy is deeply embedded within the overarching player development plans, which incorporate all aspects of development. This 'individual person support' covers three key areas:

#### ► Performance Development

Focusing on essentials such as nutrition, psychology and performance analysis.

#### ► Person Development

Assistance in travel, finances, menstrual health and the unique challenges of being a female athlete.

#### ► Career Development

Supporting players with educational guidance, day-release education

opportunities, dual career paths, scholarships and more.

The player care department provides both group and individual support on a wide range of topics essential to the players' growth and success. These initiatives help equip players with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the complexities of their careers and personal lives, ensuring they are adequately prepared for any challenges that lie ahead. More specifically, the club provides a season-long human development curriculum that runs across all age groups. These topics are tailored to be age-appropriate and delivered across five 'person development pillars', Strong Young Gunners, performance, medical, education and dual careers, specialised topics and a parent curriculum – Strong Parent Gunners. The human development curriculum is overseen by the academy

player care lead, with the performance lead, medical lead and head coach delivering their specific pillar of focus with the age group-specific MDT staff – this includes specialisms such as nutrition, sport psychology, loading/injury prevention and dual career support. External organisations are also utilised to deliver specialised topics to both players and parents.

As part of its broader commitment to player wellbeing, the academy includes menstrual health support within its welfare initiatives. This includes providing free and easily accessible menstrual products and promoting a 'no ask' culture that normalises conversations around, for example, mental health. Additionally, the academy offers education on managing the menstrual cycle in relation to training and performance, helping players to better understand and respond to their body's needs.

## AS ROMA



The women's football set-up at AS Roma is driven by the club's commitment to establishing a programme grounded in strong sporting values and advanced training methodologies. The project began in 2015 with the launch of the girls' youth system followed by the creation of the women's team in 2018. Everyone involved in the women's football department — players, staff, employees — is part of a comprehensive club structure integrating all resources, positioning AS Roma as one of Europe's leading women's football clubs. The team consistently competes for the Serie A title and participates in the UEFA Women's Champions League.



The club's vision centres on the athlete and young girls, focusing on their development and setting objectives to optimise their growth. The women's football department includes ten different age groups, starting with girls in the U9 category and progressing to the first team at the top of the pyramid. Currently, more than 170 girls are registered with the club, spanning from U9 to U17. They are supported by a dedicated team of 58 professionals, including coaches, medical and performance staff, and psychologists, who guide and nurture young athletes throughout their football journey.

### Medical and Performance

The club's medical and performance departments, while focused on women's football, also collaborate extensively with the men's department to share knowledge and enhance the overall ecosystem. This integrated approach adds significant value to the programme. The medical team work closely with staff across different age groups to ensure the conditions are optimal for players to perform at their best. The process begins with a comprehensive medical assessment before the season starts, followed by daily check-ups from team

doctors and physiotherapists. For specific cases, such as chronic conditions, the team arrange visits with orthopaedic, osteopathic or endocrinological specialists and conducts the necessary tests, followed by the development of a tailored prevention plan.

In partnership with the performance and nutrition departments, they have developed an injury-prevention protocol. This protocol outlines the minimum requirements for players, including necessary tests and medical evaluations before the new season begins. It aims to prevent major injuries by making sure all essential assessments are completed and prevention strategies are in place.

### Further Practices

To maximise player performance and support the growth of young female athletes, the club's performance and sports science department is developing and regularly updating a multi-year development plan that takes peak height velocity (PHV) into account. This plan carefully balances training loads and methods to prevent injuries while fostering optimal maturation and growth.

In addition, the department implements biological age-based training sessions ('bio-banding') for the U13 and U14 age groups throughout the season. This tailored approach means that training is aligned with each player's developmental stage, further enhancing their overall progress and performance.

# CLUB ATLÉTICO DE MADRID FEMENINO



Atlético de Madrid Femenino dates back to 2001, beginning with two teams and trials at a time when women's football in Spain was still emerging. The club has undergone significant growth and transformation, including the professionalisation of its women's department in 2015-16 and important titles in the following years including three League championships, two Copa de la Reina, one Supercopa de España, qualifying six times for the Champions League, and setting records such as the world's largest attendance for a women's club match (60,739 in 2018-19). Now the women's area has more than 300 players and 18 teams across elite and school-age groups, starting from eight years old. The club is seen as a leader in football and player development.

## Academy Model

The club is renowned worldwide for its core values, such as teamwork, effort, sacrifice and never giving up, and its spirit, characterised by its mantra *Coraje y Corazón*, which it instils in players from the youth system onwards. The academy serves as a strategic pillar for the club, featuring a 360-degree model that encompasses all areas and age groups, with 70 teams (boys and girls), including high-performance and development teams, making it the largest academy in Europe affiliated with a professional team. This model is defined by a robust and efficient organisational structure, integrating key areas such as education, scouting and international

expansion, with a strong emphasis on internal strategic alignment and integration of gender.

With almost 400 dedicated staff members — coaches, athletic trainers, scouts, analysts, healthcare professionals and educators — the academy's mission is to foster a sense of identity and belonging among young players, ensuring they integrate and develop both on and off the field.

## Infrastructure

The club's long-term vision and commitment to women's football are evident in its substantial infrastructure investments, such as the training centre at Alcalá de Henares, inaugurated in 2019.



This state-of-the-art facility serves as the home for 12 teams from the girls' academy and the women's first team. It features a dedicated stadium with 2,600 seats and cutting-edge amenities, including an 800sqm gym.

## Individual Plans

In its pursuit of elite coaching for academy players, Club Atlético de Madrid emphasises individualised training through a meticulously guided and monitored development process, allowing the creation of reports and a standardised platform for monitoring progress across different age groups and teams. This approach involves crafting tailored technical and physical

preparation plans for specific 'club project players', offering individual video performance analysis and holding daily meetings to support self-evaluation and track progress.

## Conclusion

Club Atlético de Madrid, a symbol of excellence and resilience, has built a legacy in both men's and women's football. With a rich and inspiring history and a forward-thinking approach, the club has been instrumental in advancing women's football in Spain, being the promoter of many changes and improvements in the sector, with the aim of making an enduring impact on the sport for generations to come.

## AFC AJAX



AFC Ajax is renowned globally as a top talent development club, nurturing players for its men's team year after year. In 2012, the club expanded by launching its women's football department. The goal was to unify both branches of the club while honouring the distinct histories and values of men's and women's football. The core mission of AFC Ajax remains unchanged: to inspire people in the Netherlands and develop future stars. It is essential for players and staff alike to take pride in AFC Ajax's traditions and history, as these values form the foundation for continued growth and development.



### Club Strategy for Developing Girls' Academy Players

Player development has always been a priority for the club, first with the men's team and now extending to women's football as well. A core concept in this is

'micro-dosing', where everyone involved in shaping the girls' pathway focuses on understanding each player's needs. The teaching processes are designed to help youth players make independent decisions, develop strong values and grow as well-rounded citizens. The emphasis ▶

### Club Values

- ▶ **We want to be the best**  
We have the responsibility to our club and its history.
- ▶ **We let the talent flourish**
- ▶ **We strengthen each other**  
With attention and focus on individuals and their development.
- ▶ **We show leadership**  
Players need to take responsibility for their behaviour and development.
- ▶ **We are Amsterdam direct**  
With a strict connection to the city in the way of being and doing.
- ▶ **We think offensively**



is on players taking ownership of their development journey. Girls are given the necessary tools and support for physical, cognitive and socio-emotional growth, while the club leverages departmental synergies including coaches, medical staff, performance and sports scientists, skills trainers, educators and video analysts.

AFC Ajax's football programme is the third deciding element, complementing family and school at primary and secondary school levels. Players from the

U16 age group are enrolled in a full-time programme designed to maximise their performance on the field while ensuring they focus entirely on their education off the pitch. The on-site school at Sportcomplex De Toekomst provides greater flexibility in managing the weekly schedule, allowing players to train and attend classes in one location. This means the girls can start their day at the training centre, feeling fully immersed in the club's environment from morning until evening.

**“ Our values are our power. Values play an essential role in the organisation and determine our identity. Many people think the physical aspect is what makes the difference, but that is not true. The true power is in the mental component, character and drive. Ajax's people have to be able to take care of themselves, think and act for themselves and always be able to explain themselves. ”**



# MALMÖ FF



The Malmö FF girls' youth system is an evolving and ambitious project that has placed a strong emphasis on integrating player education at the heart of its player development model, alongside athletic growth. This focus is deeply embedded into the core values of the club, which is committed to raising strong individuals and creating a winning team. As an open member association, Malmö FF maintains a direct link to its community, and each member has a vote at its annual general meeting to determine the highest policies at the club. This reinforces the club's mission to develop well-rounded individuals who can contribute to society. Formed in 2020, the girls' academy has steadily grown with a clear objective of mirroring the success seen on the boys' side. This is evident in the academy's structure and the club's holistic approach to education and development.

## Integration of Education and Football

One of Malmö's standout features is its commitment to making sure that all players receive the best academic education possible alongside their football training. The academy collaborates closely with the local education system, offering players the opportunity to attend two on-site, community-owned schools and producing a seamless education pathway that complements their football development.

The on-site school, known as the Gymnasium, is particularly notable for its location within the stadium and has impressive graduation rates of 99% reflecting the club's strong focus on

academic success. The significant majority of girls' youth system players attend the Gymnasium school, which provides them with the ability to balance their academic and athletic responsibilities effectively and mitigates any impact of travel on the contact time with players.

In addition to the close alignment with the two on-site schools, Malmö FF also has strong partnerships with 18 local schools within a one-hour radius, providing 75 coaches across a range of age groups. This network of partner schools expands the reach of Malmö FF and enables the club to provide high-quality education alongside dedicated football-specific resources such as coaching and equipment to girls outside its immediate area. ▶





### Educational Alignment with Player Care and Wellbeing

The alignment between the educational endeavours of Malmö FF academy players and their football development is carefully managed by the club's sports mentor and education tutor, who act as the vital bridge between the two organisations. Both provide a crucial neutral voice to ensure the girls' academic and football development are effectively managed.

The education tutor's role is focused on maintaining girls' educational continuity when they are taken out of school for football commitments. This is done through tutoring sessions to help them catch up on missed work and stay on track academically. Additionally, the sports mentor makes sure that the quality of care is prioritised, using group sessions to develop mental skills as well as individualised sessions where needed.

The confidentiality between the mentor and students is strictly maintained with referrals to the club psychologist available for more specialised attention. Both of these roles play an important part in ensuring safeguarding policies are maintained at all levels of the club.

### Holistic Individual Development Plans (IDPs)

Holistic IDPs are central to Malmö FF's approach to nurturing well-rounded players both on and off the pitch. These plans are developed for every player in the academy from the age of 13, and focus not only on their athletic and technical development, but also their academic and mental growth.

The IDPs are tailored to the player's needs, beginning with foundational skills and gradually incorporating more advanced physical, tactical, technical and mental development as they progress.

Regular reviews ensure that the plans are on track, with the coaches, performance staff and sports mentors collaborating to adjust goals and monitor progress every three to four weeks.

This holistic approach guarantees that players are not only equipped to succeed on the pitch but also prepared for life beyond the sport, emphasising Malmö FF's commitment to developing athletic, educated and well-rounded individuals.

Malmö's Girls' Academy forms a key part of the wider club complex



### INFORMATION - Where and what

- |                                 |                          |                                 |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 7 Pitch 7                       | Eric's Restaurant Eric's | MFF SHOPEN                      |
| 10 Warm up area                 | Café and Barbeque        | 5 Dressing room (Malmö stadion) |
| Entrance                        | Malmö stadion            | 4 Dressing room (MIG)           |
| Referees place                  | Bus stop                 | 2 Dressing room (Anneberg)      |
| Administration Office           | Toilet                   | 5 Dressing room (Isstadion)     |
| Tickets and Service center      | Defibrillator            | 2 Dressing room (Plan 10)       |
| Food hall, lunch/dinner players | Information              |                                 |

## LEGIA LADIES



Although Legia Ladies have been part of the football community since 2016, a significant turning point came in January 2024 when the club established a separate entity to manage the transition from semi-pro to a professional team in Legia Warszawa. This demonstrates the club's commitment to elevating the status of women's football in Poland and eastern Europe. By acquiring a second-division licence, Legia Ladies are poised to make an impact on the field and in the broader movement for women's empowerment through sports.

The club's core mission extends beyond just winning matches or generating revenue — although they believe financial success will naturally follow. The focus is on women's empowerment, and this commitment is reflected in the team's use of the Legia training centre as their training and matchday home. This world-class facility offers Legia Ladies access to state-of-the-art medical and physiotherapy resources, gym and fields, the same that are provided to Legia Warszawa's men's team.

This investment in player wellbeing means that the women's team is treated with the same level of professionalism and care as their male counterparts.

### Menstrual Cycle Tracking

Legia Ladies is distinguished by an innovative approach to player performance and wellbeing. The club has implemented menstrual cycle tracking as part of its training regimen. This method, based on the mini-cycles profiling approach, aims to enhance training efficiency and reduce injury risks by tailoring sessions to players'

physiological states. The team performance coach explained that the data highlights the athletes' progress from March to September. The metrics gathered from Wednesday's training sessions during these months show significant improvements in the players' running performance across different zones. For instance, zone 1 (walking) decreased from 76% in March to 41.8% in September. Meanwhile, zones 2, 3 and 4, which represent faster-running paces, saw corresponding increases. Notably, sprint performance (zone 5) improved from 0.2% in March to 0.9% in September, indicating enhanced speed and stamina.

The team is continuing to analyse data to assess the impact of tracking menstrual cycles on injury rates.

### Branding and Strategic Partnerships

In May 2024, they played their first professional league match at the main Legia Warszawa Stadium, and the club kept the objective of using the facility for the most prominent matches in the future. As part of the club's mission



to break stereotypes surrounding women's sports in Poland, Legia Ladies understands the need to create a distinctive identity that resonates with a new and diverse audience. While rooted in the rich Legia Warszawa DNA, the women's team is building its own community and visual presence, designed to attract fans who may not have previously engaged with women's football.

Legia Ladies has also been strategic in forming partnerships that align with their vision of empowerment and growth. The club's collaboration with TikTok is a forward-thinking move aimed at embracing a younger audience, tapping into a digital-savvy generation that is eager for fresh content and dynamic interactions.

At the same time, a partnership with Klarna is geared towards a more mature audience, with a focus on women's empowerment and creating meaningful connections through lifestyle and leadership initiatives.

As the team continues to climb through the Polish Orlen I Liga Kobiet, the ultimate

goal is to advance to the top-tier Orlen Ekstraliga and eventually compete in the UEFA Women's Champions League. The team's growth strategy is supported by its structure, which includes two senior sides and an U13 team.

In conclusion, Legia Ladies is at the start of an ambitious journey, striving to make a lasting impact on Polish women's football. While still in its early stages, the club is actively pushing forward with bold marketing efforts to solve the challenge of audience reach. Recognising the need to build a larger fan base, Legia Ladies is committed to breaking through traditional barriers and engaging a wider audience with community-centred campaigns.

At the same time, the team's football structure is focused on developing talent from the Masovian and Warsaw areas, creating opportunities for local players to grow and succeed within a professional environment. With the backing of Legia Warszawa and a clear commitment to both player development and expanding visibility, Legia Ladies is laying the groundwork to becoming a significant force in the sport, step by step.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To successfully build and professionalise a girls' youth system, clubs must take a well-rounded approach by focusing on the club structure, athlete care, on-pitch development, infrastructure and player pathway. It is important to acknowledge that each club will be at a different stage of maturity, and these recommendations should provide flexible guidance that can be adapted to fit more specific contexts and resourcing in each case. The roadmap offers both short-term and long-term objectives that clubs can focus on depending on where they are in their own development.





# Recommendations

These recommendations offer a clear blueprint for all clubs to professionalise their girls' football academies, ensuring long-term growth and competitive success plus a comprehensive approach to player development, care and overall club structure.

By following this roadmap, clubs can position themselves as leaders in women's football and create a sustainable future for girls' academies.

	CLUB STRUCTURE	ATHLETE CARE	ON-PITCH DEVELOPMENT	INFRASTRUCTURE	PLAYER PATHWAY
SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define an organisational chart for women's and girls' football, detailing clear roles, responsibilities and reporting lines.</li> <li>Hold regular alignment meetings between departments to enhance collaboration and decision-making.</li> <li>Engage with local communities and organisations to build strong partnerships and raise the club's profile.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide regular medical staff training and ensure access to high-quality medical care for players.</li> <li>Implement mental health support systems, including open-door policies and workshops focused on stress management and preventing burnout.</li> <li>Establish clear medical onboarding and return-to-play protocols for injured players.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce professional transition plans, outlining pathways for youth talent to progress within the club.</li> <li>Strengthen local scouting networks to enhance talent identification and recruitment.</li> <li>Implement foundational data collection systems (GPS tracking, for example) to monitor player performance and prevent injuries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin investing in facilities and specialised equipment, particularly for medical and training purposes.</li> <li>Design and implement a structured inter-department meeting cadence to enhance efficiency, data-sharing and knowledge exchange.</li> <li>Identify opportunities to participate in local and regional tournaments to provide more competitive match opportunities for players.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft professional transition plans that outline steps for youth players to progress from the academy to the senior team.</li> <li>Collaborate with local scouting teams to strengthen recruitment and ensure a steady pipeline of talent.</li> <li>Start identifying competitive local matches and tournaments that align with player development needs.</li> </ul>
LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formalise a comprehensive women's football strategy, defining core values, principles and measurable goals.</li> <li>Consolidate the women's football department by refining roles and responsibilities across all levels.</li> <li>Expand partnerships with national and international stakeholders to enhance the club's influence and reach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand the multidisciplinary medical team and integrate new technologies for injury prevention and rehabilitation.</li> <li>Build relationships with academic and medical institutions to support ongoing research on gender-specific health concerns.</li> <li>Develop mentorship programmes that connect young players with former players for career transition and support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead in talent management by using advanced analytics and data-driven insights to optimise player progression.</li> <li>Expand recruitment networks both nationally and internationally to attract top talent.</li> <li>Innovate player development pathways, creating personalised plans based on performance data and competitive needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in state-of-the-art facilities dedicated to women's football, positioning the club as a leader in infrastructure.</li> <li>Integrate advanced tools for communication, data storage and player performance tracking to improve efficiency.</li> <li>Strengthen the club's participation in national and international tournaments, offering players critical growth opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish the club as a leader in player progression by continuously innovating recruitment and development pathways using data-driven insights.</li> <li>Broaden recruitment efforts, including international partnerships, to ensure diverse and top-tier talent acquisition.</li> <li>Implement structured career transition and off-pitch development programmes to support players in their post-football careers.</li> </ul>

# BECOME A CHANGEMAKER

The future of girls' football depends on building pathways that unlock the full potential of every young player. This report has highlighted the undeniable benefits of a structured talent pathway for girls — from strengthening senior teams with homegrown talent to fostering deeper connections with the local community. Now, the challenge is clear: how can clubs turn these insights into meaningful, lasting change across the women's game?

**A** well-designed girls' talent pathway is more than just a developmental tool; it's a strategic advantage. By nurturing players from within, clubs reduce reliance on external recruitment and create a long-term competitive edge.

But this pathway isn't only about developing athletes – it's about shaping

a club's identity, securing future success and embedding values that resonate with players, staff and fans alike.

To make this vision a reality, clubs need to move beyond planning and take decisive action. This report provides the blueprint, but the real transformation begins when these ideas are put into practice.



## BE A CHANGEMAKER: ACTIONS FOR CLUBS

### Strengthen Internal Girls' Football Pathways

Clubs must establish a clear, structured route for girls to progress from grassroots football to senior teams. This requires investment in youth development, offering high-quality technical and tactical training, and fostering an environment that supports both athletic and personal growth. A strong girls' academy builds a pipeline of talent that strengthens the senior team while being fully aligned with the club's values and style of play.

### Drive Change at League and National Levels

Clubs play an influential role in advocating for systemic improvements in the women's game. Using the insights from this report, clubs can lead discussions with league administrators and national associations, pushing for greater resources and support for girls' football. By collaborating, clubs can drive broader change, ensuring the pathway from youth to professional football is well-supported and sustainable at every stage.

### Engage and Inspire the Community

Building a pathway for girls is also about creating a deeper connection with the local community. Initiatives such as football camps and outreach events can help to attract more girls to the sport, not only as players but as future staff, coaches and fans. By fostering a sense of belonging, clubs can cultivate a positive cycle of participation, where young players become embedded in the club's culture and identity, strengthening the bond between the team and its supporters.

### The Time is Now

The benefits of developing a girls' talent pathway are clear – competitive success, stronger community ties, and increased diversity within the sport. But to realise these benefits, action is needed.

The moment for clubs to step up is now. Be A Changemaker by taking what you learn from this report, sparking conversations within your club, and leading efforts to elevate girls' football. The opportunity to make a lasting impact on the future of the sport is within reach. Take action now to become part of the movement shaping the next generation of girls' football.



# APPENDICES

## CLUB STRUCTURE

### Strategy

#### 1. Women's and Girls' Football Strategy Definition

- ▶ Does the girls' youth system have a clearly defined football strategy?
- ▶ Has the club developed a written strategic plan for the girls' youth system, outlining specific goals and strategic actions?
- ▶ Does the club have a short-term and/or a long-term strategic plan?
- ▶ What are the priority actions in your strategic plan for developing the girls' youth system?

#### 2. Club and Brand Identity

- ▶ Is the women's football identity (eg in terms of core values, vision etc.) defined and recognised within the broader club structure?
- ▶ Are the core values aligned with the whole club identity, or are there different principles?

#### 3. Strategy Implementation

- ▶ Does the strategy reflect the operational activities the club is taking into place?
- ▶ Is the strategic plan shared across all the club's departments?
- ▶ Are KPIs defined at the club level or at the department level?
- ▶ Do the KPIs reflect the strategic plan?

#### 4. Club's Partnership and Collaborations

- ▶ Are partnerships established with other clubs or organisations within women's and girls' football?
- ▶ What is the purpose of the partnerships that have been formed?
- ▶ What is the club's level of local community engagement?
- ▶ Does your club partner with schools to increase girls' participation and talent identification?

### Operating Model

#### 1. Women's and Girls' Football Organisational Chart

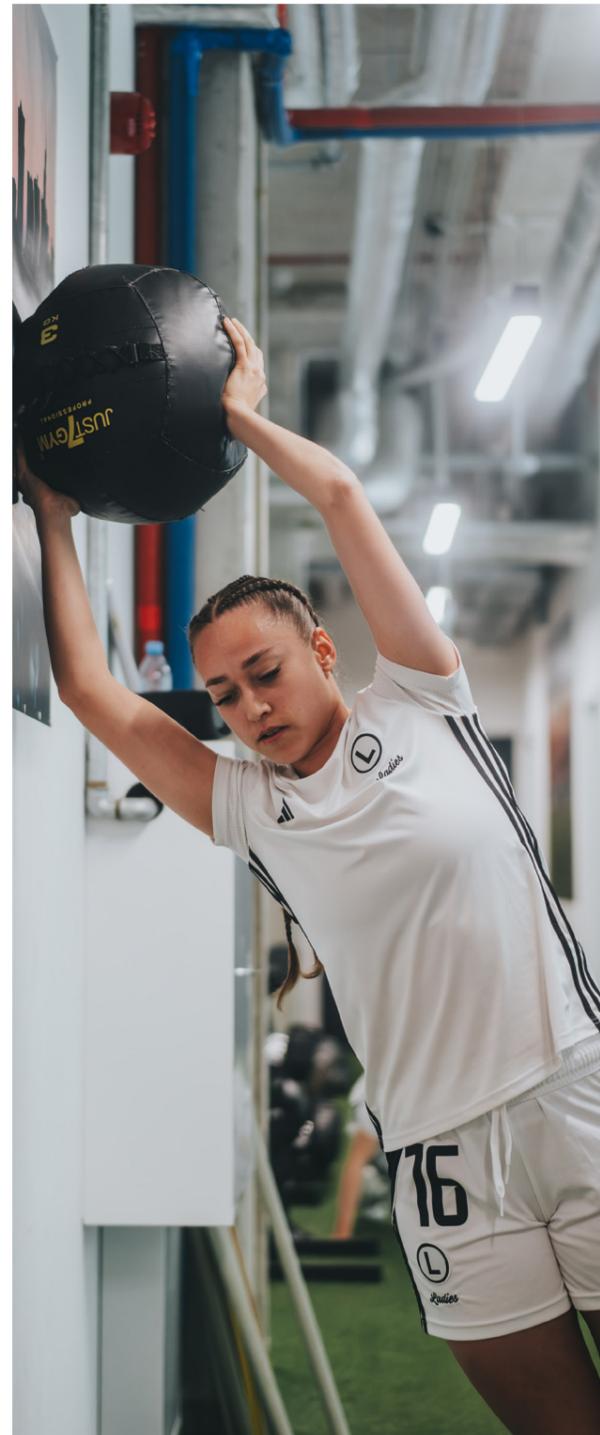
- ▶ Do the women's and girls' football departments have a clearly defined organisational chart?
- ▶ Are roles and responsibilities clearly defined and communicated?
- ▶ Where does the women's football department sit in the broader club structure?
- ▶ Which teams are currently represented in your girls' youth system, and how many players are registered for each team?

#### 2. Club Buy-In and Organisational Structure

- ▶ Is the women's football department fully integrated (in terms of alignment between departments, reporting lines etc) with the entire club's organisational structure?
- ▶ Is the club committed to supporting and investing in women's football and in the development of a youth system for girls?
- ▶ Is the level of resources allocated and dedicated to women's football (eg staffing, departments etc) appropriate and in line with the strategic goals?

#### 3. Financial Budgeting

- ▶ Is there a strategy for the allocation of women's and girls' football budgets?
- ▶ Is the budget allocated to women's football independent or linked to men's team performance (where applicable)?
- ▶ Is the financial budgeting plan in line with the expectations and strategic goals of the club?
- ▶ Is there a possibility for the club to receive funding or subsidies from external organisations to support the growth of the girls' youth system?



## ATHLETE CARE

### Medical

#### 1. Injury Assessment and Diagnosis

- ▶ Have we established clear injury assessment protocols? And are those thorough and consistently applied?
- ▶ How quickly are injuries diagnosed and treated?

#### 2. Medical Team and Expertise

- ▶ Do we have a diverse and specialised medical team to cover all aspects of athlete health?
- ▶ Are there any gaps in expertise that need addressing?
- ▶ Do we have internal dedicated staff or third parties?
- ▶ How do we ensure ongoing training and development for our medical staff?
- ▶ Are our staff equipped with the latest knowledge and skills, especially in girls' football and topics such as the menstrual cycle?
- ▶ Do we have a strategy in place for expanding the medical staff (incl. tools, budget and resources)?

#### 3. Medical Equipment and Facilities

- ▶ Is our medical equipment up-to-date and sufficient for current needs?
- ▶ Are our facilities well-equipped and maintained?
- ▶ How do we finance our medical equipment and facilities?

#### 4. Rehabilitation Programmes

- ▶ Are our rehabilitation programmes comprehensive and effective?
- ▶ How do we measure and improve the success rates of these programmes?
- ▶ Are these programmes specialised within age groups?

#### 5. Health Monitoring and Data Management

- ▶ How frequently do we monitor player health and conduct follow-ups?
- ▶ Are our monitoring systems effective and secure?
- ▶ Are our medical records and data management systems efficient/secure?

- ▶ How is this data used to improve care and decision-making?

#### 6. Partnerships and Innovation

- ▶ Do we have strong partnerships with medical institutions and experts?
- ▶ How do these collaborations benefit our athlete care?
- ▶ Are we using advanced technologies and innovative practices in our medical care?
- ▶ How do we stay updated with the latest advancements?
- ▶ Do we have opportunities for volunteers/interns?

### Care and Wellbeing

#### 1. Player Support Systems

- ▶ Do we have support systems in place for player wellbeing?
- ▶ How do we address mental health, stress management and personal issues?
- ▶ How well do we integrate support from family, friends and other external resources?
- ▶ Are we fostering a strong support network for players?

#### 2. Health and Wellness Programmes

- ▶ Are our health and wellness programmes inclusive and tailored to individual needs?
- ▶ How effective are these programmes in promoting overall wellbeing?

#### 3. Nutrition

- ▶ Do we provide adequate nutrition and lifestyle guidance to our players?
- ▶ How do we monitor and support players' dietary and lifestyle choices?

#### 4. Dual Career Balance

- ▶ How do we support players in maintaining a healthy work-life balance?
- ▶ Are there initiatives in place to help players manage their personal and professional lives?
- ▶ Can we build relationships with schools, so they understand club routines and planning?

#### 5. Feedback and Communication

- ▶ How do we gather and respond to feedback from players regarding their care and wellbeing? And do we have authorisation from parents to gather this data?
- ▶ Are our communication channels open and effective for addressing player concerns?
- ▶ How satisfied are players with the care and wellbeing services provided? Do they feel safe and comfortable, and benefit from our care?
- ▶ What metrics do we use to measure and improve player satisfaction?
- ▶ How do we assess the impact of our care and wellbeing programmes on player performance and overall team success?
- ▶ What improvements can be made based on these assessments?
- ▶ Are we understanding and are staff educated on how to deal with puberty and its challenges?

#### 6. Educational Resources and Prevention

- ▶ Are we providing educational resources and workshops on health and wellbeing?
- ▶ How do these resources contribute to players' overall wellness?
- ▶ Do we have proactive measures in place to prevent burnout and injury?
- ▶ How are we educating players about maintaining their health and wellbeing?
- ▶ Do we provide education and workshops for girls on things such as finances, intrinsic drive and motivation, taking responsibility, personal hygiene, bullying etc?

# APPENDICES

## ON-PITCH DEVELOPMENT

### Coaching

#### 1. Training Programmes and Methodology

- ▶ Are our training programmes aligned with our overall football philosophy and playing style?
- ▶ How well do we tailor training programmes to meet the individual needs of players at different stages of development?
- ▶ Are we incorporating the latest coaching methods and performance insights into our training sessions?

#### 2. Coaching Development and Support

- ▶ Do our coaches have access to ongoing professional development and education opportunities?
- ▶ How well are we supporting coaches in delivering a consistent and aligned coaching philosophy?
- ▶ Are there opportunities for coaches to share knowledge across different teams and age groups?

#### 3. Technical Skills Development

- ▶ Are players receiving individualised training to improve technical skills?
- ▶ How do we ensure that technical training progresses alongside tactical and physical development?
- ▶ Do we provide additional training resources or one-on-one coaching for players who require extra support?

#### 4. Tactical Development

- ▶ Are we providing opportunities for players to understand and develop their tactical awareness?
- ▶ How do we integrate match analysis and tactical reviews into regular training sessions?

#### 5. Mental Performance and Resilience

- ▶ Do we include mental performance training as part of our player development programmes?
- ▶ How do we support players in

developing mental resilience, focus and confidence on the pitch?

- ▶ Are we providing resources to help players manage the mental pressures of competition and performance expectations?
- #### 6. Transition to Senior Team
- ▶ How well are we preparing players for the transition from youth to senior football?
  - ▶ What processes do we have in place to ensure smooth transitions to the first team, both on and off the pitch?
  - ▶ Are there opportunities for youth players to train with or learn from senior players as part of their progression?

### Performance

#### 1. Player Performance Monitoring

- ▶ Are we tracking key performance metrics consistently across all age groups?
- ▶ How effectively do we use data from GPS, match analysis and physical assessments to optimise training?
- ▶ How do we ensure that performance tracking leads to actionable insights for player development?
- ▶ Are we using individualised data to adjust training loads and prevent overtraining or injury?

#### 2. Physical Conditioning and Fitness

- ▶ How are we integrating strength and conditioning (S&C) programmes into the overall development plan?
- ▶ Do we have a comprehensive approach to balancing physical conditioning with recovery to avoid injury?
- ▶ Are fitness programmes tailored to the physical development needs of each age group and individual players?

#### 3. Performance Data and Analytics

- ▶ How are we leveraging data analytics (eg GPS tracking, match performance data) to inform player development?

- ▶ Are we consistently analysing and acting on player performance data to individualise training plans?

#### 4. Recovery and Injury Prevention

- ▶ Do we have a clearly defined approach to player recovery and injury prevention?
- ▶ How are recovery programmes tailored to meet the individual needs of players?
- ▶ How effectively are we using recovery tools and technology to optimise player recovery?

#### 5. Nutrition and Performance

- ▶ Are our nutrition programmes aligned with the physical demands of player development and performance?
- ▶ How do we tailor nutrition plans for different age groups and physical needs?
- ▶ Are players educated on how nutrition impacts their performance and recovery?

#### 6. Collaboration between Medical and Performance Teams

- ▶ How well are the medical and performance teams collaborating to ensure player health and development?
- ▶ Are we integrating medical assessments into performance plans to better manage player workloads?
- ▶ How do we ensure that medical insights are used to inform and adapt training and recovery programmes?
- ▶ How frequently do the medical and performance teams meet to discuss player development?

## INFRASTRUCTURE

### Operations

#### 1. Operations Department Structure

- ▶ Who handles operations (eg players registration, match organisation, team management etc) for the women's and girls' football area?
- ▶ Is the operations department structure aligned with the club's needs in terms of human resources allocated and workload?
- ▶ Are roles and responsibilities clearly defined within the department?

#### 2. Communication and Data Archive Processes

- ▶ Does the club use any tools to facilitate communication processes or storage of players' personal data?
- ▶ Who is responsible for funnel communication across staff, club and families/players?

#### 3. Kit Management

- ▶ Does the club provide training kit and or leisure wear for girls' youth system players?
- ▶ Who oversees kit management?
- ▶ How often is the kit changed (eg every year, every two years)?

#### 4. Transportation System

- ▶ Are the training facilities located close to public transportation?
- ▶ Is transportation assistance offered to girls' youth players for training and/or match days?
- ▶ Is transportation offered to families for training and/or matches?

### Facilities

#### 1. Training and Match Facilities

- ▶ Are facilities offered to girls adequate for their development?
- ▶ What is the staff and players' level of satisfaction regarding training facilities (eg pitch quality, dressing rooms etc)?
- ▶ Is sufficient investment being made in improving women's and girls' facilities at the club?
- ▶ Are the girls' youth system training facilities owned by the club?
- ▶ Does the training ground have the capability to host matches?
- ▶ What kind of services are offered at the training facility (eg other sports courts, gyms, restaurants, bars)

#### 2. Proximity and Prioritisation

- ▶ Are girls' players the priority in the venue in which they train and/or play matches?
- ▶ Are girls training in the same facility as the first women's team?

### Competitions and Scheduling

#### 1. Domestic League

- ▶ Are domestic leagues competitive enough for girls' youth system players?
- ▶ What can be done to improve the level of domestic leagues?
- ▶ What is the most appropriate age limit for girls to play in mixed leagues to ensure optimal development?

#### 2. International Tournament

- ▶ What can be done to establish and implement international tournaments more frequently?

#### 3. Friendlies and Camps

- ▶ How are opponents selected for the games?
- ▶ Do friendlies provide more optionality in organising games compared to local competitions?
- ▶ Does the club host pre-season training camps for the girls' youth system teams?



# APPENDICES

## PLAYER PATHWAY

### Recruitment

#### 1. Talent Identification and Scouting

- ▶ Are we leveraging both traditional and modern methods (eg data analytics and video analysis) for scouting talent?
- ▶ How effectively are we balancing qualitative scouting (eyes and ears) with quantitative methods (numbers)?
- ▶ How well do we understand the domestic and international talent landscapes, and are we adequately covering all relevant markets?
- ▶ Do we have a clear and updated positional profile for every position on the team to guide our recruitment efforts?
- ▶ How are we using technology to enhance our scouting and talent identification processes?
- ▶ Are we maximising the use of video analysis, data platforms and other digital tools to get a holistic view of potential recruits?

#### 2. Network and Relationships

- ▶ How strong are our relationships with local clubs, academies and regional/national football associations?
- ▶ Are we regularly engaging with key talent sources, such as agents, scouts, and other clubs, to ensure a strong pipeline?
- ▶ What is our approach to international scouting? Are we strategically targeting emerging markets?
- ▶ Do we have a network of other (commercial) academies in place?

#### 3. Talent Pipeline Development

- ▶ Are we using a centralised platform to track and manage scouting information across different regions?
- ▶ How integrated is our recruitment system with our youth academy and player development programmes?
- ▶ Are we tracking talent from a young

age and providing clear pathways to the first team?

#### 4. Alignment with Club Vision

- ▶ How well does our recruitment align with the club's cultural values, and are we attracting players who fit both on and off the pitch?
- ▶ How well do our recruitment and professional transition strategies align with the club's long-term vision and goals?
- ▶ Are we continuously innovating and adapting our processes to stay ahead of industry trends and challenges?
- ▶ Who is involved in the decision-making process for recruiting a player?

### Professional Transition

#### 1. Pathway to Women's Senior Team

- ▶ How effective are our current processes for transitioning academy players to the senior team?
- ▶ What percentage of our first-team squad is made up of club-trained players, and is that percentage increasing or decreasing?
- ▶ Are we identifying the right moments for promoting players to the senior team, and how well are we preparing them for this transition?
- ▶ What staff are involved in the process of player promotion to the first team?

#### 2. Support for Transitions to Other Clubs

- ▶ What systems do we have in place to support players transitioning to other clubs, and are these processes seamless and mutually beneficial?
- ▶ Are we nurturing relationships with other clubs to facilitate smooth transitions and career progression for our players?
- ▶ How do we track the success of players who leave the club, and are

we maintaining strong connections with them?

- ▶ Do we have a loan programme in place to ensure players get the opportunity to develop at different clubs?

#### 3. Off-Pitch Career Development

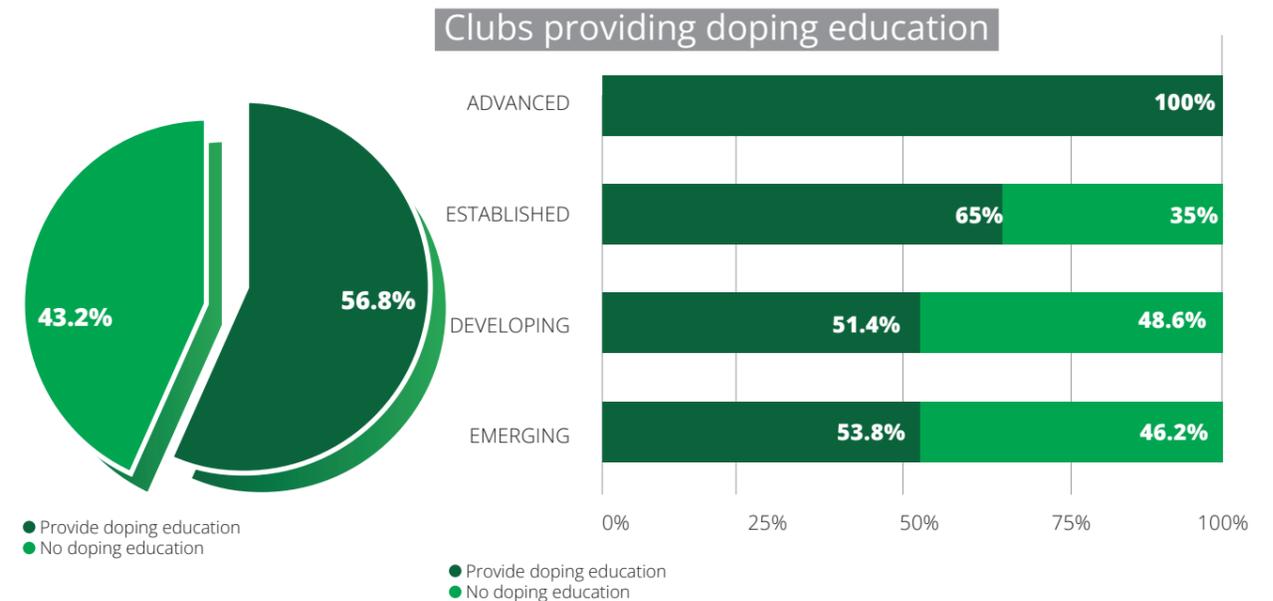
- ▶ What programmes do we offer to support players in their off-pitch career development?
- ▶ How well are we preparing players for life beyond their playing career, ensuring they are equipped with skills and opportunities to succeed off the pitch?
- ▶ Are we offering personalised career advice and mentorship to players nearing the end of their football careers? With a curriculum that is age group specific to best support the players' needs?
- ▶ Do we educate players and staff on personal development topics such as body confidence and eating behaviours?

#### 4. Player Wellbeing and Measuring Success

- ▶ Do we provide comprehensive support for player wellbeing (physical, mental and emotional) during key transition phases in their careers?
- ▶ How are we fostering an environment that encourages long-term success and retention for both senior and academy players?
- ▶ What key performance indicators (KPIs) are we using to measure the success of our professional transition processes?
- ▶ Are we regularly analysing data on the number of academy players promoted, players transitioning to other clubs, and the overall career trajectory of our former players?
- ▶ How well do our professional transition processes align with the broader goals and values of the club?

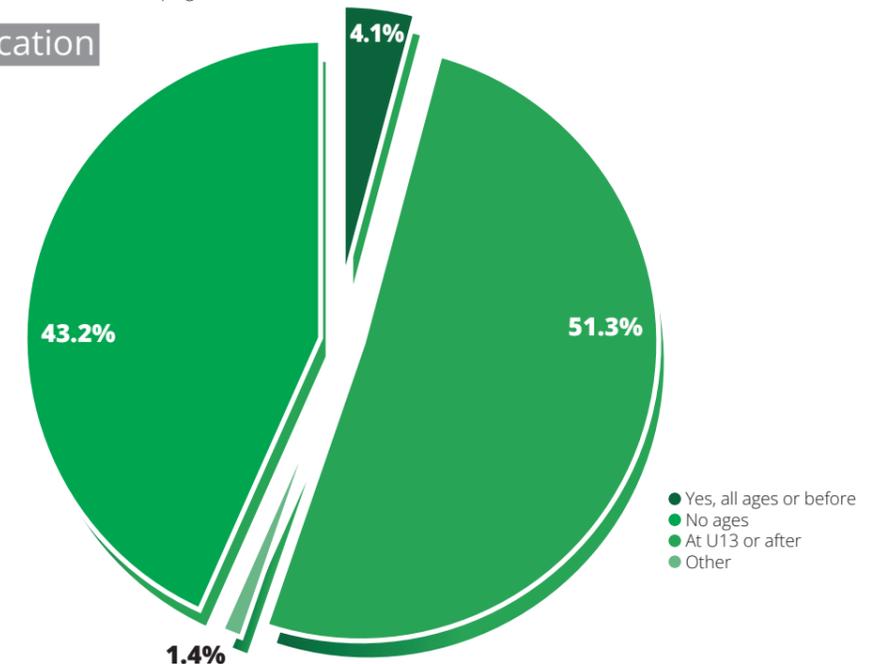
## ATHLETE CARE: DOPING EDUCATION

While doping issues are often associated with professional sports, more than half of surveyed clubs provide doping education within their youth systems. The percentage of clubs offering this type of education is higher among advanced and established clubs. However, more than half of both developing and emerging clubs are also increasingly recognising the importance of addressing doping as a key aspect of athlete care on the path to professionalism. Given the focus on youth systems, doping education, where provided, can be directed to players as well as parents.



### When is doping education provided for girls?

As the data confirms, it is reasonable to understand why doping education is primarily provided to older age groups, typically starting at the U13 level or after. As athletes move closer to the professional level, doping issues become increasingly relevant, making it more important to address these topics in the later stages of youth development.

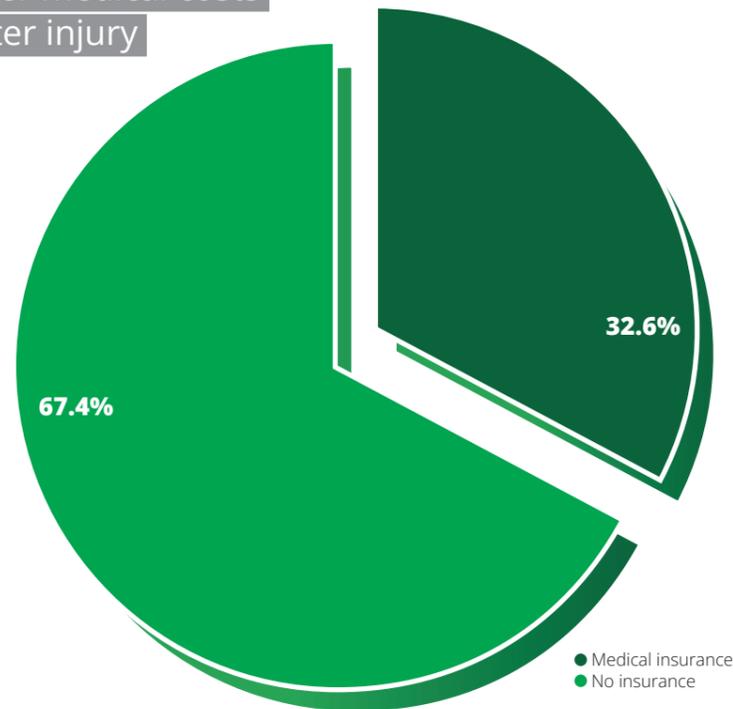


# APPENDICES

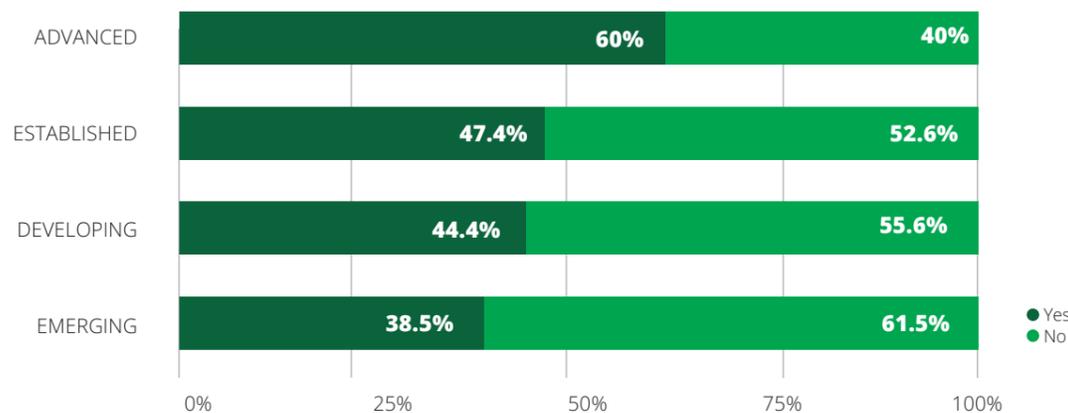
## ATHLETE CARE: MEDICAL INSURANCE

Clubs offering insurance and cover medical costs for girls' youth system players after injury

The majority of surveyed clubs do not offer additional medical coverage for girls or cover injury-related costs beyond what is provided by the mandatory national association insurance. This may be attributed to the sufficient coverage already offered by the mandatory insurance, as well as limited funding to provide individual insurance for all players.



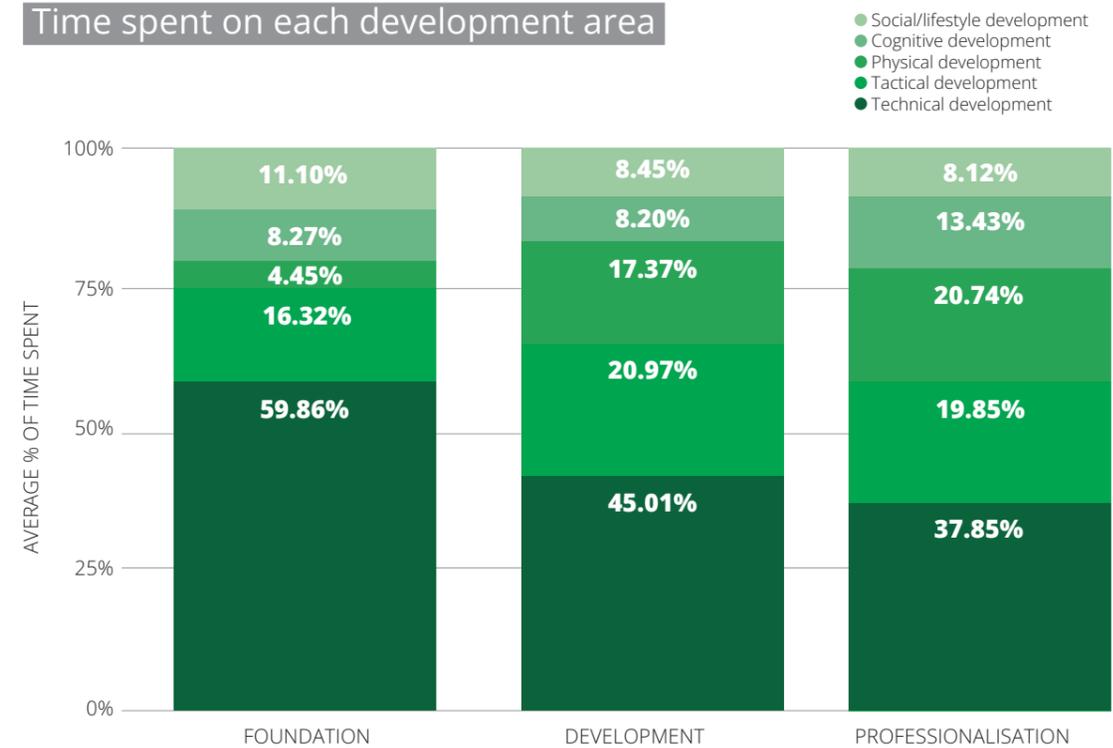
Clubs providing medical insurance



While more mature clubs tend to have a higher percentage of providing medical insurance, the difference among the various categories is not substantial, with percentages ranging between 40% and 60%. This suggests that, regardless of the club's level, providing additional medical insurance may be considered too costly or not a priority.

## ON-PITCH DEVELOPMENT: ROUNDED DEVELOPMENT OF PLAYERS

Time spent on each development area



It is evident that clubs have a shifting focus across the different stages of development within their girls' youth system as they adjust the prioritisation of technical, tactical, physical, cognitive and social/lifestyle development at each age group.

At the foundation phase, technical development is clearly prioritised with nearly 60% of time dedicated to developing fundamental football skills. Tactical, cognitive and physical development receive considerably less time, as this stage primarily focuses on familiarising young players with the game. Social and lifestyle development also holds some importance, given the need for players to understand team dynamics and learn healthy lifestyle habits.

As players move into the development phase, the focus begins to balance out across each of the areas.

Although technical development remains a priority (45%), the emphasis on physical development significantly increases (17.3%) as players begin to work more intensely on strength and conditioning to support their on-pitch development. It is also evident that there is an increased focus on tactical development to just over 20%, reflecting the growing importance of players' understanding of the game.

As players progress to the professionalisation phase, technical development remains important but reduces to just under 38%, as clubs focus on other areas such as physical and cognitive development, to prepare players for the step up to elite-level football. The increase in these two areas reflects the increasing demands of the professional game in terms of both athletic ability and other mental skills, such as decision-making and game intelligence.

# APPENDICES

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