

# Module 4. Growing international competitions – Adding value through international women's football events

In this final course of the Women's Football Business certificate, we have focused on the business growth of women's football. In our first module, we looked into women's football broadcasting potential and how televising women's sport can open new avenues to the sport, the fandom and its potential commercial partners. We then looked into the sponsorship element of women's football in more detail, in which we engage with brand associations and how they can help increase the reach of women's football. Following this, we focused on how creating women footballer icons can open the path for women's football future. We therefore focused on building tomorrow's football stars at a time in which we see that women's football and women footballers are taking the front stage of our attention.

In this module, we will finish our discussion on the business growth of women's football by looking into an important driving factor for the growth of women's football worldwide. We will therefore focus on international competitions and how they are growing worldwide.

The importance of international competitions can be understood through many ways, including their increased reach through broadcasting and sponsorship, and the creation of women footballer icons. It can also be understood through the value added to women's football by the emergence and further development of international competitions and the significant positive impacts they have on both on-pitch and off-pitch performance and growth of women's football.

This module therefore captures the growing discussion on how international competitions of women's football can help support the growth of women's football and further assist in its development as a flourishing business, not only in particular regions of the world, but also on an international level.

# Unit 4.1 FIFA's strategy on women's international competitions

As we have been arguing since the very beginning of this Certificate in Women's Football Business, women's football is undeniably growing, and, as such, every aspect of it is expected to be more professionalised in the coming years. One of those aspects, even though one might not think of it originally, is the development of international tournaments.

The importance of international tournaments is highly recognised within the sport industry. In fact, FIFA (2021a), in the latest women's football strategy that they announced, clearly state that in order to grow participation in the sport, enhance the commercial value of the sport and, in fact, build the foundations for a more sophisticated women's football ecosystem and encourage leadership roles for women, they have to start by growing on and off the pitch and showcasing the game by improving women's competitions.

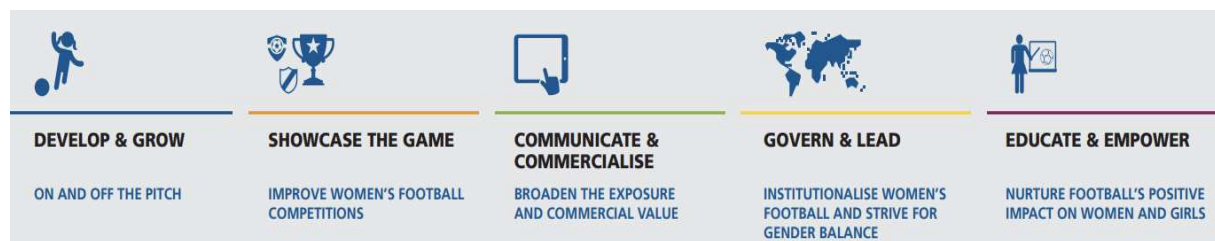
**Figure 1. FIFA's women's football strategy**



Source: FIFA, 2021b, p. 1.

It is worth at this point focusing on the FIFA women's football strategy (2021a), to understand that, apart from the three key objectives (as they are illustrated above), grow participation, enhance commercial value, and build the foundations of women's football, they also detail not only the individuals they expect to be involved in their efforts to materialise them, but also the way in which they will do it, and thus the steps that they will take.

**Figure 2. FIFA's women's football strategy – 5 strategic pillars**



Source: FIFA, 2021b, p. 1.

First, the development and growth on and off the pitch suggests that tailor-made development programmes for regional member associations will be created alongside



global women's football academies. FIFA is suggesting that football should be promoted in schools, and coaches need to be developed and mentored at the same time. Referees also need to be developed to ensure the further growth of the sport. That goal that FIFA (2021a) has set is that, by 2020, all its member associations should have women's football strategies, dedicated particularly to growing the women's side of the sport. They actually argue that, by 2026, they aim to double the number of member associations that have organised youth leagues. They also suggest that they intend to expand football in school programmes, as well as creating elite academies in order for qualified coaches and referees to be developed. This will allow for the access to the game to improve significantly, setting the basis for the future of women's sport.

More importantly, as we argued in this module, they clarify that showcasing the game, and therefore improving women's international competitions, is high on their list of priorities (FIFA, 2021a). They argue that, by building on the existing popularity of the FIFA Women's World Cup, they are going to further develop new FIFA competitions.

The tactics through which their goals will be achieved include a wider competition review that will analyse all existing women's competitions in order to reinvent and revitalise, as well as optimise all sporting and commercial elements. After the review, they will be then able to develop new FIFA women's football competitions.

FIFA (2021a) argue that they intend to introduce new competitions, specifically designed to retain female participation in sport. This will then allow for greater opportunities to be developed for women footballers, in order to play the game they love and continue their careers within it. Some examples offered in their strategy are the FIFA Women's World League, youth development tournaments, the international club competition and the FIFA women's futsal competition.

This development of new FIFA women's football competitions will then naturally lead to strengthening the Women's International Match Calendar (FIFA, 2021a). FIFA is clarifying their intention to work with relevant football stakeholders to ensure that the women's international match calendar is strengthened, and that the regulations are set in place in order for the further professionalisation of women's football to be assisted. This will, in turn, lead to a further strengthening of the regulatory foundation of the women's game.

As a final tactic, FIFA (2021a) proposed the optimisation of the regional qualifiers to international competitions. They argue that they will again work with the relevant football stakeholders to ensure that regional qualification pathways are improved at all age levels, in order for the wider landscape of women's football to be improved. As the quality of FIFA women's competitions and events will improve, they will ensure that opportunities to play the game are offered and increased in all regions around the world, including the developing regions that currently do not have a strong female football presence.

FIFA (2021a) also argue that women's football will be supported by efforts to communicate and commercialise the sport. This will allow for not only its exposure to go up, but also its



value. FIFA suggest that they will have a dedicated commercial programme for women's football soon, which will also be supported by alternatives offered to the digital content distribution. This content distribution through digital channels will allow for a wider reach of women's football. Part of this will be the promotion of women's football ambassadors, as we discussed through our analysis of women footballer icons in our previous module. Marketing and communications in different platforms will be explored, and FIFA will work with organisations and influencers in order to promote not only the sport, but also the protection and promotion of human rights.

FIFA (2021a) aim to increase the awareness of the top female footballers and ensure that the profile of women's football is enhanced by utilising and harnessing new technological advancements. They are also going to implement a clear brand strategy using such role models and ambassadors, as well as the women's legends programme, similar to the one that FIFA has run for men's football. Besides, they clarify that, by 2026, a women's football commercial programme will be launched.

Another target they clarify in the FIFA women's football strategy is the focus they would like to place on how they govern and lead the sport, and on how they aim to achieve gender balance. FIFA (2021a) argue that women's football and female representation are going to play an important part in the key governance decision-making bodies. They argue that, by reviewing and refining the frameworks already set in place, they will help promote the professionalisation of women's football.

In fact, they highlight that they will ensure that those who are focused on women's football will be empowered further, while assisting for a global network supporting women's football to be created. A particular goal that has been set for every member association is to have one spot on its executive committee dedicated to the interest of women's football (FIFA, 2021a). They also argue that, by 2026, at least one woman will be seated in the executive committee of every member association, while, by 2022, they say at least 1/3 of all FIFA committee members will be women. Through these efforts, FIFA intend to strengthen the female leadership development programme they have been running for the past few years in order to further improve the professionalisation oversight that they have.

Finally, they intend to educate and empower women within women's football, by building capacity and knowledge to better safeguard the future of women's football. As part of their efforts, they suggest that they intend to strengthen the legacy programmes in the competitions, in order to better showcase women's football. Again, international competitions have a key role to play in their efforts.

FIFA (2021a) also intend to build partnerships with national governing organisations and third-party organisations to ensure that the social impact of the development of women's sport is also filtered through to each nation. Particular campaigns for women's empowerment are going to be developed and implemented to support the efforts FIFA

have made so far. These programmes will also be developed at national levels and run by regional member associations. Specific social and health issues are going to be addressed, and national governing bodies and government stakeholders are expected to further develop these programmes to ensure that sustainability in the development of women's football continues.

**Figure 3. FIFA's women's football strategy – How success will be measured**



Source: FIFA, 2021b, p. 1.

FIFA (2021b) finish their women's football strategy by giving us a snapshot of how they will measure its success, as it is illustrated in figure 3 above. This snapshot sets six specific targets focusing on women's participation, the existence of women's football strategies in regional associations, the inclusivity of women in the executive committee of regional member associations, the increase in viewership of international competitions of women's football, the growth in the number of women's youth leagues, and the introduction of new FIFA international competitions for women.

As we can see, international competitions have a key role to play in the development of women's football. However, before we discuss the plans for the future, it is worth focusing on what the current state of international competitions of women's football around the world is.

## Unit 4.2 Women's football international competitions

In this section, we will provide an overview of the existing international competitions in women's football. On the global stage, the governing body FIFA is involved in the organisation of the FIFA Women's World Cup, in which the national teams of all countries participate. At the same time, the Olympic Games also host a women's football tournament (FIFA, n. d.). When looking at a younger age bracket, FIFA also hosts the under 20 Women's World Cup and the under 17 Women's World Cup. Finally, on a global level, they also host the FIFA Women's Club World Cup in which domestic clubs participate, and the Women's Youth Olympic Futsal Tournament for younger players. A number of other global national team competitions which are not organised by FIFA exist, in which a smaller number of countries participate.

**Figure 4. FIFA regional confederations of football**



Source: [online image of FIFA regional confederations of football], (n. d.), <https://bit.ly/3Qc8LWm>.

When we focus in specific geographic regions (as they are illustrated in figure 4 alongside the confederations that govern them), we can see that different governing bodies of football or federations are also organising a number of competitions. In Europe, UEFA (n. d.) organises the UEFA Women's Championship for the national teams and the UEFA women's under 19 and under 17 championships for youth national teams respectively. In terms of domestic club competitions, UEFA organises the UEFA Women's Champions League, similar to the men's Champions League that UEFA organises every year.

In Asia, the Asian Football Confederation organises the AFC Women's Asian Cup and the under 20 and under 17 Women's Asian Cups as well (AFC, n. d.). They also organise the AFC Women's Club Championship for domestic clubs and the AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup.

In Central and North America, as well as in the Caribbean, the CONCACAF (n. d.) organise the CONCACAF Women's Championship, the CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup and the CONCACAF Women's under 20 and under 17 championships and the girls' under 15 championship.

In South America, CONMEBOL (n. d.) organise the Copa América Femenina and the CONMEBOL under 20 and under 17 Women's Football Championships. In the same region, we also see the Copa Libertadores Femenina competition aiming at domestic clubs and the CONMEBOL Copa América Femenina and under 20 championships for futsal.

In Africa, the Confederation of African Football organise the Africa Women Cup of Nations for the national teams and the CAF Women's Champions League for domestic clubs (CAF, n. d.).

Finally, in Oceania, the Oceanian Football Confederation organises the OFC Women's Nations Cup for the national teams of the regions it covers (OFC, n. d.).

Additional international competitions are available in different regions, as well as the qualifying tournaments for the Olympic Games, which are taking place in each region separately.

If we were to compare the international competitions available for women's football, with the ones available for men's football, we would notice some significant differences. Most of these differences come at the domestic club level, in which we can see that international competitions for men's football tend to have various levels for different clubs, mostly based on the success said clubs achieve in the national championships in which they participate for each season. We could also notice a difference in the number of preparatory championships, the ones focusing on younger ages that prepare the footballers for a potential career in football, which, in the case of women's football, are often fewer and less prominent than the ones organised for the men's side of the sport.

At the same time, our biggest difference in the comparison between the two would be on the benefits international competitions provide to sports. It is these benefits that we will be discussing in the next session of this module.

## **Unit 4.3 Benefits of international competitions**

The importance of international competitions for sports and football in particular are ample. To begin with, for the players participating in a particular sport, in this case women's football, it provides them with the opportunity to practise their game, being fit and able to play better, thus improving their performance through the increased exposure to matches of high quality. In that sense, populating women's football calendars would allow players the chance to practise more, train better and ultimately improve in the sport, as FIFA (2021a) argued in their report as well. Since the demand is created, international competitions also increase the opportunities for younger football players to get into the game and continue to play, since the opportunities for them to play football at the level in which their craft is appreciated exists.

However, apart from actually improving the conditions for existing women footballers and increasing the numbers potentially for future women footballers, it is estimated that having an international presence in a sport can in fact increase the quality of the national league offset sport (Fűrész and Ács, 2020). In other words, if international competitions in which national teams participate increase, thus improving potentially the performance of national teams, a direct link appears to exist between that improvement in the performance of the national team and the national league's prestige and appreciation, meaning that better players might be interested in the league and the league might itself become more interesting, attracting more exciting games and therefore improving the overall quality of the sport in the country.

Now, moving beyond the on the pitch benefits that we discussed above, we can also look at the off the pitch benefits available. First of all, international tournaments allow national teams, domestic clubs and individual football players to showcase their abilities on a bigger scale (UEFA, 2022a). As such, women's football as a sport gains a wider reach, attracting the attention of wider audiences that go beyond the national domestic market of each country.

As a result, international competitions assist in the growth of the sport, allowing it to reach new potential customers and increase the engagement of the existing ones. As we discussed earlier on in this course, broadcasting can assist women's football reach its great potential (UEFA, 2022a). International competitions are a key element in reaching this potential and can therefore set the basis for the further popularity and growth of women's football as a business. Through this added exposure, the ability for more attention to be drawn to this sport can also be translated in more potential commercial partnerships.

Additional commercial partnerships means that women's football can grow as a business, attracting more revenue, which can, in turn, be better invested in its development (UEFA, 2022a). The creation of international competitions can therefore create new 'products' to be commercialised. By developing new competitions, new media rights and sponsorship rights are created for various elements of the tournaments, further growing the business potential of women's football.

From what we have seen so far through women's football development, and the way in which the previous international tournaments have been welcomed in the wider commercial landscape, we can suggest that there is ample space for women's football to be further commercialised.

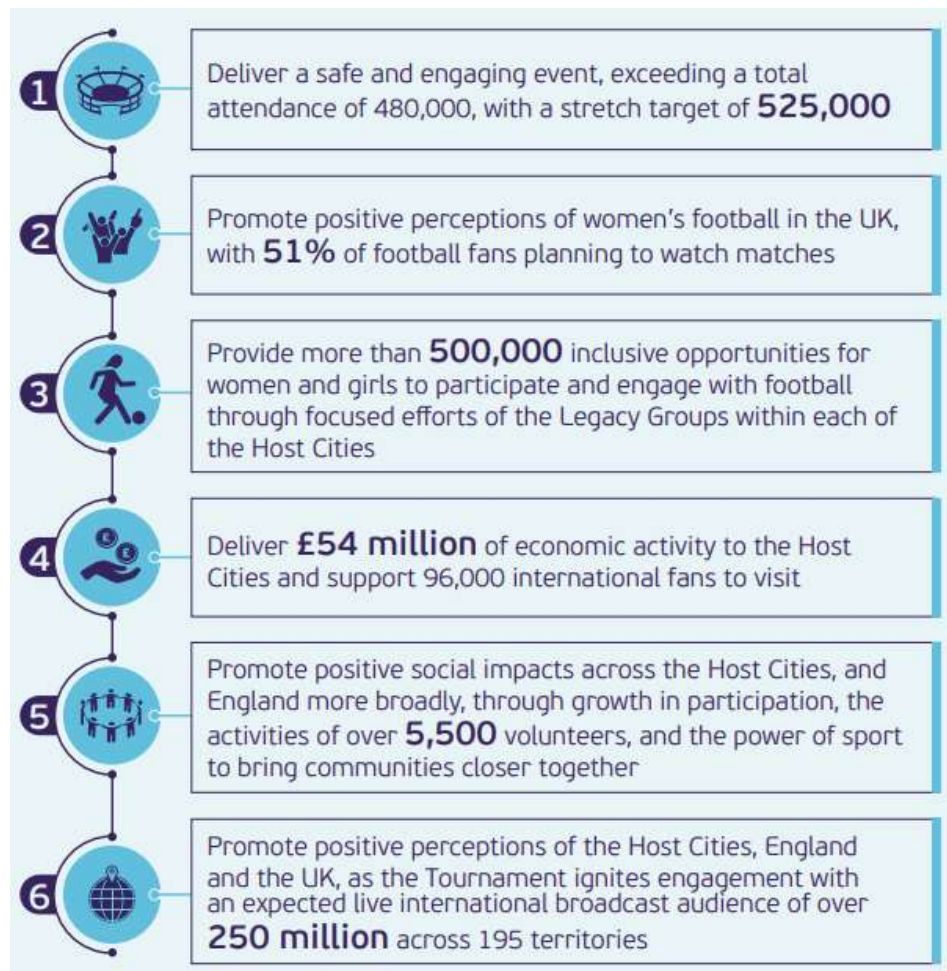
As we discussed earlier on in this course as well, extending these commercial partnerships can benefit women's football, not only in terms of monetary value; through these commercial partnerships, women's football can be better appreciated as a business that can also act as an avenue for other brands, in order to further promote themselves to the eyes of the existing and potential new customers (UEFA, 2022a). Therefore, international competitions can help act as an additional and elevated platform that can allow women's football to generate new avenues for fan engagement, monetisation strategies and wider growth.

## **Unit 4.4 Benefits of international competitions – UEFA 2022 Women's EURO**

In order to better understand and appreciate the value of international competitions, we can focus on the UEFA 2022 European Women's Championship as a case study, and

examine the impact report that UEFA (2022b) released with the assistance of the auditing firm Ernst and Young. This very detailed report looking into what was projected at the time for the delivery of this international women's championship is better summarised in figure 5 below.

**Figure 5. Key benefits of hosting the UEFA European 2022 Women's Football Championship**



Source: UEFA, 2022b, p. 3.

The study argues that, by delivering a safe event that was well advertised, they were expecting it to attract more than half a million people to stadia (UEFA, 2022b). At the same time, they were expecting that everybody involved or aware of the international championship would have a positive perception of women's football. The emphasis was placed particularly on the domestic market in order to win them over the sport.

They also argue that this would affect the on-pitch possibilities, offering inclusive opportunities for women and girls to participate and engage with football (UEFA, 2022b). Additionally, it is suggested that social impacts of positive nature were to be expected in the host cities. These cities were also expected to receive positive perceptions worldwide, as the tournament was being broadcasted around the globe.

Finally, and in very tangible terms for the organisers and the growth of the sport, it was estimated that more than 54 million pounds worth of economic activity would take place around the host cities, making the international tournament a very good and profitable investment for the host nation (UEFA, 2022b).

## **Unit 4.5 Legacy of women's international competitions**

The way in which we can understand and appreciate the impact that international tournaments can have in women's football is through the examination of legacy. Nowadays, any mega sport event needs to have a strategy for how it can create a lasting legacy in not only the host nation, but also in all nations involved (Preuss, 2007). Ideally, this legacy should extend beyond the participants and affect also the individuals attending or consuming the broadcasted event worldwide.

In the case of the UEFA 2022 Women's European Championship hosted in England, particular focus was placed on legacy. They, in fact, argue that eight legacy groups were formed consisting of various stakeholders from across the host cities, ensuring that representation from community football organisations, schools and local authorities existed among the key individuals forming the processes to ensure legacy (UEFA, 2022b). The idea was that this international competition could be used to strengthen local networks in order to drive sustainable change beyond the international tournament itself, and therefore allow for the championship to act as an example for future tournaments to follow.

To support their efforts, grassroots football around the cities in which the championship was hosted received approximately 2.4 million pounds through local funding, funding from the Football Association of England, from UEFA commercial partners, from Sport England and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (the Ministry of Sport), as it is illustrated in figure 6.

**Figure 6. 2022 UEFA European Women's Championship legacy funding sources**



Source: UEFA, 2022b, p. 12.

This funding was then to be used to support a range of activities across the host cities that incorporated both existing FA programmes and new initiatives tailored to local needs. The UEFA Women's EURO 2022 was used as a vehicle to inspire positive change in the growth of the sport, by promoting equal access for all girls to play football in schools and clubs, by advocating for a diverse workforce of coaches, referees and local administrators to be involved in football, and by setting the basis for football to become an inclusive, safe and welcoming environment for every woman and girl to play competitive or recreational grassroots football, irrespective of their ability disability age, or ambition (UEFA, 2022b). Through this investment on legacy, this international tournament was aiming to grow participation and ensure that the workforce supporting women's football improved, setting the basis of the further growth of women's football business.

## **Unit 4.7 Impact of international competitions**

Having discussed how important international competitions are and how their legacy is now becoming part of the planning and management of the event, it is important to focus on the actual impact these competitions have on women's football and beyond. Measuring this impact and ensuring that the targets set in legacy planning are actually materialising after each international championship is over, is also a vital part of how

decisions are being made on when, who and where an international competition should be hosted (Preuss, 2007).

In the case of the UEFA 2022 Women's EURO, the need to measure impact would spread in all six areas that they argued are the targets and the prospective legacy of the championship (UEFA, 2022b). These include delivering operational success, growing the professional game, driving inclusive grassroots participation, supporting host economies and tourism, promoting positive social impact and enhancing the international perceptions of England and the UK as it can be seen in figure 7 below.

**Figure 7. Measuring impact of UEFA Women's EURO 2022**



Source: UEFA, 2022b, p. 14.

All these aspects should be measured in order to allow us to understand the success of international competitions after they are completed. So, let us look into each one of these impact categories in turn.

First, delivering operational success can be measured by ensuring that a safe and engaging event is, in fact, delivered (UEFA, 2022b). Ideally, one with a record-breaking attendance and viewership, ensuring that the trend of a growth in women's sport is documented, and ensuring that the event is delivered in a way that allows for the audience, both the one attending in person and the one spectating online or through

traditional broadcasting methods, to be left with a positive perception of the championship's organisation.

Growing the professional game can be measured by assessing the perceptions of women's football (UEFA, 2022b). If these perceptions are enhanced and become more positive, if we see an increased interest from the people spectating the sport in person or through broadcasts, and if we see new audiences attracted to the game, then we can argue that the international championship had a positive impact on growing the professional game.

Driving an inclusive grassroots participation is also an important aspect of the impact of an international championship. If the Women's Euro 2022 was able to inspire greater participation, and indeed drive for a more inclusive and sustainable access to participation, while creating new opportunities for women and girls of all ages, through local communities and schools, to engage with the sport, as well as including underrepresented groups, then we could see that the impact of the international championship can be highlighted (UEFA, 2022b). Measuring the participation levels following an international championship can ensure that those metrics are provided to the organisers showcasing this impact.

The support to host economies and tourism can be measured by assessing the international domestic tourism that was generated by an international tournament. How the host cities and the host country are viewed in terms of potential future destinations can also be considered a measurement.

The promotion of positive social impact can be measured through the assessment of participation in grassroots football. In a broader sense, this would ensure that community engagement through the tournament is promoted in a way that allows for football to act as a social lever for greater inclusion of diverse individuals in the sport (UEFA, 2022b). Appropriate measures should be set in place to measure this impact, not only directly after the tournament, but also after some time, to ensure the longevity that an international tournament should strive for.

Finally, enhancing the international perceptions of England and the UK is also an important impact to explore. A well-organised tournament can act as a positive example for future tournaments to follow, and it can leave visitors and audiences with a very positive impression of the host nation (UEFA, 2022b). Whilst academic studies agree on the importance of international championships in enhancing international perceptions (Kim *et al.*, 2015), it is important to also measure such perceptions to ensure that tangible measurements exist for this impact category.

## Unit 4.8 Course summary

In this course, we focused on the business growth in women's football and the various

aspects or components that can help in the further development of the business side of the sport. As such, we began our examination of women's football broadcasting potential and thus how televising women's sport can set the scene for its growth, not only as a popular sport, but also as a thriving industry within the wider sport and entertainment sector. We then moved on into the area of women's football sponsorship and how building brand associations can not only further develop the sport itself, but also ensure that, through the added reach provided to and through sponsorship, women's football business can reach new levels of professionalisation. Following this, we explored the creation of women footballer icons, and how the popularity of women footballers can help further grow the sport, similarly to how the men's side of the sport has been assisted by the development of men footballer icons. Finally, we centred on women's football international competitions and how through their growth they add value to women's football business both commercially and through the long-lasting legacy and impact they can have.

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