

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL STRATEGY

2020-2024





The introduction of women 's football development strategy is an important landmark in Lithuanian sports history. It marks our commitment to provide girls and women opportunities to achieve their dreams in football. A game that is based on values of unity, inspiration, support and respect.

This strategy seeks to define a full-fledged player path: starting from the first acquaintance with the beautiful game, moving on to playing alongside peers in tournaments and finally by having the opportunity to stay in football after completing active playing career by either working or being a supporter.

Anecdotally, it is said that there would be less problems in the world should men be more interested in what women do, and women would be more interested in football. Our association, as a representative on women's football, aims to have as much female football players as male players. In recent years the growth of the grassroots game has shown that girls can be also active in football. We must ensure that these events and matches would be only the start of their football path.

Even though our football community and UEFA has recognized the improvements in football competitions and events, women's football movement is still lacking awareness among a wider range of people. We should be aiming for every mother to be aware that the aforementioned movement is active and developing, that we have a growing number of players across our leagues. It is important to note that every mother or daughter might be involved in such events.

Youngest players could start with projects such as Futboliukas in kindergartens or LadyGolas in schools. Few years ago, LadyGolas reached a record number of participants and 475. The new development strategy aims to have more players at grassroots level and the coaches would be able to pick the most talented one's for elite development.

We are striving to remove any barriers between girls and boys in football. The ultimate aim is to have both females and males in mind when we are talking about football players. This is reflected in our new club licensing rules and football academy certification guidelines. All biggest football clubs should have both girls and boys in their academies. The new licensing rules include a requirement to have girls in club structures.

This is done in order to improve the preparation of players for national teams and their competitiveness. The selection of players for national teams have been very limited before, but I believe this strategy will help achieve of increasing the number of female players across the country and we will also have better players who could be more competitive internationally.

ARTŪRAS VITALIJUS KRUKIS
Lithuanian Women's Football Association
President



Women's football is one of strategic pillars of the Lithuanian football strategy 2020-2024. This document can be considered as a plan of women's football community. We believe it will be of use in aiming for our targets systematically and achieving our tasks.

Although women's football in general has made a big step forward, a lot of challenges still await us and we must be prepared to face them.

One of the main objectives is to increase the number of girls and women who are involved in the game. While aiming to have more participants in grassroots football events and other women's football projects, we also strive to have a safe, fun environment and provide opportunities for everyone to achieve their goals in football and elsewhere.

Players, coaches, referees, managers, volunteers – these are only some of the areas where women could be involved in football. We want them to be aware of the opportunities, be brave and confident, feel supported and have the ability to choose.

While strengthening the core of our football pyramid we must not forget the top. We are actively supporting elite level clubs with measures such as licensing. These and other important changes shall help in the aim of making the women's game more professional.

It is vital to review and develop our competitions and create a player's path. This would assist us in developing players for youth and senior national women's teams. Teams that Lithuania would be proud of. We also aim to improve the image of women's football. Creating a distinct brand, communications and marketing strategy, attracting ambassadors – these are few of the tools to grow the popularity of the game, attract sponsors and more fans.

Unite, inspire, support and respect – these are the values we have in aiming for our goals. Women's football has a great potential and positive energy. I am confident that with the power and excitement of football, by working together we can achieve a time where football would be accessible, safe, friendly and fun for all women. Starting from a little girl's dream and reaching the largest stadium, where fans would chant the name of LITHUANIA.

VILMA ZURŽĖ
Lithuanian Women's Football Association
General Secretary



INTRODUCTION

Females play football for different reasons at different ages. Motivations across the majority of participants include the desire to have fun, socialize with friends in an active environment, having good experiences, challenges and to build confidence. Our goal is to offer different opportunities to allow females participate in football as much as possible and making sure opportunities to play and stay in football are not limited.

The Lithuanian football federation and Lithuania women's association are committed to the responsibility of creating a strong platform for the long-term stability and development of women's football. At the grassroots level, female participation numbers have increased over the past years, but the main challenge is to keep those participants in football. To achieve that, we must work on everything from recruitment, national leagues, coaching to national teams and image. It is clear that women's football represents an opportunity to grow the game. In this document we have highlighted the importance of focus areas for women's football development. The growth in female participation is a major driver of our strategy plan.

VISION

Every women and girl - inspired by football – enjoying football – fulfilling their dreams - #OUR GAME

MISSION

Through the positive power of football we will strive to ensure that every women and girl in Lithuania who wants to play or support the game can access welcoming, enjoyable and developing opportunities. For the most talented we will deliver an inspirational pathway that brings dreams to life.

VALUES

United - Inspired - Supported - Respected

COMPETITIONS AND CLUBS

LEADERSHIP AND WORKFORCE

PARTICIPATION



VISIBILITY

NATIONAL TEAMS

AREAS OF FOCUS FOR WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

Five strategic pillars will be the focus for developing women's football in Lithuania. This will provide us the framework of measuring success and implementation of projects and programmes. Subdivided areas with key action plans will help to track and evaluate women's football development as we seek to bring the women's game to the next level.



COMPETITIONS AND CLUBS

KEY ISSUES

The aim of women's national competitions is to ensure players' progression. Although current situation makes us aware of the factors which slow down development of women's football.

Low number of participants (teams and players)

In the 2019 season of the Women's A league (top division) there were 5 teams and the Women's 1st league (second division) consisted of 10 teams. Low numbers of girls playing football in some regions leads to formation of joint teams and there is too much workload for talented young players as they represent teams in multiple championships. There is no bottom-up transition.

Low competitive balance

There is a big difference of ability between the teams, which leads to one team domination and big winning margins. Problems include no club development strategy, lack of professionalism, slow growth of the teams, no licensing (supervision) system.

Lack of interest in women's and girls' competitions

Due to insufficient popularity women's games have a very low attendance and low fan experience. There are no separate sponsors for women's and girl's competitions, low media attention, no strategy for marketing and communication.

Retention of female players

There is a considerably high tendency of players' drop-off after graduating from school or universities/colleges. A clear player pathway is missing, there are few opportunities and inadequate motivation to stay in football.

GOAL 1

#DEVELOP COMPETITIONS AND PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL TALENTED WOMEN AND GIRLS TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

We must provide the best ways for players to develop as elite athletes by improving national competitions and creating an appropriate pathway for women's and girls in all age groups. We will review our underage competitions to help the development of young players.

OBJECTIVE - Raise the level of women's and girls' competitions

ACTION - Create a marketing and communication strategy (which includes broadcasting, new logo, actions to increase attendance of the female game). Encourage and motivate women's clubs to participate in social events and activities, organize pre-match activities to raise fan experience. Review regulations of competitions. Attract a sponsor for Women's A league (Top division).

OBJECTIVE - Encourage and support to raise professionalism

ACTION - Create a licensing system for women's top division teams and amend LFF club licensing requirements to stipulate that all men clubs should develop women and girls' teams (all A league clubs should have a women's team by 2020, all 1st league clubs to have a women's team by 2021, all 2nd league clubs to have a women's team by 2024). Seek for stability in women's and girls' teams with qualified coaches. Create a motivational promotion system for participating teams. Strive to build strong football centers in major cities. Encourage and support the formation of new women and girls' clubs.

OBJECTIVE - Review leagues structure

ACTION - Create a new competition structure. Establish more elite competitions to help identify players at a younger age, since youth competitions are important in player development at each level. Aim for clear distinction between grassroots and elite level and ensure the transition from one team to another. Create regional competitions, player pathway to keep them in football and strive for more opportunities of girls playing with boys (encourage mixed teams such as those in grassroots football projects aimed at kindergartens (Futboliukas) and schools (Pradinukų lyga, Golas).

NATIONAL TEAMS

KEY ISSUES

Lack of success

In 2019 across all national teams there were only 5 wins out of 28 matches. The winning percentage barely reaches 18%. Players, coaches are reluctant to represent national teams as they don't see high prospects of success or it has a low level of attraction. This creates an endless circle: national teams fail to win as they do not have all the best players and coaches; and vice versa: the best players and coaches do not participate because of constant failures.

Lithuania Women's National team ranking 2019 – 107

All Women's National teams 2019:

Wins – 5 Draws – 6 Loses – 17 TOTAL – 28

No talent identification process

There is no general scouting system to look for diverse and talented players.

No common development system

GOAL 2

DEVELOP AND IMPROVE NATIONAL WOMEN'S TEAMS TO A LEVEL THAT LITHUANIANS CAN BE PROUD OF

Our aim is to improve all age groups of national teams by supporting them in the stage of progression. We want to develop the confidence of our female players to play at international level and embed a playing strategy that is common to all teams, and provides a smooth transition to the next national team age group.

OBJECTIVE - Improved performance of women's national teams at international competitions

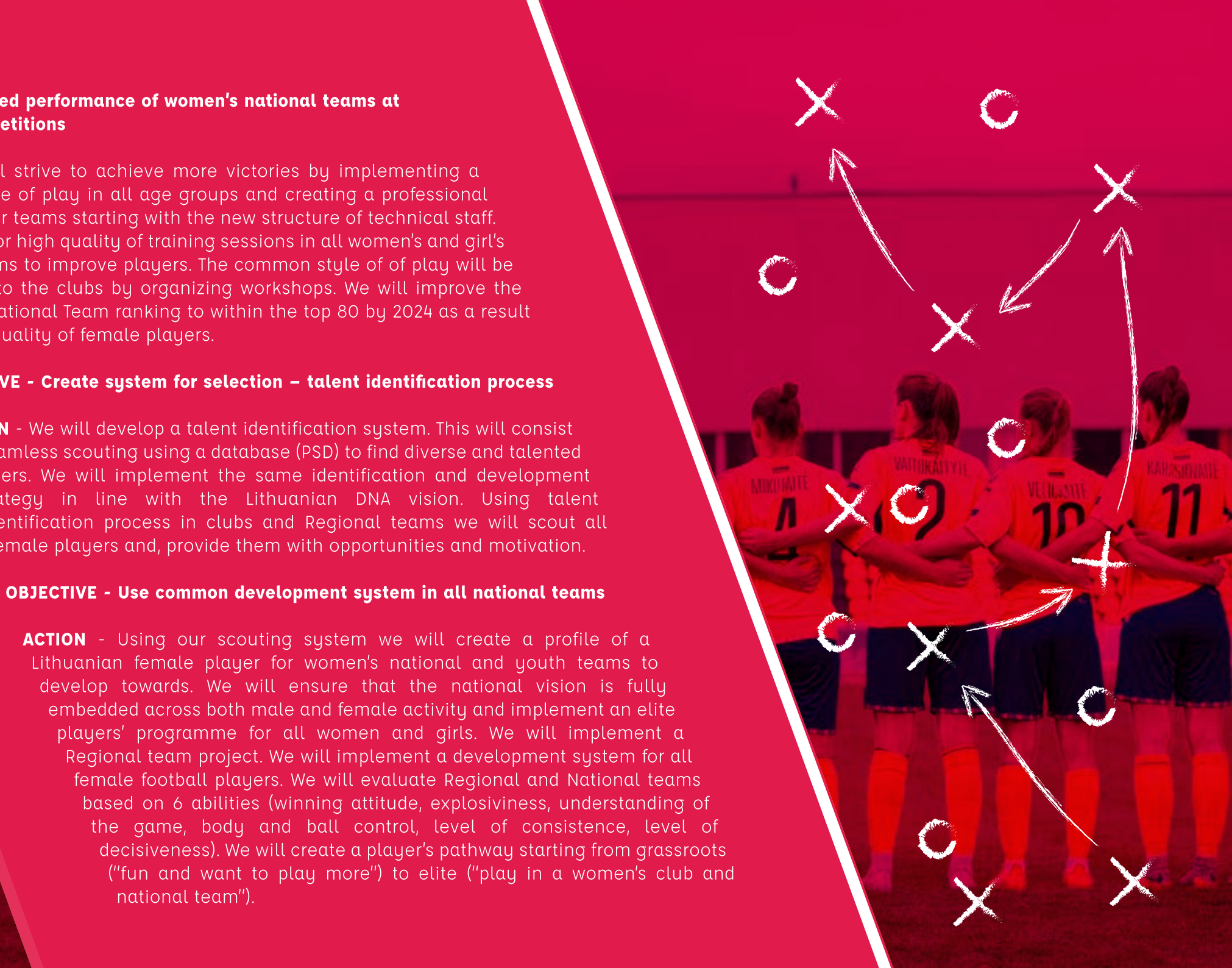
ACTION - We will strive to achieve more victories by implementing a common of style of play in all age groups and creating a professional environment for teams starting with the new structure of technical staff. We will seek for high quality of training sessions in all women's and girl's national teams to improve players. The common style of of play will be introduced to the clubs by organizing workshops. We will improve the Women's National Team ranking to within the top 80 by 2024 as a result of better quality of female players.

OBJECTIVE - Create system for selection – talent identification process

ACTION - We will develop a talent identification system. This will consist of seamless scouting using a database (PSD) to find diverse and talented players. We will implement the same identification and development strategy in line with the Lithuanian DNA vision. Using talent identification process in clubs and Regional teams we will scout all female players and, provide them with opportunities and motivation.

OBJECTIVE - Use common development system in all national teams

ACTION - Using our scouting system we will create a profile of a Lithuanian female player for women's national and youth teams to develop towards. We will ensure that the national vision is fully embedded across both male and female activity and implement an elite players' programme for all women and girls. We will implement a Regional team project. We will implement a development system for all female football players. We will evaluate Regional and National teams based on 6 abilities (winning attitude, explosiveness, understanding of the game, body and ball control, level of consistence, level of decisiveness). We will create a player's pathway starting from grassroots ("fun and want to play more") to elite ("play in a women's club and national team").



PARTICIPATION

KEY ISSUES

Low number of women and girls playing football and weak links between grassroots and clubs

Grassroots football projects have been successful in introducing a large number of new players to the game, but we have struggled to provide them with regular training and pathway to the clubs. It is crucial to increase the number of registered female players by ensuring that more women and girls have increased access to football in all regions. In addition, it is vital to have girls involved in the game earlier and for women stay in it longer.

Low retention of football players due to drop outs after school / university graduation

A big drop off of players happen at ages 18-19 after school graduation and 23-25 after university/college graduation. A lot of girls also are playing in schools and at grassroots level, however they are not then progressing into clubs and senior competitions. Retention of players at these age periods is very crucial .

Lack of proper infrastructure and access to existing infrastructure

There are issues with football infrastructure such as suitable changing facilities or access to facilities. This is an obstacle for female participation.

Lack of initiatives from regional associations

Football is not part in school curriculum



GOAL 3

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF REGISTERED WOMEN AND GIRLS

The aim is to increase the number of registered women and girls by attracting as much as possible participants to grassroots and women related projects, while ensuring a safe, fun and controlled environment with an opportunity to seek dreams in football.

OBJECTIVE - Ensure that all regions are committed to provide conditions for playing

ACTION - Strong infrastructure is a key element in the development of women's football. We must seek cooperation with public authorities such as ministries and municipalities, create links between schools, universities/colleges to improve access to facilities. All regions of Lithuania have to be committed to provide the necessary conditions to develop women's football. We will plan and liaise with stakeholders to seek for equitable and fair access to facilities for women's teams.

OBJECTIVE - Increase the number of registered female players

ACTION - Currently there are 8646 registered female players, making up 25% of total football players in Lithuania. The target is to increase the number of registered female players to 12 500 until 2024 by collaborating with clubs, leagues and other stakeholders. Our aim is to expand competitions at grassroots level. To encourage new participants, a primary school league will be used to attract players from different regions. We will also strive to expand grassroots festivals each year and develop new programmes to register players.

AGE	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TARGET
0-18 years old	7900	8650	9700	10800	11550	11550
18-65 years old	650	750	800	900	950	950
TOTAL	8550	9400	10500	11700	12500	12500

OBJECTIVE - Higher retention of female players and other participants

ACTION - Grassroots programmes are vital to engage and retain women and girls in football as they provide an opportunity to play in a fun and safe environment. Those programmes target first-time players and encourage girls to try football before committing. One of the challenges is retention of female players and other participants in the game. We should continue to establish opportunities to motivate and ensure them to stay in football. We will include universities/colleges in to football activities in cooperation with Lithuanian student's football association. We will raise the number of coordinators and volunteers in football festivals and organize more grassroots education programmes. We will create and provide pathway to the clubs, attract participants through education, programmes, competitions and other activities. We will provide education by covering cost of educational tools at the start: such as local D licence and grassroots leader's certificate.

LEADERSHIP AND WORKFORCE

KEY ISSUES

Low number of qualified female coaches, referees and managers working in football

There are a low number of female coaches and referees in comparison to men's. It is important for women to be included into learning process from the men's game as well as gaining support from male counterparts. A strong network of male and female coaches, referees, managers will bring more benefits to all levels of women's and girls' football. Updating football knowledge is crucial for development of the women's game.

Lack of seminars dedicated to women's football

Although there are many similarities in working with females and males regardless of gender or age group, it is always important to understand what motivates females and the best way for them to learn. When working in women's football there are some key things to consider – female players want to learn; they need positive reinforcement to build confidence; social cohesion is important.

Coaches UEFA Pro

Male 36

Female 0

Referees

Male 106

Female 11

Coaches UEFA A

Male 128

Female 1

Coaches UEFA B

Male 242

Female 17

Coaches Local C

Male 205

Female 55

2019

We must commit to ensure additional professional development for all female coaches, managers, referees by delivering education and support provided within the LFF to support the development and enhance positive football experiences for young players.

GOAL 4

EMPOWER AND ENSURE LIFELONG PARTICIPATION IN FOOTBALL

In order to develop women's football, it is important to empower women to be represented in the game and keep them in football. To support the growth and sustainability, development of female coaches, managers, referees and CEO's is necessary.

OBJECTIVE - Raise number of female coaches dedicated to women's football

ACTION - Effect on women's football development will be more beneficial with a higher number of female coaches dedicated to the women's game, thus allowing the coaches to concentrate solely on women's football and inspire women and girls to play. We will increase the number of women and girls taking coaching courses by a minimum of 15. We will provide coaching career development advice and guidance to all Lithuanian women's national teams and women's clubs players during national teams training camps with information about opportunities on how to become a coach. We will offer licensed courses with funding opportunities for women's national team players and coaches working in the elite level. We will offer specific women's football education opportunities for coaches (UEFA Education Courses, UEFA Study Groups).

OBJECTIVE - Raise number of female referees

ACTION - The quality of competitions and fair play are important elements in the acceptance and supporting the game. We will increase the number of women and girls taking refereeing course. We will provide referee career development advice and guidance to all Lithuanian women's national team players during national teams training camps with information about opportunities on how to become a referee. In co-operation with Lithuanian football referees association we will organize refereeing seminars dedicated to women's and girls' national team players.

OBJECTIVE - Increase number of seminars and courses about women's football as a subject

ACTION - We will create mentoring opportunities to improve coaches working with female teams. We will give support through training and guidance for those willing to be involved across all roles (coaching, refereeing, managing). We will collaborate with UEFA and other football associations on good practices, conduct joint internal seminars between association and LFF staff.

OBJECTIVE - Raise number of managers that are working in women's football

ACTION - Managers contribute to the social and economic value of football. Emotional attachment to football motivates people to keep going forward and assist in developing culture of service. It is important to encourage women to be more pro-active in the football operations. We will provide football career development advice and guidance to all Lithuanian women's national team players. We will provide internships in Lithuanian football federation and Lithuania women's association in collaboration with universities/colleges. We will encourage capable women to apply for top level positions. We will make sure that everyone is aware that prior experience in football (depending on the position) isn't mandatory, rather looking for qualities such as enthusiasm, willingness to learn and help.



VISIBILITY

KEY ISSUES

- Lack of local media attention for women's football
- No general or main sponsors for women's football
- Low attractiveness for participants, spectators or investors due to weak product
- No separate communication and marketing strategy for women's football

Changing the perception and building awareness of women's football in society is one of the challenges that we face today. Our aim is to build a platform to support women's football with provision of consistent, accurate and instant information. Strong media relationships and messages will maximize opportunities for increasing exposure. Attracting promotion and marketing investment will assist the growth and development of the women's game.

GOAL 5

PROMOTE THE WOMEN'S GAME ENSURING ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS INSPIRED BY FOOTBALL FIND IT EASY AND WELCOMING TO GET INVOLVED

We aim to establish promotional activities and campaigns with the correct messages to potential and existing players, coaches, families and audiences in order to grow the opportunity to support and develop the growth of women's football in Lithuania. The women that are involved can be role models and motivate women and girls to start and stay in football.

OBJECTIVE - Create an attractive image of women's football

ACTION - We will create a distinct and separate brand identity for women's football so that the female game can have its own distinctive mark and can be promoted among women's football. We will develop a separate marketing and communication plan for women's football. A consistent plan of marketing activities throughout each year including activities, football events, festivals and campaigns will help to increase visibility and awareness about the women's game as well as participation both off and on the pitch. We will create a logo for Women's A league (top division). We will create dedicated social media pages promoting women's football activities and develop human-interest stories. We will encourage women to be positive role models for one another by sharing their successes outside of sport. We will expose to girls positive, strong female role models by inviting successful women, athletes and community members to be guest speakers or do training sessions. In building supportive environment for female players there are key influencers that can have a positive impact on female playing football: coaches, parents, friends and peers, elite players, teachers, siblings etc.)

OBJECTIVE - Find and engage separate key sponsors dedicated to women's football

ACTION - Women's football in Lithuania has never had its own general or main sponsor. With the growing popularity of women's football, the interest of people and companies, our partnerships with sponsors of girls and women's football can include specific marketing support for both sides to achieve our goal of promoting the women's game in Lithuania. We will create and develop concepts to show women's football as exciting, unpredictable and skillful.

OBJECTIVE - Increase the number of spectators at domestic and international matches

ACTION - Finding how and where to watch women's football in action needs to be easier. Increased attendance at women's and girls' football matches would encourage the growth of football itself in every sense - parents leading their children to football matches can become potential sponsors or volunteers, teachers working with children can introduce them to their favorite sport. Experiences in women's football matches can be positive and contribute to building up a culture of "football for families" in Lithuania. We will increase the number of Women's A league broadcasts every year and monitor the number of spectators. We will broadcast the Women's National team matches. We will create a dedicated social networking campaign for each Women's National team qualification cycle. We will execute promotion programmes with more football events in cooperation with Women's association and Grassroots association (grassroots and elite level). More visible football events will attract more spectators and potential players, coaches, referees, managers and volunteers. The events must be promoted and interact with sponsors. With the right tools we will build strong and cohesive women's football community. We will collaborate with women's clubs to organize pre-match events or other activities.



**EVERY WOMEN AND GIRL
INSPIRED BY FOOTBALL
ENJOYING FOOTBALL
FULFILLING THEIR DREAMS
#OUR GAME**

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 MOTERYSUZFUTBOLA

STADIONO G. 2, LT-02106, VILNIUS

