



# STRATEGY PAPER

# 2023

# 2026







## INTRODUCTION

The Malta Football Players Association (MFPA) is launching its third strategy paper after a thorough review and evaluation of the path and achievements of the Association to date, and the goals set out in the previous paper. While the majority of the goals and projects included in the preceding paper have been successfully implemented, and issues of paramount importance such as 'the abolition of transfer fees at the end of a contract', have been tackled, the work is far from done.

The MFPA's mission has always been to protect and safeguard the rights of football players in Malta. This remains unchanged. Over the years, our mission has naturally evolved and organically expanded to include the athletes' wellbeing, on and off the pitch.

The player cannot be separated from the human and to protect one, is to safeguard the other. This priority will be at the forefront of our strategy for the next four years to ensure that holistic support is available to all member players.

After a wide consultation process encompassing in-depth discussions with players from every division, five focus areas have been identified. This document will provide the road map for the work ahead in the next four-year cycle.

## FOCUS AREAS

1. Education
2. Comprehensive Health
3. Women in Football
4. Player Services
5. Strengthening the Association



# 1. EDUCATION

1.1 The MFPA is fully aware that education is crucial for football players, particularly in Malta where only recently have top players become full-time professionals. As an Association for players, it is imperative that we provide players with all the tools possible for a successful life, during and after their active football career. With this in mind, the strategy for the coming years can be summarised as follows:

- **Advocating** in favour of a dual career pathway. Reaching out to professional players, as well as promising young players, to convince them of the benefits of pursuing educational opportunities in parallel with their football career.
- Providing as many **opportunities** as possible. By working with various educational and academic institutions, the MFPA will ensure that a wide array of courses are offered to our member players.
- **Supporting** players who are interested in acquiring a new skill but may be facing barriers to get there. Whether the obstacle is a financial one, a scheduling constraint or anything else, the MFPA will work with individuals to try and **alleviate the burden** as much as possible.

1.2 It is also important for the MFPA management and administration to continue on their path to improve and expand their own education. This will not only enrich the individuals themselves but will directly benefit the Association by enhancing its own human resources.



## Key Performance Indicator

By end of 2026, the MFPA is targeting that at least **15%** of member players will have availed themselves of one or more of the educational opportunities offered.





## 2. COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH

Health is fundamental. It is thus crucial to prioritise programmes that safeguard and promote the health and safety of member players. In the coming years, the MFPA will be embarking on a number of initiatives in this field, namely:

### 2.1 Health and safety education

- 2.1.1 It is paramount that players, technical staff and club administrators are equipped with first aid knowledge and skills. **First Aid** sessions and courses will continue to be offered to players and clubs who show interest, with the MFPA covering all expenses.
- 2.1.2 The MFPA remains committed to advocating against the **perils of doping**. With the help of medical experts, we will financially sponsor educational talks, seminars and promotional material about the subject.
- 2.1.3 Lowering health risks such as cardiac health, can be done through proper **nutrition**. With this in mind, the MFPA will launch educational sessions to raise further awareness and provide useful information about this key subject.



2.2 Medical studies confirm the vital importance of **mental health** for athletes, not only for a general sense of wellbeing, but also because it greatly impacts sports performance. Unfortunately, this sphere still remains largely overlooked. To address this, the MFPA plans to introduce the following initiatives:

- 2.2.1 Offer players and clubs a compact exploratory session with a sports psychologist to gradually introduce the idea of mental wellbeing.
- 2.2.2 Launch information campaigns to combat the taboo which is regrettably still associated with mental health.
- 2.2.3 Assist member players who seek individual mental health support.
- 2.2.4 Work with sports authorities to promote and lobby for more access to mental health professionals for athletes.

2.3 There is still a lot of work to be done in the health and safety sector in local football. For this reason, the MFPA will also be focusing on **lobbying and launching new initiatives**, namely:

- 2.3.1 Better health and safety conditions on the pitch, during games and training. This includes:
  - having a first aider on site before any sporting activity commences;



- making sure a defibrillator (AED) is easily accessible;
- making comprehensive preventive medical tests compulsory before the commencement of the season.

2.3.2 Injuries are unfortunately common in football. Adequate and timely treatment is crucial and thus a sports health insurance should become not only the norm, but a prerequisite for all football players.

2.3.3 Football pitches are to be awarded one of the FIFA quality marks. In view of this, artificial turf pitches are to be properly assessed and tested.

2.3.4 Consultation with the federation and/or the league before the start of the season. Exercising in extreme heat conditions is related to heat-stress injury and decreased performance. Summer in Malta might offer challenging heat conditions for players. Therefore, mitigation strategies (e.g., delayed kick-off, water breaks) should be implemented. Consultation on the following matters should be held:

- The ideal time of training sessions and matches during the summer period due to the heat.
- Minimum rest time between matches.
- Length of the off-season break which is recommended to be at least 28 days.
- To have a minimum of 14 days as an in-season break.
- Mandatory water breaks during the summer period.
- Additional player workload safeguards must be considered<sup>1</sup>

2.3.5 Moreover, heat guidelines have been developed in order to mitigate the effect of heat conditions and protect athletes' health. The Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) is a composite temperature calculated from multiple meteorologic parameters (especially ambient temperature, humidity, sun exposure and wind speed) and will be used to determine the need for activity modification or cancellation when athletes are exposed to extreme heat conditions.

2.4 Individuals who have been athletes their whole life tend to struggle after retirement. The post-career transition can create health and wellbeing challenges. In view of this, the MFPA intends to introduce a number of projects for **retired member players** mainly:



## Key Performance Indicators

- By the end of 2026, all former national team players, who are over 50 years, and who have played at least 20 games for the national team, will have been offered the opportunity to take part in the After Career Consultation programme, as well as the preventive medical examinations mentioned herewith.
- By the end of 2026, at least **50%** of the professional clubs in Malta will have hosted at least one of the health and wellbeing sessions.



- After career consultation and examination for former national team players focusing on the cardiovascular, musculoskeletal and mental health of the player.

- Awareness surrounding breast cancer as early detection can spot the disease when it is most treatable. Hence former female national team players who are 40+ will be provided with free screening.

- Awareness surrounding testicular and prostate cancer for men to minimise the risks. The MFPA will undertake to provide former male national team players with free prostate cancer screening depending on the age and family history. Promotional material will also encourage and help players to conduct regular self-checks and physician check-ups in case of any symptoms.

<sup>1</sup> Data is based on the FIFPRO Player Workload Monitoring Platform, which was developed in cooperation with KPMG Football Benchmark



### 3. WOMEN IN FOOTBALL

All initiatives and services offered by the MFPA are naturally available to ALL member players including women. However, after much discussion, the MFPA feels that **women's football in Malta deserves greater support** and as such extra resources and focus are needed in order to try and bridge the current gap. Over the next four years, the MFPA will work on a number of salient issues, namely:

- 3.1 Improving the **playing conditions** during games and training. This includes working to improve schedules, pitches and resources. Bearing in mind that women players are not paid for their services, it is obvious that they are carrying a bigger burden for no tangible reward.
- 3.2 Working to improve the **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the women's national team**. Whilst the first MOU was a huge step in the right direction, the women's national team is still far from having equal working conditions. The goal in the upcoming years is to continue to bridge the inequity gap.
- 3.3 **Lobbying** for better protection in case of injuries. Since women playing for Maltese clubs have an amateur status, they are not contractually protected in case of injury. Unfortunately, players who suffer serious injuries, often find themselves having to deal with this on their own and bearing the costs of treatment despite giving their services free of charge. The MFPA deems this unacceptable and will be discussing with local authorities on ways to provide better safeguards for female players.
- 3.4 Actively **reaching out to women in football** to engage them in the MFPA's work. The aim is to raise greater awareness among women footballers about the benefits and opportunities they can have access to through MFPA membership. Moreover,

another equally important aim is to encourage direct input from women who are active in local football, consolidating the work of the MFPA Player Council which also comprises female football players.

- 3.5 Actively assisting players in pursuing **better opportunities abroad**. This may include legal assistance, guidance on regulations and contract reviews as well as ongoing welfare support.



### Key Performance Indicators

- By the end of 2026, all female players will have either: the possibility to sign an agreement with their respective clubs to cover all medical expenses in case they are injured while providing their services to the club or
- Have a sports medical insurance which safeguards the players in case of injury.
- By the end of 2026, players representing the senior women's national team will have their appearance match fees in international matches increased to keep closing the gender pay gap.





## 4. PLAYER SERVICES

Apart from all the services currently in place, the MFPA will be introducing the following new projects:

- 4.1 Pre-season training camps for out-of-contract players will remain a priority with possible expansion.
- 4.2 Financial and tax advisory services (by independent experts) shall be available to professional players.
- 4.3 Provide MFPA members with a secure and confidential setting on the MFPA platform, to report any abuse which is thereafter referred to the competent authorities.
- 4.4 Improve the MFPA website to make it easier, more user-friendly and responsive for members to:
  - request a copy of their contract,
  - register for the training camp,
  - apply for any course provided or supported by the MFPA,
  - calculate the training compensation in Malta,
  - check for banned substances,
  - report a match-fixing approach,
  - request assistance on social security and tax contributions.
- 4.5 Lobby to amend the parliamentary act so that players can use the Red Button app and anonymously report a match-fixing approach without concern of legal action being taken against them too.
- 4.6 Abolish any restrictions imposed on the movement of amateur players. According to the principles on contractual stability as provided for in the FIFA Regulations, any player who is not contractually bound to a specific club by means of a validly signed employment contract is free to sign for any club of his or her choosing. The freedom of an amateur player to move to other clubs cannot be compromised any further.

Currently local regulations prohibit amateur players from moving to another club as once they register with a club, they have an obligatory period of between two and four years depending on their age. Youth players for instance must commit to their club for a period of four (4) years after signing at the age of 14.

Even at the end of the season, a player's club may demand any sum of money in order to transfer them to another team which is unacceptable. In fact, over the past few years there have been many allegations of abusive situations where parents were left with no option but to pay thousands of Euros for their child to leave and join another club. This is illegal and unfair.

Moreover, they no longer reflect the needs of Maltese football and must be removed, also considering that clubs who invest in youth development are entitled to receive training compensation once a player signs a professional contract.

- 4.7 Abolish domestic training compensation for players who are at least 24 years of age.
- 4.8 Establish a set of minimum requirements for player accommodations.



### Key Performance Indicator

By the end of 2023, the MFPA digital platform will provide all the above-mentioned services and web application will render well on all screen sizes and resolutions, while ensuring good usability.



## 5. STRENGTHENING THE ASSOCIATION

As a dynamic Association, the MFPA must continue to adapt and improve. Ongoing self-assessment is essential and to this end, the following steps have been earmarked:

- 5.1 An internal review of current policies aimed at **good governance** will be conducted periodically. Policies which have proven effective will be consolidated and efficacy will be enhanced in areas that need addressing.
- 5.2 It is vital that the Players' Association remains close to the players it represents. The MFPA will not only remain **accessible to players** and stakeholders, it will also continue to actively seek out their input and constructive criticism. The MFPA will also strive to have at least 80% of professional players registered with Maltese clubs as their members. Moreover, it will keep working to increase the number of paid up members.
- 5.3 Building on the great work already being done to improve **communication** and to reach out to a wider audience via various media platforms, the MFPA will continue to bolster these efforts to expand its outreach and raise its profile.
- 5.4 We will be increasing our ongoing efforts to identify means and ways for the Association to become more **financially self-sustainable** and ensure a legacy is left for the next generation of MFPA administrators and players.
- 5.5 Embracing **digital transformation**. Digitization and digitalization serve as the path towards digital transformation. Currently all data kept by the MFPA is already in digital format. However, digitized data is not all being used to improve workflows and enhance operations. Hence the next step is to use digitized data to process information and improve workflows by automating existing processes (digitalization). This will be used to accomplish various goals, such as increasing operational efficiency, reducing costs, minimising human errors, enabling data analysis and create greater value for members. Digital transformation will be then achieved by integrating technology to most, if not all of the organisation's operations.
- 5.6 Develop and implement an effective equality, diversity and inclusion strategy. The MFPA wishes to embed an EDI strategy and hence make a long-term, sustainable commitment to change.



### Key Performance Indicators

- Conduct a digital and social media audit every 2 years.
- Take an open approach to digital transformation and have the membership registration process, membership audit reports and all financial transactions fully digitized by 2026.
- Have a thorough look at how all MFPA's processes can be improved by digitalization.
- Add at least one revenue stream and reduce/restructure one of the main fixed costs such as rent by 2026.
- By the end of 2024, the MFPA will have at least 80% of professional players registered with Maltese clubs as their members.







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