



EUROPEAN CLUB ASSOCIATION

# WOMEN'S FOOTBALL STRATEGY 2021-23

BE A CHANGE MAKER



ECA 

# BE A CHANGEMAKER STRATEGY

## FOREWORD



**Over the last decade, women's football has experienced an unprecedented period of growth.** This is an achievement the industry as a whole can be most proud of. Though, this is only the first step – a step in the right direction, of course – but only a first step all the same. There is still so much more work to be done to realise the game's full potential.

The sustainability of the modern football club is built on three fundamental pillars: the men's team, the women's team, and the academy. We have recently seen many men's clubs, including some of the traditional heavyweights in Europe, investing in the women's game and launching and developing successful teams. Whilst I have been incredibly encouraged by this progress, it is now the responsibility of all of us, as leading European clubs, to ensure we treat each of these three pillars equally. This is something our supporters and society expect and deserve.

But the reality is that the growth of women's football can only be achieved through taking creative action. This responsibility does not lie with just one organisation alone, but will require the whole women's football community and its stakeholders to play their part. We must assemble a regulatory framework, specific to women's football, improve competitions and nurture the next generation of talented female players.

I have been in the game long enough to fully understand the inequalities that exist and my ability to do something about it. I'm therefore proud as the chair of ECA's Women's Football Committee to support the implementation of ECA's bold new initiatives. Through ECA's 'Be a Changemaker' strategy, I am confident that women's club football in Europe can surpass all of our expectations.

**JEAN-MICHEL AULAS**

PRESIDENT, OLYMPIQUE LYONNAIS  
EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER, ECA  
CHAIR OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL COMMITTEE, ECA



ECA  
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CHANGEMAKER

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**At ECA, women's football is not just a box-ticking exercise or an 'any other business' item. It's a priority.** The full weight of the organisation and our member clubs are behind our ambitious plans to work towards cementing Europe's status as the powerhouse of women's club football.

To achieve lasting positive change that will truly transform the levels of professionalisation, we must elevate multiple areas of the women's game simultaneously. A tall order, you might say.

But through ECA's first ever women's football strategy, 'Be a Changemaker', we will chip away at the age-old argument 'it wouldn't happen in the men's game' and break free from the shackles that have held women's football back for so long.

From unleashing the potential of European club competitions, tackling critical, yet neglected areas of medical research and optimising high-performance youth player pathways, ECA will help clubs drive a better tomorrow for women's football.

The 'competitive on the pitch, collaborative off it' ethos that is synonymous with women's football is one of the reasons I've dedicated more than a decade to the game.

But you can't delegate change, you have to lead it, and at ECA, along with our member clubs, that's exactly what we intend to do.

## **CLAIRE BLOOMFIELD**

HEAD OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL, ECA



# The state of play

Coronavirus has left football in a precarious position, but there will be deeper and more far-reaching consequences for the women's game.

The pandemic has highlighted the long-standing disparity between men's and women's football, with some industry experts going as far as suggesting the impact of Covid-19 could set the women's game back a decade or more.

### **Not on our watch.**

The women's game offers a new space in which to innovate and although the pandemic has indeed exposed the fragilities of the women's football ecosystem, ECA is uniquely placed to provide solutions to some of the industry's toughest challenges.

Of course, finding solutions in these unusually turbulent times will not come easily, but doing nothing will cost us more.

ECA and its member clubs have already reached several significant milestones in the women's game in recent years, most notably in influencing the successful reform of the UEFA Women's Champions League from 2021/22 and the inclusion of a centralised commercial model. But for ECA, this is only the beginning.

Women's football is in a unique position to take learnings from men's football and do things differently. Rather than simply mimicking what has come before, the women's game has an opportunity to set the examples that the rest of sport can follow.

ECA is the sole independent body directly representing football clubs at European level. Since its creation in 2008, ECA, the 'voice of the clubs', has positioned itself as an important and respected stakeholder in the international football landscape.

ECA is the only organisation recognised by FIFA and UEFA as representing European clubs and the only body through which clubs are represented in their decision-making organs. Membership comprises of 246 clubs from all 55 UEFA National Associations, with an Executive Board representing the full

spectrum. ECA is also a key convenor and a provider of expertise; delivering research, analysis and a range of member services that aim to help its members grow and thrive as both sporting organisations and businesses.

ECA exists to find positions of compromise and consensus between clubs, develop fair resolutions to their pressing challenges and act as an independent, club-led organisation by placing clubs at the Heart of Football.

# Who do we represent?



# Our vision

## *VISION*

A far-reaching, robust and influential women's club football ecosystem that shows a clear path towards achieving the same level of professionalisation as in the men's game.

## *MISSION*

To drive, innovate and advocate a professional and sustainable future for women's club football whilst protecting its integrity in moments of challenge and change.

## *CORE VALUES*



**Accountability**



**Community**



**Respect**



**Communication**



**Passion**



# Our strategic plan...



Together with the leading women's football clubs across Europe and our stakeholders UEFA, FIFA and FIFPRO, ECA is part of a growing movement committed to making a transformative difference to the women's game. Though, an intention alone is not enough...

ECA's ambitious new women's football strategy, backed by some of the game's most influential leaders, sets out creative action to deliver lasting positive change whereby leading clubs from any and every European nation have an opportunity to be competitive, sustainable and have a clear path to grow.

Since the most effective 'changemakers' are collaborators, facilitators, friends and allies – beyond the 90-minute mark at least – our approach aims to bring together those who share ECA's commitment to advancing women's club football, in an environment that allows winning ideas to emerge.

Finding innovative solutions is no easy task, but Changemakers understand they are in it

for the long haul and use adversity to think big. They challenge each other, as well as the status quo, and inspire and mentor their colleagues to do the same.

ECA's 'Be a Changemaker' strategy has an unshakeable mission and is built on bringing together a diverse community, trusted and transparent relationships, developing valuable resources and co-creating bold solutions that tackle the biggest challenges facing the women's game.



**FFJJ**  
Inspiring creative action to help clubs drive a better tomorrow for women's football



# CHARLIE MARSHALL

CEO, ECA



Full scale **gender equality in football is an ambitious goal** but one we embrace. Clubs have the opportunity to drive this. **They have much more in common with each other** off-the-field than they have rivalries on the pitch, and understand the needs, challenges and solutions better than anyone. **That's why we must work as a collective**, from top to bottom, to be the changemakers needed to enable the women's game to grow sustainably, to thrive and ultimately to prosper.



## STRATEGIC GOAL 1

### Enhance club player pathways to provide a prosperous and sustainable future for the game



**Conduct analysis** across a variety of youth systems throughout Europe considering recruitment, training and infrastructure.



**Provide advanced technical support** through a partnership with ECA's Youth Working Group and Women's Football Committee.



**Produce case studies** and supporting digital content that detail the most successful youth systems for girls.



**Develop best-practice** plans that clubs can adopt, demonstrating various player pathways, including feeder club systems and certificates of excellence.



**Lead the introduction** of a bespoke training reward mechanism and associated regulations for young female players.



STRATEGIC GOAL

2

Accelerate professionalisation, empowering clubs to reach, maintain and exceed improved minimum standards



**Create services** that focus on delivering practical support to clubs.



**Carry out 'health checks'** in order to provide informed guidance on how clubs can improve and prioritise the spread of resources.



**Mobilise FIFA's Professional Women's Football Task Force** to co-create solutions for improved minimum standards.



**Help clubs to understand** the benefits of a professional infrastructure through varied case studies.



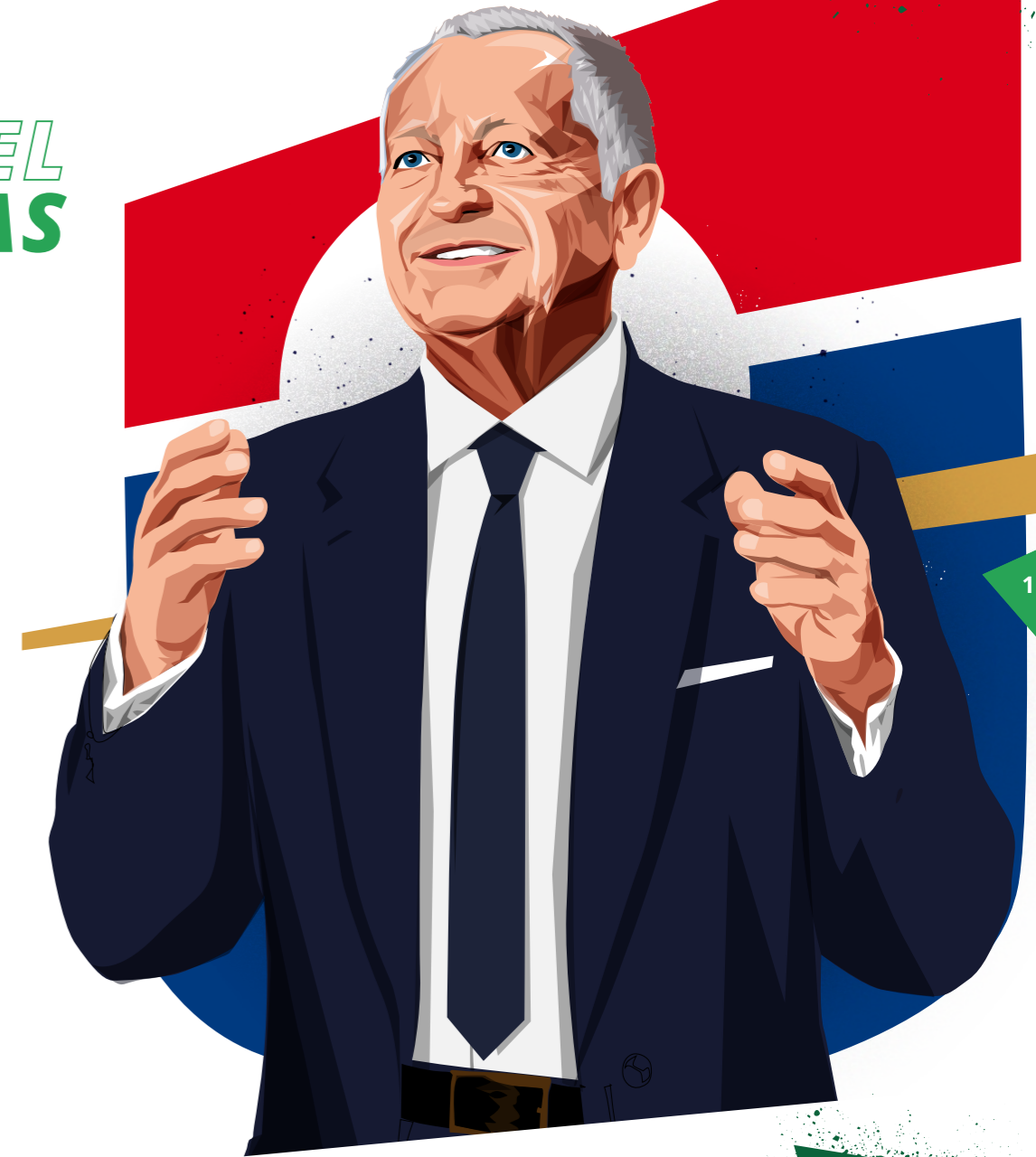
**Work with stakeholders** to further develop the Club Licensing system, plus regulations to guide tournament standards.

JEAN-MICHEL AULAS

PRESIDENT, OLYMPIQUE LYONNAIS  
EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER, ECA  
CHAIR OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL COMMITTEE, ECA



*I'm proud as the chair of ECA's Women's Football Committee to support the implementation of ECA's bold new initiatives. Through ECA's 'Be a Changemaker' strategy, I am confident that women's club football in Europe can surpass all of our expectations.*





# EMMA HAYES

MANAGER, CHELSEA FC WOMEN

“ Our success on the pitch can be helped by winning off the pitch and **ECA’s bold new plans can drive an even higher performance** culture throughout the women’s game. The standards in **elite women’s football should not be any different from the men’s** and this strategy has the potential to start closing that gap. ”

## STRATEGIC GOAL

# 3

### Advance the economic development of women’s football and identify new commercial opportunities



**Negotiate improved UEFA Women’s Champions League** commercial opportunities with the support of a dedicated Working Group.



**Equip clubs with the knowledge** to secure sponsorship deals and maximise club revenue streams through a series of workshops, webinars and club visits.



**Secure additional investment** for women’s football by establishing financial contributions from the men’s European club competitions.



**Work towards a position** whereby ECA is a go-to resource for expert counsel on commercial matters.



**Work closely with UEFA** on the Value of Women’s Football study to deliver a compelling business case for investing in the women’s game.

STRATEGIC GOAL

4

Boost the opportunities for clubs to realise European ambitions through the development of the competition landscape



**Explore the options** for a possible second-tier competition that provides clubs with the opportunity to play more relevant games in Europe.



**Develop an online match organising tool** to facilitate friendly fixtures for non-participating UEFA Women's Champions League clubs to meet European opponents.



**Thoroughly evaluate the possible** introduction of a Club World Cup including providing analysis of ownership, format, access list and commercial models.



**Optimise existing competitions** and create proposals for further development of European club competitions beyond 2025.



**“** The football system is made up of two simple things: *the players on the pitch and those who give them the opportunity to compete at their best.* The women's game is no exception. ECA's new strategy will help clubs and players to work together to achieve our shared dreams. **”**

SARA  
GAMA

CAPTAIN, JUVENTUS FC WOMEN & ITALY



# CLAIRE BLOOMFIELD

HEAD OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL, ECA

**“** We are part of *a growing movement committed to making a transformative difference* to the women's game. But you can't delegate change, *you have to lead* it, and at ECA, along with our member clubs, *that's exactly what we intend to do.* **”**



STRATEGIC GOAL

# 5

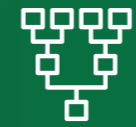
## Facilitate the successful creation of new women's football clubs across Europe



**Introduce a multi-directional scheme** which offers guidance to clubs launching a women's team and those still in the early years of their project.



**Implement a 'care package'** which supports clubs teetering on the verge of existence.



**Create a directory of clubs** willing to exchange their experiences in launching a women's team and facilitate club visits.



**Support the integration of women's football** amongst leading European clubs and provide case studies of best practices that demonstrate a clear correlation with on-field success.

STRATEGIC GOAL

# 6

Produce 'first of its kind' research studies that become a reference point for the women's game globally



**Identify priority topics** through ECA's dedicated surveys and Women's Football Committee.



**Create a High-Performance Task Force** with club experts and external research partners to launch timely and in-depth investigations.



**Publish comprehensive reports** analysing findings, plus action plans clubs can implement.



**Host educational workshops** to provide clubs with practical support to benefit from new or recommended best practices.



## HEDVIG LINDAHL

GOALKEEPER, ATLETICO MADRID & SWEDEN



I imagine the day when **everyone has the opportunity to explore how good they can become** at playing football, without being held back by structural reasons. ECA's first women's football strategy aims to **challenge and clear the roadblocks of our time** and drive towards the new reality many of us picture.



ECA's 'Be a Changemaker' strategy will see the introduction of a new Task Force dedicated to exploring high-performance topics that are specific to the women's game.

The lack of sports science and sports medical research conducted on elite female athletes in football means it is a challenge to develop evidence-informed approaches to training, injury rehabilitation and female specific issues.

With an increasing number of players competing full-time, a shift towards professional leagues, the increased physicality and intensity of the game and greater demands of the international

match calendar, addressing this gap in knowledge is ever-more important.

But clubs are generally under-resourced in this area, so despite being eager to participate in research studies (65%, according to ECA's Women's Football Survey in October 2020), they simply do not have the means to investigate these topics in any great depth.

The Women's High-Performance Task Force will therefore be introduced as the research arm of ECA's women's football specialist groups and will be dedicated to producing timely studies on critical topics such as ACL prevention and the impact of the menstrual cycle on training and performance.

Bringing together club experts from across Europe who work specifically with women's teams, plus external research firms and academics, ECA will lead ground-breaking investigations that aim to become a reference point for the game globally.

# Women's High-Performance Task Force





By achieving the goals set out in the 'Be a Changemaker' strategy, ECA will have turned ambitious plans into lasting positive change and encouraged clubs and stakeholders to commit to supporting a series of creative actions.

But being successful goes beyond simply providing services which clubs would otherwise not have access to, or rolling out professionalisation initiatives that only benefit a select few. Results must also have a far-reaching impact and strengthen Europe's position in the wider women's football landscape.

The collaborative approach adopted from the development to implementation phase of the 'Be a Changemaker' strategy will ensure that

clubs see these achievements as being as much their success as that of ECA's. Described as 'bold', 'forward-thinking' and 'action oriented', ECA will have also gone some way to changing the perceptions of the women's professional game – as well as fostering a new-found solidarity with the men's game.

ECA, in its established role as industry thought leaders, will be able to confidently demonstrate the added value to its members and have credible evidence to back up its claims when talking to stakeholders and the football community. Crucially, ECA will be proud of its ability to better anticipate challenges, embrace creative disruption and protect the integrity of its mission to achieve a sustainable future for women's club football.

The successful delivery will also assure women's football clubs across Europe that they have a trusted and reliable partner in ECA and will see the Administration and its members go into the next four-year cycle with renewed vigour, ambition – and advocates for the women's game.

# What does success look like?



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