



## ACTION PLAN 2024

This action plan is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on four priority areas which are designed as the foundation for future development. These priority areas are addressed individually in this action plan. For each priority area a set of specific objectives are set out as well as actions to enable the achievement of these objectives.

In addition to these main priority areas, the federation will continue to work within the framework of the organisation's vision, mission, values, and strategic goals to create and maintain the conditions for playing rugby and for competitions activities both in Finland and for national teams internationally as well as to improve the visibility and recognition of the sport. Key objectives and actions related to this continuous every-day work of the federation are presented in part 2.

### ***Vision***

To be a self-sufficient federation with the necessary and required structures and with authorised, trained, qualified and dedicated staff and volunteers that promote Finnish rugby locally and globally in accordance with the recommendations of the relevant governing bodies, in order to secure the growth of rugby in Finland.

### ***Mission***

To promote, develop, and maintain the sport among all stakeholders in Finland, including players, administrators, coaches, sponsors, supporters, and governing bodies.

### ***Values***

The values follow the values of World Rugby: Integrity, Respect, Solidarity, Passion, and Discipline.

The continuous goals of the Finnish Rugby Federation are to:

- Promote the values, spirit, and ethos of rugby in Finland
- Facilitate and support long-term participation and continuous involvement in the game by all stakeholders encouraging collaboration and mobility between categories
- Have a sustainable year on year increase in registered players in all categories
- Identify, secure, and sustain long-term partners ensuring that they get a return for their investment through various avenues



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### **PART 1 - Main priorities**

#### **A) GROWTH OF THE GAME**

##### **Current situation**

Rugby is one of the most well-known and popular team sports globally, but in Finland, it is among the marginal sports and relatively unknown. The growth in the number of licence holders is crucial for the development of rugby in Finland and for securing and increasing funding. The number of licences is one of the key metrics governing bodies monitor and use in the allocation of funding. For example, resources and support available through the Olympic Committee increase significantly after more than 1,000 annual licences.

The number of competition licences developed positively until 2017, after which it has declined to the current level of approximately 600 annual licences. Between 2015-2017, the number of licences was at its highest and there were around 700 competition licences. The amount began to decrease after this. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was not yet clearly visible in 2020 when the number of licences decreased by only 50 compared to the previous year. The impact of the pandemic and related restrictions was more noticeable in 2021 when the competition licences (approx 540) were at their lowest since 2011. The total annual number of other licence categories (referee, administrative, junior and non-competitive) has been below 100 in recent years.

Recruitment and retention of new players are central for long-term sustainable growth, both in terms of domestic competitions and competitive national teams, and financial sustainability. The federation plays an active role in supporting and encouraging recruitment, but the desire to recruit new players, active planning of recruitment and the local implementation of recruitment must be club-driven.

Globally, rugby is a growing sport especially among women and girls. In Finland, about one-third of players are women and girls. The number of women's licences has remained steady at just under 200 over the past few years. Women's competitions and the number of participating teams have expanded in recent years following the re-establishment of the women's division in 2021. More and more clubs also have women's teams, and in 2022, the first club focusing on women's rugby was founded. However, at the same time, the number of teams in the women's Championship has decreased from six to five, and the teams have struggled to field full teams throughout the season, especially without the use of loan players. Similar issues with the line ups have been seen in the Division 1 which expanded from four to five teams in 2023, leading to an increase in the number of matches from 12 to 20. In the 2023 season, four matches were forfeited in the women's Championship and seven matches in women's division 1 (compared to one and none in the 2022 season).

The club-driven junior rugby strategy from 2020 determined that the activities would target 15-17-year-olds allowing recruited players the opportunity to transition to be able to the adult competitions and preventing the end of their involvement in rugby due to lack of competition activities. In practice, engaging youth in their teenage years and on the verge of adulthood is challenging. It requires a significant amount of time and resources from clubs and the federation due to the competition with other hobbies and competing activities. In this situation, rugby should,



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like many other sports, focus on establishing training groups and teams for children, especially those in primary school and younger, and supporting children's rugby. By growing the number of children involved in rugby, it is possible to maintain junior groups with sufficient numbers through age groups and youth. Parents are also most active in club and team activities when the children are younger.

### Objectives

- To create a sustainable player and participant base for rugby by retaining existing players and other actors for longer and keeping them more engaged as well as through developing the recruitment of new players and other actors
- To diversify and extend player pathways through development of alternative formats including non-contact rugby and junior activities in both competitive and recreational versions

### Actions

- Development of junior activities
  - Update the junior strategy together with clubs during 2024
  - Start building junior groups beginning with the youngest age groups, and support clubs in establishing junior groups and provide coaches with education and training
  - Enhance school cooperation for instance by providing ready-made guidelines to teachers for organising rugby training during PE classes
  - Add information on junior rugby to the federation website
- Development of non-contact rugby activities
  - Continue the development of touch activities by encouraging the use of the format and the establishment of groups in clubs. Provide information and training opportunities on the format and introduce touch as a part of rugby at events in which the federation participates. Plan, in cooperation with clubs, to introduce touch to school PE classes
  - Plan to initiate competition activities during either during the upcoming or following operational period, with the goal of official touch tournament or league
  - Look into T1 rugby, the non-contact version developed by World Rugby and its integration into Finnish rugby
  - Add information on non-contact rugby to the federation website
- Women and girls' rugby
  - Investigate the current situation of women and girls' rugby in Finland and possible development actions through a study project to be completed in cooperation with the federation
- Increasing the number of players and other people involved
  - Explore the possibility of organising a nation-wide recruitment campaign in spring and autumn, and implement it if deemed useful
  - Ensure that all those involved in rugby have a valid licence
  - Explore the feasibility of new licence categories such as a group non-competitive licences for juniors or short-term event licences. Implement if there is a need for new categories
  - Adding a "Welcome to Rugby" section to the federation website



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### Outputs

- Updated junior strategy
- New clubs have either established or are planning junior groups, and junior activities continue in clubs with existing activities. Clubs that are not currently planning junior activities have been identified
- Updated model guidelines (rugby and touch) for clubs and schools for organising school sports classes and in recreational groups
- Several clubs organise non-contact rugby activities
- Information on junior rugby and non-contact as well as on where and how to try and play rugby can be found on federation website
- Plan for competition activities in non-contact rugby
- Report on women and girls rugby with development actions
- Number of licences has started to increase across all licence categories



### **B) TRAINING AND EDUCATION**

#### **Current situation**

The development of rugby requires the development of knowledge and increasing the competence of those involved. Training and education together with increasing rugby-related knowledge and competencies are a central part of enhancing player welfare and improving player safety.

In Finland, there is a limited number of qualified individuals to provide the necessary courses, and in some cases, there are no such individuals for certain types of training. Therefore, organizing training and education activities requires cooperation with other federations and Rugby Europe, and in some cases, participation in courses outside of Finland.

The training and education requirements of national team management have increased.

#### **Objectives**

- To coordinate and organise training and education activities based on the course calendar that actively respond to needs, contribute to the development of both rugby and individuals, and increase rugby-related knowledge and competencies
- To increase the number of own educators
- To create and maintain up-to-date training and education database
- To ensure that all members of national team managements have the necessary qualifications and they fulfil the criteria set by Rugby Europe and World Rugby

#### **Actions**

- Organise training and education activities in Finland based on the course calendar planned together with the educators
- Identify suitable educators for different roles (coaching, S&C, first aid, match official) and provide them with training with the support of the federation, and regional and international bodies
- Create training and education database with information displayed by clubs
- Create training and education plans for national team management
- Collaborate on a thesis project to develop a guidance for preventing of head injuries and increasing player safety

#### **Outputs**

- Organised match official, coaching and S&C courses
- Federation has a training and education database that displays trained individuals by clubs
- Guidance on preventing of head injuries and increasing player safety (thesis project)



### C) DEVELOPMENT OF RUGBY FACILITIES

#### Current situation

The weather conditions in Finland impose restrictions and create challenges for the competition calendar both for domestic competitions and for national team matches. Currently, the 15's competitions during the summer season are primarily played between June and September, with a few matches possible already in late May. This poses challenges for the season's schedule having to also work around holidays (graduation weekend and Midsummer) and Rugby Europe's 7's tournaments for the national teams. The competition calendar for the 15's national teams requires home game to be organised in late autumn and early spring when grass pitches are not necessarily available. In recent years, matches have been cancelled or moved at last minute to an alternative pitch, and calendar changes requested to allow Finland to play its home matches in autumn, in October when pitches are usually still available.

#### Objective

- Long-term goal is to build or support the construction of Finland's first artificial turf field in accordance with World Rugby Act No. 22, which the federation would manage possibly in cooperation with a municipality.
- Ensure necessary rugby facilities in order to have a more flexible time window to play national team matches in Finland
- Explore new playing venues in addition to the existing ones that can be utilised in organisation of national team games or club events. In tandem, seek ways to cooperate with various municipal sports services

#### Actions

- Conduct a survey of the club and municipal sport facilities
- Investigate the usage potential of sport facilities in the capital region
- Initiate the work to determine the construction, maintenance and operating costs of synthetic and other rugby compatible playing surfaces and identify potential partners and funding solutions

#### Outputs

- Federation and national teams have the necessary information regarding the potential playing venues for the year 2024 and the coming years
- There are up-to-date records of clubs' playing facilities that are easily accessible and shareable, allowing the federation to guide and provide support in local facility management.



### D) GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURES

#### Current situation

The requirements imposed on the the federation have increased, and in 2023 the federation has focused on updating for instance its rules, discipline activities and some of its sustainability programmes. The federation activities rely on the contributions of an executive director operating as an external service provider and volunteers. Limited resources create challenges in carrying out the federation's varied tasks.

In recent years, there have been challenges in filling both the federation's board positions and other volunteer roles, which have had repercussions on the federation's activities and planning. The clubs face similar challenges in finding volunteers. The accumulation of tasks and responsibilities on the shoulders of individual volunteers leads to burnout and fatigue, often resulting in individuals stepping out of their roles. The federation's board has attempted to address this by establishing commonly agreed operating procedures and dividing responsibilities. Additionally, the goal is to provide the board members and other federation volunteers with the necessary guidance and to ensure that they have access to required information and files.

#### Objectives

- Ensure that the federation activities meet the set requirements and maintain up-to-date sustainability programmes
- Support the prerequisites for operations and success of the federation's volunteers
- Support the club activities and prerequisites for operations

#### Actions

- Update and, if necessary, draft task descriptions and necessary guidance for all federation actors
- Draft and update federation's sustainability programmes including on environment and good governance, and implement the programmes providing guidance and assistance to the clubs and their members, and individuals involved in the federation
- Update and implement the federation's anti-doping programme and competition manipulation prevention programme promoting their objectives by providing guidance, education and instructions to all entities and stakeholders within the federation's scope - members, players, referees, other officials, national teams, partners and board members
- Conduct TD's club meetings and if necessary club-specific development plans. The number of club meetings will be decided at the start of the operating period and they will be continued also in the following operating period.

#### Outputs

- Club meetings carried out according to the plan set at the beginning of the year
- Federation's sustainability programmes are up-to-date
- Information and guidance necessary for the position is available to all board members and individuals in other federation roles



### **PART 2 - Continuous activities**

#### **1. Monitor the sustainable development of domestic competitions**

- a. Organise competition activities in 7s and 15s formats for both men and women
- b. Support all clubs in recruitment, development, and player retention either by participating or providing information as needed
- c. Ensure an appropriate balance between 7's and 15's for both men and women
- d. Continue the development of women's Division 1 and when teams are ready enable the transition to Championship
- e. Re-evaluate the current loan player rules for both men and women (end-of-season review) to ensure that the future emphasis remains on clubs' own recruitment and development efforts
- f. Maintain an active relationship with both men's and women's rugby coordinators to ensure smooth flow of information and the ability to proactively identify and address potential issues
- g. Plan and organise other competition formats to both adults and juniors if players and team numbers allow

#### **2. Support all four national teams**

- a. Participate in international match and competition activities (Rugby Europe) with all senior national teams
- b. Develop and promote the existing partnership with Eerikkilä to increase its significance as a national training centre for rugby
- c. Provide ongoing support and guidance for sponsor acquisition
- d. Continue to collaborate closely with team management to facilitate proactive information flow

#### **3. Represent Finland's interests in cooperation organisations and administrative bodies**

- a. Ensure the continuity of funding
- b. Advocate for access to international competitions
- c. Aim for improved cooperation in terms of access to information and resources

#### **4. Improve the recognition and visibility of rugby nationwide and increase its attractiveness for corporate partnerships**

- a. Create a communications plan covering all federation activities including domestic competitions and national team activities as well as communication regarding board activities, and ensure that there are necessary resources and persons to implement the plan
- b. Produce and develop regular and open communication in different channels for all stakeholders including clubs
- c. Participate to Yle SM-Viikko that will be organised in Jyväskylä in March 2024 and showcase snow rugby to Finnish television viewers through Yle