



# Development strategy

2021-2025

The background is a solid blue color with a pattern of overlapping, stylized leaf or feather shapes in various shades of blue, creating a sense of movement and depth. The text is centered in the middle of the image.

WE ARE STRONGER  
**TOGETHER!**

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The Development Strategy has adopted some of football's main pillars into its core, and these considerations will no doubt reap significant benefits following implementation. Prioritising grassroots and educational programmes for boys and girls, coaching education, infrastructure development and investment in club football, will no doubt lead to fruitful sustainability, while a modern management approach in a digital ecosystem with improved processes will greatly complement the existing professionalism within the dedicated AFFA teams. It is also heartening to see how volunteering remains an area of particular importance for AFFA, as are the key areas of sustainability and social responsibility.

These activities - your strategy - also greatly align with my Vision 2020-2023, in maximising the development impact we carry with our members, boosting women's football, increasing global competitiveness and ultimately, making football truly global and work for society, all around the world. There is no doubt this important document, which attests the realisation of your vision, will contribute to the promotion, popularisation and further development of football in Azerbaijan, to its visibility and its prosperity in the country in the years to come, paving the way for future successes.

**Gianni Infantino**  
**FIFA President**



UEFA and the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) have forged a strong relationship over the years and we are delighted to congratulate them on their consistent hard work and dedication to grow football in Azerbaijan, and to utilise its enormous potential for social good. AFFA continues to demonstrate strong leadership in implementing practical steps to develop and promote the popularity and participation in football across the country. Baku shined as a warm and welcoming host of the UEFA EURO 2020 and it was clear to see the nation's love of the game during that very special time.

One of the key objectives of the UEFA Good Governance Principles is the enrichment and value of strategic development - which is not only how a national association runs and governs football on a day-to-day basis but also the need for a sustainable future vision and the necessary goals to achieve it. UEFA and its Grow team is pleased to have collaborated closely on the AFFA Development Strategy 2021-2025 which is such an inspiration for the national association as a whole and future football development in Azerbaijan.

**Aleksander Čeferin**  
**UEFA President**



In football, as in most other areas, in order to achieve sustainable and comprehensive development, it is important to set the right goals, develop a strategic roadmap to achieve the objectives and coordinate the entire process over time. During the implementation of the State Program for the Development of Football in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2005-2015, signed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev in 2005, important work was done to develop football in our country including numerous infrastructure projects implemented and great progress achieved in increasing popularity and bringing football education to the level of modern standards. In the framework of the GROW 2020 program jointly launched by AFFA and UEFA, AFFA continued to work actively during 2016-2020 to ensure football remains the most followed and popular sport in the country. For the last four years, along with the implementation of infrastructure and educational projects, serious work was done to develop club football and ensure a healthy competitive environment. The UEFA Europa League Final 2019 and four matches of the EURO 2020, which we will host with the great support of our state authorities, are undoubtedly two of the most important milestones in the country's football history. Both events are instrumental in raising our country's global profile as a sports nation, in addition to promoting football domestically. I am confident that the AFFA Development Strategy for 2021-2025 designed as the logical follow-up to these processes, will further contribute to the development of football in the country.

**Rovnag Abdullayev**  
**President of AFFA**

## Our vision

Preserve football's position as the number one sport in our country and make it the primary means of healthy lifestyle

## Our mission

In addition to supporting the development of young players, we want to continue to offer equal opportunities and provide a safe environment so that everyone in our country can engage in football and become part of a growing football family



## **Responsibility**

As the governing body of football in the country, we understand our responsibility to society

## **Equality**

We intend to make the game of football accessible to everyone, regardless of gender, age, physical ability or place of residence

## **Transparency and fairness**

We ensure transparency and fairness in all steps taken on and off the football pitch

## **Development**

We are committed to continuous development, applying the most advanced management methods in all aspects of our football-related work





Thanks to our football policy, implemented with the support of our state authorities and partners, football remains the **MOST FOLLOWED SPORT** in our country. Following the hosting of 2019 UEFA Europa League Final and four matches of 2020 UEFA European Championship in Baku and other initiatives implemented across the country, the interest in football in the country has grown from 28 to 39 percent for the last four years (58 percent for men, 20 percent for women).<sup>1</sup> Football is also the most played sport by children thanks to the youth leagues hosting in nine age groups and girls' leagues hosting in four age groups, the School Cup engaging more than 75 percent of all national schools and dozens of other grassroots football projects implemented in the country. AFFA organizes an average of 250 matches per week. A nationwide study shows that football has remained parents' first-choice sport for children for the last four years, with the percentage of choice going up from 5 to 10 percent.

Implementation of **INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS** was continued for the last four years. To ensure the development of national teams and clubs in a professional environment, the artificial turf of a number of football pitches has been replaced with natural turf and a number of new natural turf pitches have been built. In addition, as part of a partnership with local authorities, dozens of artificial turf football pitches have been built and made available for free use by the public in order to increase the popularity of football.

Significant work has been done to ensure the **DEVELOPMENT OF CLUB FOOTBALL** and a healthy competitive environment. As betting games become widespread around the world, attempts to manipulate match results are being made in most countries, and unfortunately such attempts are in many cases successful. The Azerbaijan Premier League has maintained transparency in this regard, although there have been some negative occurrences in the First Division. The Disciplinary Committee of AFFA has fined and sanctioned several clubs, footballers, coaches and administrative staff found to have been involved in match-fixing and many of those responsible have been banned from football. The football family understands that the biggest threat is the increase in match-fixing.



XXVIII NÖVBƏTİ KONFRANS  
28 YANVAR 2020



We have continued to conduct **EDUCATIONAL** PROGRAMS for different categories of national football stakeholders. In the last four years, more than 200 football coaches have successfully completed coaching courses in UEFA Pro, A, B and AFFA C categories, and 341 coaches have obtained AFFA D license. Regular courses, workshops, seminars and training sessions have been organized for the referees officiating various matches of Azerbaijan Premier League, First Division and other leagues hosting by AFFA. Along with the management of AFFA Referees Committee, trainers assigned by the UEFA Refereeing Department are also involved in training processes and share their experiences. Besides, our international referees participate in training sessions organized in different countries by FIFA and UEFA. Furthermore, dozens of our employees have attended and successfully completed various educational programs in football management organized by UEFA and other prestigious organizations.

**A MODERN MANAGEMENT APPROACH** has been introduced and the electronic management system of AFFA has been established as a starting point. AFFA invites tenders for its projects in order to maintain transparency and create a fair competitive environment for companies providing services in various pitches. Announcements and other important information related to tenders are posted on the AFFA website and all applications are accepted online. Each company interested in these tenders must first undergo AFFA due diligence process with a positive result. The due diligence system is critical to identifying reliable partner companies and long-term partnerships.

At the AFFA Conference held on 28 January 2020, a structural change was approved with the aim of **IMPROVING THE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**. Taking into account the growing scale of the football projects and intensity in various pitches, the number of members of the Executive Committee was increased from 11 to 13. The number of vice presidents of AFFA was increased from 2 to 4. One of them received the status of executive vice president. For the first time, a woman was elected to the Executive Committee. In addition, a number of changes were made to the charter of AFFA.

**VOLUNTEERING** has always been an area of particular importance for AFFA, and we were even more motivated when the Head of the State declared 2020 as the Year of Volunteers. Currently, AFFA's volunteer base includes 8,100 individuals who are actively involved in organizing sports and social events on a regular basis. The Europa League Final 2019 was organized with the participation of 1,452 volunteers, while 2,020 volunteers were involved in the organization of UEFA EURO2020 matches in Baku.





**BAKU**  
**FINAL 2019**



In 2012 the first steps were taken towards hosting large-scale football tournaments in Azerbaijan. The same year, the final tournament of the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup was hosted in our country. FIFA officials evaluated that tournament as "one of the best world cups in the history in terms of organization." Four years later, our country hosted a continental scale tournament. Matches of 2016 UEFA U-17 European Championship were organized in four different stadiums in Baku. In 2019, Baku hosted the decisive game of the second most prestigious club tournament of UEFA. English football clubs Chelsea and Arsenal played the final match of UEFA Europa League at Baku Olympic Stadium. This magnificent stadium also will host four matches of UEFA EURO 2020 that was originally scheduled to start on 11 June 2020, but was then postponed for 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hosting these events is of great importance both in terms of promoting football and increasing its popularity in our country and also enhancing the global visibility of Azerbaijan and Baku, developing tourism and making positive contributions to the economy.

With the great support of our state, we will continue our efforts to hold large-scale international events in the future.



The COVID-19 pandemic which affected almost all countries in the world negatively influenced many areas of activity, and football is no exception. Certain difficulties encountered when organizing and conducting both domestic and international tournaments. Over the past period, AFFA has been able to quickly adapt to the new realities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite all the challenges, new seasons of the Azerbaijan Premier League and the First Division kicked off, and the tournaments were held on schedule. All matches of Azerbaijan National A Team within UEFA Nations League and National U-21 Team in the Qualifying Round 2021 UEFA European Championship were successfully hosted. Although the cases of Covid19 infection were recorded among the players, it did not much impact the hosting of the matches.

In line with the quarantine related requirements set by the Task Force under the Cabinet of Ministers, AFFA staff operated remotely and carried out all required work according to the daily plan of action.

Several online meetings of AFFA Executive Committee were organized. In view of pandemic-related challenges and based on requests received from several clubs, the AFFA Executive Committee decided to provide financial assistance to several Premier League clubs.





# Development Strategy 2021-2025

The new strategy will cover 5 football seasons in 2021-2025 and guide AFFA's activities in the course of these years. We believe this strategy will contribute to the achievement of our goals and uniting all football stakeholders in Azerbaijan.

**The new strategy will have four main priorities:**

**1** Grassroots and  
Youth Development

**2** Football  
Infrastructure

**3** Club Football  
and Regions

**4** Digital  
Ecosystem

We want to create equal conditions to play football for everyone across the country regardless of their gender, age, nationality or race. As mentioned above, competitions and grassroots football projects that we organise in various age groups have increased the percentage of children playing football across the country to 12%.<sup>1</sup> However, according to the statistics, in recent periods, 56% of adults and 58% of children have not engaged in any sport throughout the year. To increase the number of our healthy compatriots, we want to encourage more people, particularly children, to play football and thus help our state to increase the number of healthy people. To achieve this, we will step up our activities aimed at our five target groups (aged 3-5, aged 6-9, aged 10-18, students, amateurs). Moreover, we will conduct a series of projects to support the professional development of young football players. The implementation of all these projects requires educated coaches. We will strictly focus on increasing the quality of the coaching courses for UEFA Pro, UEFA A, UEFA B and AFFA C licenses, and will organise refresher courses for coaches with an AFFA D license annually.

## **In addition to the above, we have set ourselves the following objectives to be accomplished by 2025:**

- ⚽ Double the number of active student and amateur players and quadruple the number of preschool age football players in order to maintain popularity;
- ⚽ Increase the number of schools covered by the Football Lessons at Schools project to 85;
- ⚽ Finalize and separately implement a new training program for each of the following age categories: 12-13, 14-15, 16-17, 18-19;
- ⚽ Conduct selections among the participants of the Elite Training Project in U-12, U-13, U-14 and U-15 age groups, and organize training camps for each age group twice a year;
- ⚽ Ensure that three teams formed of participants of the Elite Training Project in the regions participate in the U-15 League and other age groups Leagues;
- ⚽ Increase the number of coaches with AFFA D license to 700;
- ⚽ To carry out relevant work on the development of children's and youth football in the liberated regions in close cooperation with the state and various foundations

No	GOAL	OBJECTIVE AND PROJECTS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	DEADLINE
1	Double the number of students engaged in active football	By the end of 2025, double the number of students engaged in active football, which currently stands at 420, by maintaining the continuity of ongoing projects and organizing tournaments at two new universities each year	As of 2022, organize competitions at two new universities each year and maintain the continuity of competitions	December, 2025
2	Increase more than two times the current number of amateur players	By the end of 2025, increase the number of amateur players, which currently stands at 7,900 (4,000 amateur players over 18 and 3,900 young players involved in the Football Lessons at Schools project), more than two times. This will be reached through amateur competitions and Football Lessons at Schools Project (new schools) to be launched as of 2022	As of 2022, maintain the continuity of tournaments and leagues involving amateur participants over 18, organizing 6 new tournaments/leagues each year, and engaging 10 new schools in the football lessons at schools project each year and increase the number of schools to 85 by 2025	December, 2025
3	Quadruple the number of preschool age football players	By the end of 2025, increase the number of preschool age children engaged in active football, which currently stands at 300, more than four times by involving new nurseries in the Football at Kindergartens Project each year	As of 2022, engage 4 new nurseries in the Football at Kindergartens Project each year and increase the number of Kindergartens to 20 and number of children to at least 1,200 by the end of 2025	December, 2025
4	Increase the number of coaches with AFFA D license to 700 and conduct refresher courses each year	By the end of 2025, increase the number of coaches with AFFA D license (which currently stands at 340) to 700	Increase the total number of licensed coaches to 700 by granting license to 90 new coaches each year through D License coaching courses to be organized in Baku and regions as of 2022	December, 2025
5	Finalize and implement a new training program separately for each of the following age categories: 12-13, 14-15, 16-17 and 18-19;	Develop the most talented young footballers in the country according to the same program and methodology	Implement the program and methodology developed for the relevant age groups each year	December, 2025
6	Conduct selections among participants of the Elite Training Project in U-12, U-13, U-14 and U-15 age groups, and organize training camps for each age group twice a year	Select the most talented young footballers in the U-12, U-13, U-14 and U-15 age groups through continuous selections across the country, and organize training camps for each age group during the year	Conduct selections each year and organize training camps twice a year for the relevant age groups	December, 2025
7	Participation of teams formed of participants of the Elite Training Project in leagues hosting by AFFA	Participation of three teams formed of participants of the Elite Training Project in the regions in U-15 League and other age groups Leagues;	As of 2022, one team formed of participants of the Elite Training Project and one more team in each of the following two years shall participate in the U-15 League hosting by AFFA	December, 2023
8	Conduct relevant work to develop youth football in the liberated regions in close cooperation with the involved state authorities and various foundations	The relevant action plan and performance indicators will be introduced in line with the government plan on the restoration of infrastructure and resettlement of population in the liberated districts.		

We intend to create safe, fair and accessible opportunities to play football. To achieve this, we will continue to implement various infrastructure projects in close cooperation with local partners and international organizations

### To this end, we set ourselves the following goals for the next five years:

- ⚽ Reconstruct three football stadiums in the regions;
- ⚽ Build two new football pitches with natural turf;
- ⚽ Install 50 new artificial turf football pitches and make them available for public use;
- ⚽ Restore 40 village/town football pitches and make them available for local residents;
- ⚽ Join government initiatives and various foundations;
- ⚽ To carry out relevant work on the restoration and reconstruction of sports infrastructure in the liberated districts in close cooperation with the state and various foundations



No	GOAL	OBJECTIVE AND PROJECTS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	DEADLINE
1	Reconstruct three football stadiums in the regions	Reconstruct existing stadiums and install new football pitches to develop professional football, especially in the regions	One football stadium is going to be renovated by the end of 2022, another one by the end of 2023 and another one by the end of 2025	December, 2025
2	Build two new football pitches with natural turf		Construction of one football pitch by the end of 2023 and another one by the end of 2025	December, 2025
3	Install 50 new artificial turf football pitches to make available for public use	Install, in cooperation with local authorities, artificial turf football pitches to promote the game and create additional opportunities for the local residents	A total of 50 artificial turf football pitches will be constructed (6 pitches will be installed in 2021 and 11 each following year)	December, 2025
4	Restore 40 village/town football pitches and make them available for local residents	Identify damaged/destroyed football pitches, renovate them in cooperation with local authorities and make them accessible for local population In order to restore the conditions and ensure the popularity of football in the regions	A total of 40 football pitches will be renovated (4 pitches in 2021 and 9 each following year);Grassroots football festival will follow each pitch inauguration	December, 2025
5	to carry out relevant work on the restoration and reconstruction of sports infrastructure in the liberated districts in close cooperation with the state and various foundations	The relevant action plan and performance indicators will be introduced in line with the government plan on the restoration of infrastructure and resettlement of population in the liberated districts		

Amidst the growing interest in football, the Premier League of Azerbaijan and the national cup also enjoy increased interest. However, the number of fans turning up for both league and cup matches has noticeably diminished. One of the factors affecting the number of fans is the fact that the majority of the Premier League clubs represent Baku. Lack of independent financial sources for clubs and the lack of interest from the regional Executive Powers is one of the main weaknesses.

We will continue to support the clubs in proper organization of community relations and marketing. Besides, more than 40% of the cities and districts of the country are annually represented in the Regional League that we have established to support football's development in the regions. We will continue our activities in this area, too.

### **In addition to the above, we have set ourselves the following objectives to be accomplished over the next five years:**

- ⚽ Increase the number of clubs participating in the Premier League to at least 10;
- ⚽ Provide financial support to keep competitive balance between Premier League clubs;
- ⚽ Develop support programs and establish grants in the areas of community relations and marketing to support Premier League clubs;
- ⚽ Construct and commission two football academies in the regions to discover and develop young football players;
- ⚽ Maintain the participation percentage of all cities and districts of the country in the Regional League at a minimum of 40%



No	GOAL	OBJECTIVE AND PROJECTS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	DEADLINE
1	Increase the number of clubs participating in the Premier League to at least 10	Support the participation of at least two regional clubs in the Premier League by finding a sustainable financial resources for the clubs	Starting from the season 2022/23, AFFA will be seeking for sponsors for at least 2 clubs competing in First Division from the 2021/22 season. (Using various promotion methods to start negotiations with potential sponsors in the regions in collaboration with local authorities); Increase the number of Premier League clubs to 10 during the Strategy implementation period and prevent the decrease in the number of clubs	December, 2025
2	Develop support programs and establish grants in the areas of community relations and marketing to support Premier League clubs	A club support program which includes support by UEFA, FIFA, National Associations, international clubs, public and private organizations in the 8 identified areas and any additional areas if so required in the course of the program	Conduct a survey among clubs to analyze the current situation and understand the expectations from the program, by the end of Q2 2021; Introduce short-term and long-term plans within the program by the end of Q3 2021; Provide support in at least two areas during the year based on established priorities; Submit annual reports	December, 2025
3	Construct and commission two football academies in the regions	Construct and commission two football academies in the regions to discover and develop young football players	Construct the first academy in 2021, and the second by the end of 2024; Develop the selection and educational program for the academies by the end of the respective years	December, 2024
4	Maintain the participation percentage of all cities and districts of the country in the Regional League at a minimum of 40%	Maintain the current level of involvement of regional cities and districts in the Regional League to support participation in football in the regions	Maintain at least current level (40%) of representation of the cities and districts of the country in the League every season	December, 2025

We intend to create a digital football ecosystem that is flexibly responsive to changing demands as well as transparent and accessible. The necessity to flexibly respond to changing demands of the modern world makes digital transformation inevitable. The Covid-19 pandemic, which we have been facing since early 2020, has accelerated this process in all areas, including football. AFFA uses the modern tools and platforms to constantly analyze the expectations of different target groups and presents creative content on social media platforms maintaining active communication with the general public. We are also active in e-football games, considering the growing interest of young people in e-games. We intend to further expand our activities in this direction, beyond e-Milli team created last year and e-Milli League launched earlier this year.

### **In addition to the above, we have set ourselves the following objectives to be accomplished over the next five years:**

- ⚽ Develop an interactive football map of the country;
- ⚽ Create an OTT platform covering children and youth leagues and grassroots football projects that are not covered in the media;
- ⚽ Create an online platform for club licensing;
- ⚽ Develop online education programs (Football lessons, fitness activities, coaching, refereeing courses);
- ⚽ Continue the digitalization of the management process





No	GOAL	OBJECTIVE AND PROJECTS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	DEADLINE
1	Develop an interactive football map of the country	Prepare an interactive football map on a dedicated platform to create opportunities for playing football across the country for people who want to start playing football in football clubs, schools and courses	Develop criteria for joining the map and collect data, by the end of 2021; Run the test version by end of 2022; Introduce the final version at the end of Q2 2023	July, 2023
2	Create an OTT platform	AFFA's new OTT platform project that will cover children's and youth leagues and grassroots football projects that are not covered in the media	Explore potential suppliers by the end of 2021; Determine the technical specifications of the platform by the end of Q2 2022; Conduct a test run of the platform by the end of Q2 2023; Introduce the final version for the 2023/24 season;	July, 2024
3	Create an online platform for club licensing	Establish an up-to-date unified electronic licensing system by exchanging experience with UEFA and European National Associations and analyzing the offers available on the market of information technologies	Conduct a domestic study on the relevant target audience by the end of 2021; Perform a test run of the system by the end of 2022; Implement the system for licensing of Premier League clubs for the season 2023/24; Carry out the entire licensing procedure as of the 2024/25 season through the system	July, 2024
4	Develop online education programs (Football lessons, fitness activities, coaching, refereeing courses)	Prepare video lessons based on the program developed by the relevant department in the mentioned four areas to make distance training sessions available to various target groups	Complete indoor and outdoor fitness activities by the end of 2021; Complete football lessons by the end of Q2 2022; Complete coaching and refereeing courses by the end of Q2 2023	July, 2023
5	Continue the digitalization of the management process	Continue to apply modern digital management methods in various areas of football management	Introduce the electronic HR management system by the end of Q2 2022; Improve the online referee management system by the end of 2022; Introduce the online task manager system by the end of 2023 to manage and monitor the execution of internal tasks of AFFA; Regularly review and apply systems aimed at the improvement of the management in the various areas	December, 2023



Sustainability and social responsibility are no longer an opportunity in football, but one of the most important conditions. Especially in the post-pandemic period, we understand the role and responsibility of our institution to society. To this end, we want to move from the format of individual CSR initiatives to a more basic and systematic integration format of sustainability principles.

The Football Social Responsibility Strategy of AFFA (2021-2025) has been developed on the basis of these principles and will be reflected in all its activities on and off the pitch. Together with our members and partners, we have identified priorities and developed relevant goals and action plan.



Responsible persons / entities and key performance indicators in each area will be identified to achieve the goals in a timely manner and monitor the process more effectively. In addition to quarterly surveys a detailed report will be submitted every 6 months. The first one is scheduled for 1 December 2021. At the end of each year, in case the results for the key performance indicators are unsatisfactory, the objectives and implementation plan will be revised and amended.





**Rovnag Abdullayev**  
AFFA President



**El Khan Mammadov**  
Executive Vice President



**Rauf Aliyev**  
Vice President



**Elshad Nasirov**  
Vice President



**Vagif Sadigov**  
Vice President



**Kazbek Tuayev**  
ExCo member



**Isgandar Javadov**  
ExCo member



**Mahir Mammadov**  
ExCo member



**Firudin Gurbanov**  
ExCo member



**Elmar Mammadyarov**  
ExCo member



**Zaur Akhundov**  
ExCo member



**Farid Mansurov**  
ExCo member



**Konul Mehdiyeva**  
ExCo member







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