



# **AFC CLUB COMPETITIONS – ENTRY REGULATIONS**

## **EDITION 2026**





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ENTRY REGULATIONS**  
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# CONTENTS

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<b>PREAMBLE</b>	<b>5</b>
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<b>DEFINITIONS</b>	<b>6</b>
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<b>SECTION 1: GENERAL PROVISIONS</b>	<b>8</b>
1. Scope of Application	8
2. AFC Club Competitions Ranking	8

---

<b>SECTION 2: SLOT ALLOCATION</b>	<b>9</b>
3. Slot Allocation	9

---

<b>SECTION 3: MEMBER ASSOCIATION ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA</b>	<b>15</b>
4. Member Association Eligibility Criteria	15

---

<b>SECTION 4: ELIGIBILITY OF CLUBS</b>	<b>19</b>
5. Eligibility of Clubs	19
6. Club Licensing Criteria	19
7. Sporting Criteria	20
8. Integrity of AFC Club Competitions	21
9. Appeal	25

---

<b>SECTION 5: CLOSING PROVISIONS</b>	<b>26</b>
10. Draw Mechanism	26
11. Disciplinary Measures	26
12. Decisions	26
13. Amendments	26
14. Matters Not Provided For	26
15. Implementing Provisions	26
16. Enforcement	27

---

<b>APPENDIX 1: AFC CLUB COMPETITIONS RANKING PRINCIPLES</b>	<b>28</b>
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## PREAMBLE

These Entry Regulations set out the principles for allocating slots to Member Associations and their eligible clubs to participate in AFC Club Competitions from the 2027/28 Sporting Season onwards.

These Entry Regulations shall be read in conjunction with the relevant competition regulations and circulars. These Entry Regulations form an integral part of any such competition regulations and/or circulars.

## DEFINITIONS

In these Entry Regulations, capitalised terms shall have the following meanings, unless the context specifically indicates otherwise:

<b>ACGL</b>	The AFC Challenge League.
<b>ACL Elite</b>	The AFC Champions League Elite.
<b>ACL Two</b>	The AFC Champions League Two.
<b>AFC Club Competitions</b>	The AFC Champions League Elite, the AFC Champions League Two and the AFC Challenge League.
<b>AFC Club Competitions Ranking</b>	A ranking of the Member Associations based on the results of all their clubs in AFC Club Competitions (and where applicable, the AFC Champions League and AFC Cup) determined in accordance with Appendix 1 to these Entry Regulations.
<b>East Ranking</b>	The ranking for the East Region determined by the AFC Club Competitions Ranking.
<b>East Region</b>	The region comprising Member Associations from the ASEAN geographic zone and East geographic zone as identified in Article 7 of the AFC Statutes.
<b>Entry Regulations</b>	These AFC Club Competitions – Entry Regulations.
<b>Member Association Eligibility Criteria</b>	The criteria set out in Article 4 of these Entry Regulations.
<b>Regional Ranking(s)</b>	The West Ranking and/or East Ranking (as applicable).
<b>Sporting Criteria</b>	The criteria set out in Article 7 of these Entry Regulations.
<b>Sporting Season</b>	The period starting with the first official match of a competition and ending with the last official match of the relevant competition.
<b>Titleholder</b>	The champion of the most recently concluded edition of an AFC Club Competition.
<b>West Ranking</b>	The ranking for the West Region determined by the AFC Club Competitions Ranking.
<b>West Region</b>	The region comprising Member Associations from the West geographic zone, South geographic zone and Central geographic zone as identified in Article 7 of the AFC Statutes.

For the purposes of these Entry Regulations, and provided the context so permits:

- (a) the singular shall include the plural and vice-versa;
- (b) the masculine gender shall include the feminine and vice-versa;
- (c) references to natural persons shall include any legal person or corporation;
- (d) references to the AFC shall include its successors and permitted assigns and, where the context requires, the AFC Committees;
- (e) references to the AFC Commercial Rights Partner or Commercial Affiliates shall include, where advised by the AFC, their successors and permitted assigns;
- (f) all defined terms, unless otherwise stated herein, shall bear the same meaning as ascribed in the AFC Statutes, the relevant AFC Competition Regulations, the AFC Competition Operations Manual and the AFC Club Licensing Regulations, unless the context indicates otherwise; and
- (g) references to Articles shall mean the Articles of these Regulations, unless expressly stated otherwise.

## SECTION 1: GENERAL PROVISIONS

### 1. Scope of Application

- 1.1. These Entry Regulations govern the entry of clubs into AFC Club Competitions from the 2027/28 Sporting Season onwards.
- 1.2. These Entry Regulations set out the mechanism for allocating slots to Member Associations and their eligible clubs to participate in AFC Club Competitions.
- 1.3. Any reference to the AFC Statutes and to AFC and FIFA regulations refers to those in force at the time of application.

### 2. AFC Club Competitions Ranking

- 2.1. The principles for determining the AFC Club Competitions Ranking are set out in Appendix 1 to these Entry Regulations. The calculations for the AFC Club Competitions Ranking carried out by the AFC General Secretariat are final and binding and not appealable.
- 2.2. The two (2) Regional Rankings shall be used to determine the number of slots allocated to each Member Association in forthcoming AFC Club Competitions.
- 2.3. The AFC General Secretariat shall publish the AFC Club Competitions Ranking which shall be used to determine the Regional Rankings in accordance with the provisions set out in these Entry Regulations.

## SECTION 2: SLOT ALLOCATION

## 3. Slot Allocation

- 3.1. Subject to the other relevant provisions within these Entry Regulations, Member Associations in the West Ranking shall be allocated the following provisional positions and slots for AFC Club Competitions:

WEST RANK	ACL Elite		ACL Two		ACGL	
	DIRECT (LS)	INDIRECT (PS)	DIRECT (GS)	INDIRECT (PS)	DIRECT (GS)	INDIRECT (PS)
1	3	2	1			
2	3	1	1			
3	3		1			
4	2		1			
5	1	1	1			
6	1		1			
7		1	1			
8			1	1		
9			1	1		
10			1	1		
11				1	1	
12				1	1	
13					1	
14-25						1 each

\* LS: League Stage / GS: Group Stage / PS: Preliminary Stage

- 3.2. Subject to the other relevant provisions within these Entry Regulations, Member Associations in the East Ranking shall be allocated the following provisional positions and slots for AFC Club Competitions:

EAST RANK	ACL Elite		ACL Two		ACGL	
	DIRECT (LS)	INDIRECT (PS)	DIRECT (GS)	INDIRECT (PS)	DIRECT (GS)	INDIRECT (PS)
1	3	2	1			
2	3	1	1			
3	3		1			
4	2		1			
5	1	1	1			
6	1		1			
7		1	1			
8			1	1		
9			1	1		
10			1	1		
11				1		1
12				1		1
13-22						1 each

\* LS: League Stage / GS: Group Stage / PS: Preliminary Stage

- 3.3. For the avoidance of doubt, the AFC General Secretariat has the right to make any necessary adjustments to the slot allocations set out in Articles 3.1 and 3.2 in the manner provided for in these Entry Regulations. The adjusted slot allocation will be notified to the Member Associations by circular letter.

Clubs Eliminated in Preliminary Stage

- 3.4. Club(s) eliminated in the ACL Elite Preliminary Stage shall enter the ACL Two Group Stage for the same Sporting Season. In such cases, the relevant Member Association(s) shall receive additional ACL Two direct slot(s) only for the specific purpose of admitting the Club(s) that are eliminated in the ACL Elite Preliminary Stage (i.e. the relevant Member Association’s previously allocated slots in ACL Two will not be affected).
- 3.5. Club(s) eliminated in the ACL Two Preliminary Stage shall enter the ACGL Group Stage for the same Sporting Season. In such cases, the relevant Member Association(s) shall receive additional ACGL direct slot(s) only for the specific purpose of admitting the Club(s) that are eliminated in the ACL Two Preliminary Stage (i.e. the relevant Member Association’s previously allocated slots in ACGL will not be affected).

Slots for Titleholders and the ACGL runner-up

- 3.6. The Titleholder of each AFC Club Competition and the ACGL runner-up shall be allocated a slot in the next edition of AFC Club Competitions as follows:
  - 3.6.1. the ACL Elite Titleholder shall be allocated an ACL Elite direct slot;
  - 3.6.2. the ACL Two Titleholder shall be allocated an ACL Elite indirect slot; and
  - 3.6.3. the ACGL Titleholder shall be allocated an ACL Two direct slot and the ACGL runner-up shall be allocated an ACL Two indirect slot.
- 3.7. All Titleholders and the ACGL runner-up shall be allocated the relevant slots as per Article 3.6 even if they do not qualify for the relevant AFC Club Competition by virtue of failing to meet the Sporting Criteria.
- 3.8. Notwithstanding Articles 3.6 and 3.7, the Titleholders and the ACGL runner-up must meet the eligibility requirements set out in Articles 4, 6 and 8 in order for the relevant slot(s) to be allocated to them.
- 3.9. Unless decided otherwise by the AFC, where any Titleholder and the ACGL runner-up participates in the next edition of the AFC Club Competition of which it is the Titleholder and the ACGL runner-up, it shall, for operational purposes (e.g. seeding for entries), be deemed to be the highest-seeded club within the relevant stage (i.e. Preliminary Stage or Group Stage/League Stage) of that AFC Club Competition. For the avoidance of doubt, this provision shall apply as follows:
  - 3.9.1. the ACL Elite Titleholder shall be deemed the highest-seeded club of the ACL Elite League Stage and Preliminary Stage;
  - 3.9.2. the ACL Two Titleholder shall be deemed the highest-seeded club of the ACL Two Group Stage and Preliminary Stage;
  - 3.9.3. the ACGL Titleholder shall be deemed the highest-seeded club of the ACGL Group Stage and Preliminary Stage within its respective region (i.e., the East Region or West Region, as applicable); and
  - 3.9.4. the ACGL runner-up shall be deemed the highest-seeded club of the ACGL Group Stage and Preliminary Stage within its respective region (i.e., the East Region or West Region, as applicable).
- 3.10. Where any Titleholder and the ACGL runner-up, by virtue of meeting the relevant Sporting Criteria, qualifies for the relevant stage of the AFC Club Competition to which it is entitled in accordance with Articles 3.6.1 to 3.6.3, it shall occupy an existing slot allocated to its Member Association.
- 3.11. Where the ACL Two Titleholder qualifies for a direct slot in the next edition of the ACL Elite by virtue of meeting the Sporting Criteria, it shall occupy an existing slot allocated to its Member Association. Where the ACGL Titleholder qualifies for any slot in the next edition of the ACL Elite by virtue of meeting the Sporting Criteria, it shall occupy an

existing slot allocated to its Member Association. Where the ACGL runner-up qualifies for any slot in the next edition of the ACL Elite or direct slot in the next edition of the ACL Two by virtue of meeting the Sporting Criteria, it shall occupy an existing slot allocated to its Member Association.

3.12. Where the ACL Elite Titleholder does not qualify for a direct slot in the next edition of the ACL Elite by virtue of failing to meet the Sporting Criteria, then either:

3.12.1. it shall occupy an existing ACL Elite direct slot allocated to its Member Association. In such case, the ACL Elite Titleholder shall be deemed to be the highest-seeded club from its Member Association in the ACL Elite League Stage for the purposes of club entries; or

3.12.2. one (1) additional ACL Elite direct slot shall be allocated to the Member Association for the ACL Elite Titleholder in cases where the relevant Member Association has no ACL Elite direct slot based on its Regional Ranking (cf. Articles 3.1 & 3.2) or has only one (1) ACL Elite direct slot but the slot is allocated to the winner of its domestic top division league as per Article 7.1.3. In such case, the ACL Elite Titleholder shall be deemed to be the highest-seeded club from its Member Association in the ACL Elite League Stage for the purposes of club entries.

3.13. Where the ACL Two Titleholder does not qualify for an indirect slot in the next edition of the ACL Elite by virtue of failing to meet the Sporting Criteria, then either:

3.13.1. It shall occupy an existing ACL Elite indirect slot allocated to its Member Association. In such case, the ACL Two Titleholder shall be deemed to be the lowest-seeded club from its Member Association in the ACL Elite Preliminary Stage for the purposes of club entries; or

3.13.2. One (1) additional ACL Elite indirect slot shall be allocated to the Member Association for the ACL Two Titleholder in cases where the relevant Member Association has no ACL Elite indirect slot based on its Regional Ranking (cf. Articles 3.1 & 3.2) or has only one (1) ACL Elite indirect slot but the slot is allocated to the winner of its domestic top division league as per Article 7.1.3. In such cases, the ACL Two Titleholder shall be deemed to be the lowest-seeded club in the ACL Elite Preliminary Stage for the purposes of club entries.

3.14. In case the ACGL Titleholder does not qualify for a direct slot in the next edition of the ACL Two by virtue of failing to meet the Sporting Criteria and/or the ACGL runner-up does not qualify for an indirect slot in the next edition of the ACL Two by virtue of failing to meet the Sporting Criteria, then either:

ACGL Titleholder

3.14.1. it shall occupy an existing ACL Two direct slot allocated to its Member Association. In such case, the ACGL Titleholder shall be deemed to be the lowest-seeded club from its Member Association in the ACL Two Group Stage for the purposes of club entries; or

- 3.14.2. one (1) additional ACL Two direct slot shall be allocated to the Member Association for the ACGL Titleholder in cases where the relevant Member Association has no ACL Two direct slot based on its Regional Ranking (cf. Articles 3.1 & 3.2) or has only one (1) ACL Two direct slot but the slot is allocated to the winner of its domestic top division league as per Article 7.1.3. In such case, the ACGL Titleholder shall be deemed to be the lowest-seeded club in the ACL Two Group Stage for the purposes of club entries.

ACGL Runner-up

- 3.14.3. it shall occupy an existing ACL Two indirect slot allocated to its Member Association. In such case, the ACGL runner-up shall be deemed to be the lowest-seeded club from its Member Association in the ACL Two Preliminary Stage for the purposes of club entries; or
- 3.14.4. one (1) additional ACL Two indirect slot shall be allocated to the Member Association for the ACGL runner-up in cases where the relevant Member Association has no ACL Two indirect slot based on its Regional Ranking (cf. Articles 3.1 & 3.2) or has only one (1) ACL Two indirect slot but the slot is allocated to the winner of its domestic top division league as per Article 7.1.3. In such case, the ACGL runner-up shall be deemed to be the lowest-seeded club in the ACL Two Preliminary Stage for the purposes of club entries.
- 3.15. Subject to the exceptions stipulated in Articles 3.12 to 3.14, the total number of slots allocated to the relevant Member Association shall not change as a result of the operation of Articles 3.10 to 3.14. Subject to Articles 3.19 and 3.20, the remaining slots of the relevant Member Association in AFC Club Competitions shall be reallocated to the next-best seeded eligible Clubs in accordance with Article 7.3.

Principles for Redistribution of Slots

- 3.16. A redistribution of slots shall occur in accordance with Article 3.17 in cases where:
- 3.16.1. for indirect slots, any Member Association which is only allocated indirect slots fails to meet the minimum conditions in accordance with Article 4.4; or
- 3.16.2. as per the Regional Ranking (cf. Articles 3.1 & 3.2), any Member Association has more slots allocated to it than the number of maximum slots provided for in Article 3.19; or
- 3.16.3. any Member Association has more slots allocated to it than the number of its eligible clubs (cf. Section 4); or
- 3.16.4. a club refuses to enter any AFC Club Competition despite meeting the criteria set out in Article 5.1; or
- 3.16.5. in any other case(s) expressly provided for in these Entry Regulations.
- 3.17. In case of a redistribution of slots, the following principles shall be applied within the relevant AFC Club Competition:

- 3.17.1. subject to Articles 3.19 and 3.20, any slot(s) that were forfeited shall be redistributed to the highest eligible Member Association in the same Regional Ranking of the same AFC Club Competition as follows:
- 3.17.1.1. ACL Elite: redistribution of any such slot(s) shall be amongst Member Associations ranked 6th or higher in the same Regional Ranking.
  - 3.17.1.2. ACL Two: redistribution of any such slot(s) shall be amongst Member Associations ranked 12th or higher in the same Regional Ranking.
  - 3.17.1.3. ACGL: redistribution of any such slot(s) shall be amongst Member Associations ranked 13th or lower in the same Regional Ranking.
- 3.18. For the avoidance of doubt, the redistribution of any direct slots shall be done before the redistribution of any indirect slots and any slot(s) which is not allocated to an eligible club shall be annulled and not be redistributed.

Maximum Number of Slots allocated to a Member Association

- 3.19. With the exception of any adjustments to slot(s) allocated to a Member Association in accordance with Articles 3.4, 3.5, 3.12.2, 3.13.2, 3.14.2 and 3.14.4, the maximum number of total slots (direct and indirect) allocated to a Member Association across all AFC Club Competitions shall be limited to whichever number is the lower of the following:
- 3.19.1. A maximum of six (6) slots; or
  - 3.19.2. From the AFC Club Competitions 2031/32 Sporting Season onwards, one-third (1/3) of the total number of clubs in the domestic top division league of the Member Association. For the avoidance of doubt, when determining the total number of clubs in the domestic top division league of a Member Association, ‘foreign’ clubs (i.e. clubs which are not affiliated to the relevant Member Association) shall not be considered. The AFC General Secretariat has the sole discretion to determine whether a club shall be considered ‘foreign’ for such purposes.
- 3.20. With the exception of any adjustments to slot(s) allocated to a Member Association in accordance with Articles 3.4, 3.5, 3.12.2, 3.13.2, 3.14.2, 3.14.4 and 4.3, the maximum number of slots allocated to a Member Association in each specific AFC Club Competition shall be limited to the following:

COMPETITION	MAX. TOTAL SLOTS	MAX. DIRECT SLOTS	MAX. INDIRECT SLOTS
ACL Elite	5	3	2
ACL Two	2	2	1
ACGL	2	1	2

## SECTION 3: MEMBER ASSOCIATION ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

## 4. Member Association Eligibility Criteria

- 4.1. Member Associations must meet the Member Association Eligibility Criteria as set out below in order to be eligible to obtain direct slots for the respective AFC Club Competition:

Criterion 1: Technical Standard			
DESCRIPTION	ACL Elite	ACL Two	ACGL
a) Member Association must be ranked in the Regional Ranking for the respective AFC Club Competition	6 <sup>th</sup> or higher (except for ACL Elite Titleholders)	12 <sup>th</sup> or higher (except for ACGL Titleholders and ACGL runner-up)	11 <sup>th</sup> or lower (except for Clubs eliminated from the ACL Two Preliminary Stage)

Criterion 2: Club Licensing System			
DESCRIPTION	ACL Elite	ACL Two	ACGL
a) Must have established a Club Licensing Administration within the Member Association or League, evidenced by: (i) a full-time Club Licensing Manager; (ii) a First Instance Body and Appeal Body; (iii) Club Licensing Regulations accredited by the AFC General Secretariat; and	✓	✓	✓
b) Club Licensing requirements applied to at least the domestic top division league.	✓	✓	✓

Criterion 3: Sporting Integrity			
DESCRIPTION	ACL Elite	ACL Two	ACGL
a) An integrity officer appointed within the Member Association	✓	✓	✓
b) Regulations/disciplinary code(s) prohibiting and sanctioning match manipulation/match fixing	✓	✓	✓
c) A reporting mechanism and whistleblower policy for match manipulation/match fixing	✓	✓	✓
d) An education seminar for players and team officials per domestic Sporting Season	✓	✓	✓

## Criterion 4: Organisation of Professional Football League

### Part 1 Competition Format

DESCRIPTION	ACL Elite	ACL Two	ACGL
a) Each club in the domestic top division shall play a minimum of twenty-four (24) matches per season (including the domestic top division league, and domestic cup(s))	✓	✓	
b) Each club in the domestic top division shall play a minimum of twelve (12) matches per season (including the domestic top division league, and domestic cup(s))			✓
c) A domestic top division shall have a minimum duration of eight (8) months (including the domestic top division league, domestic cup and any grand final if applicable)	✓	✓	
d) A home and away league format for the domestic top division league	✓	✓	
e) A home and away league format or a single round-robin league format for the domestic top-division league			✓

### Part 2 Governance and Regulations

DESCRIPTION	ACL Elite	ACL Two	ACGL
f) A highest decision-making body of the league (or for league matters), comprising members from relevant stakeholders who reflect the interest of different parties (e.g. representatives from clubs, the league, the Member Association, independent organisations and/or individuals)	✓	✓	✓
g) A full-time dedicated official who oversees operational matters for the league	✓	✓	✓
h) A dedicated management structure for the league	✓	✓	✓
h) Audited financial statements for the league organiser. In case the league is not separate from the Member Association, financial accounts need to be separated for the league.	✓	✓	✓
i) Audited financial statements for the league organiser. In case the league is not separate from the Member Association, financial accounts need to be separated for the league.	✓	✓	✓
j) Competition regulations	✓	✓	✓
k) National regulations for the status and transfer of players	✓	✓	✓
l) A national and/or league disciplinary and ethics code	✓	✓	✓

m) An operational referees’ department	✓	✓	✓
n) Implementation of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system	✓		
o) An education programme for referees	✓	✓	✓
p) Appointed referee assessors at matches	✓	✓	✓
q) Appointed match commissioners at matches	✓	✓	✓
r) Data sharing with AFC for benchmarking purposes	✓	✓	✓

### Part 3 Safety and Security

DESCRIPTION	ACL Elite	ACL Two	ACGL
s) National or league safety and security guidelines	✓	✓	✓
t) Appointed safety and security officers at matches	✓	✓	✓
u) Accurate measurements of attendance and announcement(s) of the figure at matches	✓	✓	

### Part 4 Media

DESCRIPTION	ACL Elite	ACL Two	ACGL
v) Broadcasting of league matches through TV and/or other available platform(s)	✓	✓	
w) Frequent delivery of content of league matches through a league-specific home page and/or social media	✓	✓	
x) All league matches shall be recorded in full	✓	✓	
y) All league matches shall be recorded, at least in highlights			✓
z) Media opportunity to cover matches both on match days and non-match days	✓	✓	✓

### Criterion 5: Stadium

DESCRIPTION	ACL Elite	ACL Two	ACGL
a) The Member Association must have at least this number of stadiums in the domestic top division league that: (i) comply with the AFC Stadium Regulations; and (ii) comply with the AFC Safety and Security Regulations.	2	2	1

### Criterion 6: Logistics, Visa and Accommodation

DESCRIPTION	ACL Elite	ACL Two	ACGL
a) A straightforward process for obtaining visas	✓	✓	✓

b) Daily international flights within the respective region (i.e. West Region or East Region)	✓	✓	✓
c) Simplified airport procedure, straightforward immigration/customs process	✓	✓	✓
d) Well-established local transportation infrastructure	✓	✓	✓
e) Teams and official hotels at the applicable standard	✓	✓	✓

- 4.2. Member Associations shall be responsible for ensuring that all criteria listed in Article 4.1 have been met and are properly implemented. The AFC General Secretariat may request Member Associations to provide information for assessments and is solely responsible for determining whether a Member Association meets the Member Association Eligibility Criteria.
- 4.3. With the exception of any additional slot(s) allocated to a Member Association in accordance with Articles 3.4 and 3.5, Member Associations that fail to fulfil the Member Association Eligibility Criteria shall, subject to Article 4.4, be eligible to be allocated only indirect slots for the relevant AFC Club Competition. In such cases, the number of direct slots for the relevant Member Association(s) in the relevant AFC Club Competition shall be wholly converted into indirect slots (e.g. 2+1 becomes 0+3).
- 4.4. Member Associations which are allocated only indirect slots must, as a minimum, meet the following criteria:
- 4.4.1. Criterion 4: Organisation of Professional Football League – Part 1: Competition Format;
  - 4.4.2. Criterion 5: Stadium;
  - 4.4.3. Criterion 6: Logistics, Visa and Accommodation; and
  - 4.4.4. their eligible club(s) must be licensed in accordance with Article 6.
- 4.5. In the event that a Member Association fails to meet the minimum conditions as set out in Article 4.1 and/or Article 4.4, and has more slots allocated to it than the number of its eligible clubs (cf. Section 4), any of its direct slots which are not allocated to an eligible club shall be redistributed in accordance with Article 3.17 without converting them into indirect slots as provided for in Article 4.3.

## SECTION 4: ELIGIBILITY OF CLUBS

### 5. Eligibility of Clubs

- 5.1. To be eligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions, a club must:
  - 5.1.1. be granted a licence in accordance with Article 6;
  - 5.1.2. meet the Sporting Criteria; and
  - 5.1.3. comply with the rules on the integrity of AFC Club Competitions as set out in Article 8.
- 5.2. In case of failure to meet any of the criteria defined in Article 5.1, a club shall be considered ineligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions. Accordingly, subject to Articles 3.19 and 3.20, such club shall be replaced by the next-best seeded eligible club from the same Member Association in accordance with Article 7.3.

### 6. Club Licensing Criteria

- 6.1. Member Associations are required to implement a national club licensing system for all the clubs within their domestic top division league, in accordance with the AFC Club Licensing Regulations.
- 6.2. Clubs that meet the Sporting Criteria must have validly received a licence from the relevant national licensor.
- 6.3. Where a Member Association has fewer licensed clubs than slots allocated to it, their slot(s) shall be redistributed in accordance with Article 3.17.
- 6.4. If a club fails to acquire a licence for an AFC Club Competition for which it would be eligible in accordance with the Sporting Criteria then it shall not be eligible to enter any other AFC Club Competition in the same Sporting Season.

#### Extraordinary Application

- 6.5. Where a club has not acquired a licence from the relevant national licensor, that licensor may, on behalf of such club, request an extraordinary application of the club licensing system in accordance with the AFC Club Licensing Regulations.
- 6.6. Member Associations which do not have an approved national licensing process shall only request an extraordinary application once for each relevant club. This limit includes all requests undertaken in previous AFC Club Competitions Sporting Seasons.

#### AFC Entry Control Body

- 6.7. The AFC Club Licensing Regulations set out the matters relating to the club licensing criteria that may be lodged or appealed before the AFC Entry Control Body. Such decisions shall

be made in accordance with the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body.

## 7. Sporting Criteria

- 7.1. Subject to the relevant provisions of these Entry Regulations, each Member Association shall set the methodology for nomination of its representative club(s) for AFC Club Competitions. Notwithstanding the foregoing, each Member Association shall ensure that without exception:
- 7.1.1. subject to Articles 3.6 to 3.14, its club(s) qualify for AFC Club Competitions based on sporting merit;
  - 7.1.2. it clearly identifies a domestic top division league and domestic cup (if applicable) for the purposes of these Entry Regulations;
  - 7.1.3. subject to Articles 3.9, 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14, the highest-seeded club nominated by the Member Association is the winner of its domestic top division league. In case the domestic top division league consists of different formats (e.g. a Knockout Stage after the completion of a League Stage), the Member Association shall be responsible for determining the winner of the domestic top division league as part of its nomination principles;
  - 7.1.4. the principles of objectivity, transparency and non-discrimination are respected with a view to ensuring fair entry into AFC Club Competitions; and
  - 7.1.5. the nomination principles are approved by the relevant competent bodies within its Member Association and/or League prior to submission to the AFC General Secretariat.
- 7.2. Member Associations shall submit their proposed methodology for nominating their representative clubs to the AFC General Secretariat in writing by no later than 31 March preceding the start of the relevant AFC Club Competition Sporting Season. Once submitted, Member Associations shall only be required to resubmit their proposed methodology for subsequent AFC Club Competition Sporting Seasons if any changes have been made to the methodology (in which case the aforementioned deadline shall apply).
- The domestic top division league or domestic cup specified in the proposed methodology submitted by Member Associations must conclude no later than 30 June of the year in which the relevant AFC Club Competition Sporting Season is scheduled to commence. If the domestic top division league or domestic cup concludes later than 30 June for any reason, the proposed nomination methodology shall be deemed invalid unless the AFC decides otherwise at its sole discretion.
- 7.3. Member Associations shall submit a list of eligible clubs with their respective seedings for relevant AFC Club Competitions in accordance with the principles set out in these Entry Regulations to the AFC General Secretariat in writing by no later than 31 May preceding the start of the relevant AFC Club Competition Sporting Season.

- 7.4. Only clubs finishing in the top fifty percent (50%) of the final ranking in the domestic top division league (based on the total number of clubs that participated on its first match day) are eligible to meet the Sporting Criteria. For the avoidance of doubt, this Article 7.4 shall not apply to the winner of a domestic cup competition.
- 7.4.1. For example, in a domestic top division league of twelve (12) clubs, only the top six (6) are eligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions on the basis of their finishing positions.
- 7.4.2. For the avoidance of doubt, if the same domestic top division league commenced the Sporting Season with twelve (12) clubs, but only ten (10) completed the full Sporting Season for whatever reason, the top six (6) are eligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions on the basis of their finishing positions.
- 7.4.3. For the avoidance of doubt, when calculating the number of clubs that participated on the first match day of a domestic top division league and the final finishing position, 'foreign clubs' (i.e. clubs which are not affiliated to the relevant Member Association) shall not be considered. The AFC General Secretariat has the sole discretion to determine whether a club shall be considered 'foreign' for the above purpose.
- 7.5. This Article 7 shall only take into consideration the domestic top division league and domestic cup ending in the domestic Sporting Season immediately preceding the relevant AFC Club Competition.
- 7.6. For the avoidance of doubt, in case a club meets the Sporting Criteria to be eligible to participate in more than one (1) AFC Club Competition, it shall participate in the highest-tier AFC Club Competition for which it is sportingly eligible.

## 8. Integrity of AFC Club Competitions

- 8.1. The provisions of this Article 8 aim to safeguard the integrity of AFC Club Competitions and matches.
- 8.2. Clubs must be committed to ensuring that they conform to the highest ethical, integrity and sporting standards at all times in their dealings with the AFC under this Article 8 and shall not provide false, incomplete, misleading and/or inaccurate information to the AFC and/or fail to comply with any request for information from the AFC in connection with their obligations. Cases of non-compliance with these overarching duties may be referred to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee.

### Clubs directly or indirectly involved in match manipulation

- 8.3. In furtherance of Article 74 (6) of the AFC Statutes, if on the basis of all the factual circumstances and information available to it, the AFC Entry Control Body concludes to its comfortable satisfaction that a club has been directly and/or indirectly involved in any activity aimed at arranging or influencing the outcome of a match at national or international level at any time in the ten (10) years prior to the start of the upcoming Sporting Season, such club

shall be declared ineligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions. Such ineligibility is effective for only one (1) Sporting Season.

- 8.3.1. When making this administrative decision, the AFC Entry Control Body can rely on, but is not bound by, a decision of a national or international sporting body, arbitral tribunal, or state court.
- 8.3.2. The AFC Entry Control Body can refrain from declaring a club ineligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions if it is comfortably satisfied that the impact of a decision made in connection with the same factual circumstances by a national or international sporting body, arbitral tribunal or state court has already had or has the effect to prevent that club from participating in AFC Club Competitions.

#### Matters of ownership and control

- 8.4. No club participating in an AFC Club Competition may, either directly or indirectly:
  - 8.4.1. hold or deal in the securities or shares of any other club participating in the same AFC Club Competition;
  - 8.4.2. be a member of any other club participating in the same AFC Club Competition;
  - 8.4.3. be involved in any capacity whatsoever in the management, administration and/or sporting performance of any other club participating in the same AFC Club Competition; and/or
  - 8.4.4. have any power whatsoever in the management, administration and/or sporting performance of any other club participating in the same AFC Club Competition,

if there is a material risk that such circumstance(s) would actually or potentially jeopardise the integrity of the relevant AFC Club Competition and/or any match in the relevant AFC Club Competition.

- 8.5. No individual or legal entity may simultaneously be involved, either directly or indirectly, in any capacity whatsoever in the management, administration and/or sporting performance of more than one (1) club participating in the same AFC Club Competition if there is a material risk that this would actually or potentially jeopardise the integrity of the relevant AFC Club Competition and/or any match in the relevant AFC Club Competition.
- 8.6. No individual or legal entity may have control or influence over more than one (1) club participating in the same AFC Club Competition if there is a material risk that this would actually or potentially jeopardise the integrity of the relevant AFC Club Competition and/or any match in the relevant AFC Club Competition.

In assessing whether control or influence exists for the purposes of this Article 8.6, the following factors shall be taken into account:

- 8.6.1. holding a majority of the shareholders' voting rights in the relevant clubs;
  - 8.6.2. having the right to appoint or remove a majority of the members of the administrative, management, or supervisory body of the relevant clubs;
  - 8.6.3. being a shareholder and alone controlling a majority of the shareholders' voting rights in the relevant clubs pursuant to an agreement entered into with other shareholders of the relevant clubs; and/or
  - 8.6.4. being able to exercise by any means a decisive influence in the decision-making of the relevant clubs.
- 8.7. The burden of proof shall rest on the relevant club to prove its compliance with the provisions of Articles 8.4 to 8.6. With this in mind, in order to ensure the integrity and smooth operation of AFC Club Competitions and matches, any club that anticipates that it may participate in an AFC Club Competition in the future (whether for the first time or otherwise) but has any questions and/or concerns over its ability to comply with any of these provisions shall submit all relevant information to the AFC General Secretariat by no later than 31 March preceding the Sporting Season in which it anticipates that it may participate.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the AFC General Secretariat shall be entitled, at its discretion, to request information from any club at any time in connection with the matters covered by Articles 8.4 to 8.6.

- 8.8. If the AFC General Secretariat considers that any clubs may not or do not comply with Article 8.4, Article 8.5 and/or Article 8.6 prior to the relevant clubs' participation in the relevant AFC Club Competition, it shall:
- 8.8.1. provided that timing permits and at its sole discretion, have the opportunity to enter into discussions with the relevant club(s) in order to reach an agreement to resolve the matter(s) of non-compliance (requiring the immediate implementation of changes, safeguards and/or other mechanisms at the relevant club(s) to avoid non-compliance); and/or
  - 8.8.2. refer the matter to the AFC Entry Control Body, together with a full report on the alleged non-compliance (and, where applicable, details of any agreement reached pursuant to Article 8.8.1 and evidence of the relevant club(s)' compliance with the same).

For the avoidance of doubt, any discussions and agreements reached pursuant to Article 8.8.1 must be concluded by 15 June preceding the relevant Sporting Season at the latest.

- 8.9. For the avoidance of doubt, the AFC General Secretariat shall be entitled to seek external professional advice for the purposes of any discussions, assessment and/or agreement under Article 8.8.1.
- 8.10. The AFC Entry Control Body shall make all final decisions regarding any allegations of non-compliance with Article 8.4, Article 8.5 and/or Article 8.6 which arise prior to the

relevant clubs' participation in the relevant AFC Club Competition.

For the avoidance of doubt, this shall include ratifying or not ratifying any agreement reached pursuant to Article 8.8.1 and confirming the relevant clubs' compliance with the same.

Clubs should be aware that the AFC Entry Control Body decides on the eligibility of clubs to enter the relevant AFC Club Competition by reference to the appropriate date(s) of assessment and shall not allow entry subject to conditions or future commitments regarding the performance of obligations.

- 8.11. Should the AFC Entry Control Body determine that any clubs do not comply with Article 8.4, Article 8.5 and/or Article 8.6 prior to the relevant clubs' participation in the relevant AFC Club Competition or decide not to ratify any agreement reached pursuant to Article 8.8.1 (including, without limitation, where any required changes, safeguards and/or other mechanisms at the relevant club(s) to avoid non-compliance have not been implemented), then only one (1) of the relevant clubs may be admitted to compete in the relevant AFC Club Competition (including the potential case of clubs competing in the same AFC Club Competition due to the operation of Articles 3.4 and 3.5). In such case, Article 8.12 or 8.13 shall be implemented by the AFC General Secretariat.
- 8.12. If the non-compliance is determined prior to the relevant clubs' participation in the relevant AFC Club Competition and the AFC General Secretariat determines at its discretion that it is reasonably practicable to do so, then, subject to their compliance with these Entry Regulations and provided that the applicable slot allocations allow it, the relevant clubs may be admitted to different AFC Club Competitions in accordance with the following principles (to apply in descending order):
  - 8.12.1. in the first instance, where applicable, the eligible club which qualifies on sporting merit for the higher-tier AFC Club Competition shall have priority (i.e. in descending order, as applicable: ACL Elite, ACL Two or ACGL);
  - 8.12.2. if, having applied Article 8.12.1, the relevant eligible clubs are affiliated to different Member Associations, the eligible club which is affiliated to a Member Association with the higher ranking in the AFC Club Competitions Ranking shall have priority; and
  - 8.12.3. if, having applied Article 8.12.2, and the relevant eligible clubs are affiliated to the same Member Association, the eligible club which is the higher seed shall have priority.

For the avoidance of doubt, it is not necessarily the case that all of the relevant clubs will be admitted to AFC Club Competitions.s.

- 8.13. If the non-compliance is determined prior to the relevant clubs' participation in the relevant AFC Club Competition and the AFC General Secretariat determines at its

discretion that it is not reasonably practicable to implement the provisions of Article 8.12 for whatever reason(s) then the AFC General Secretariat shall determine the next steps at its discretion, having regard to the importance of safeguarding the integrity and smooth operation of AFC Club Competitions and matches in AFC Club Competitions.

- 8.14. Compliance with Articles 8.4 to 8.6 is a continuing obligation for all participating clubs throughout the relevant AFC Club Competition season. If the AFC General Secretariat considers that any participating club(s) may not or does not comply with Article 8.4, Article 8.5 and/or Article 8.6 after the relevant AFC Club Competition has started, then the relevant club(s) shall be permitted to complete the relevant AFC Club Competition, however, the AFC General Secretariat shall refer the matter to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee together with a full report on the alleged non-compliance. In such circumstances, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee shall make a decision on the question of the alleged non-compliance and may impose disciplinary sanctions in respect of any breach of the regulations in accordance with Article 59.2 of the AFC Statutes. In this regard, the relevant clubs may without limitation, be disqualified from participating in one (1) or more future editions of AFC Club Competitions. This shall include, without limitation, situations where a club has breached Article 8.2 and/or where there has been a change of circumstances at the relevant club(s) during the season (whether made intentionally to circumvent the relevant provision(s) or otherwise).

## 9. Appeal

- 9.1. Any appeal against a decision of the AFC Entry Control Body shall be made in accordance with the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body.

## SECTION 5: CLOSING PROVISIONS

### 10. Draw Mechanism

- 10.1. The draw mechanism for AFC Club Competitions shall be published by the AFC General Secretariat in advance of any draw.

### 11. Disciplinary Measures

- 11.1. All disciplinary measures in relation to these Entry Regulations shall be undertaken in accordance with the current AFC Statutes, AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code and any relevant AFC circular.

### 12. Decisions

- 12.1. All decisions made in accordance with these Entry Regulations, except where expressly identified otherwise, are final and binding and not appealable in accordance with the AFC Statutes.

### 13. Amendments

- 13.1. The AFC reserves the right to make amendments to any part of these Entry Regulations for any reason whatsoever. Such amendments shall be duly communicated to the Member Associations and clubs in due course.

### 14. Matters Not Provided For

- 14.1. Matters not provided for in these Entry Regulations shall be decided by the AFC Competitions Committee. Such decisions are final and binding and not appealable.

### 15. Implementing Provisions

- 15.1. The AFC General Secretariat is entrusted with the operational management of AFC Club Competitions and is therefore entitled to make decisions and adopt the detailed provisions necessary for implementing these Entry Regulations.

## 16. Enforcement

- 16.1. These Entry Regulations were ratified by the AFC Executive Committee on 29 April 2026 and came into force on 1 June 2026.
- 16.2. These Entry Regulations shall be applicable to AFC Club Competitions from the 2027/28 Sporting Season onwards.
- 16.3. For the avoidance of doubt, the AFC Club Competitions - Entry Regulations (Edition 2025) shall be applicable to the AFC Club Competitions 2026/27 Sporting Season.

For the AFC Executive Committee

**Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa**  
*President*

**Datuk Seri Windsor John**  
*General Secretary*

## APPENDIX 1: AFC CLUB COMPETITIONS RANKING PRINCIPLES

### How are the rankings determined?

The AFC Club Competitions Ranking is a ranking of Member Associations based on the results of all their clubs in AFC Club Competitions (and where applicable, the AFC Champions League and AFC Cup) over the previous eight (8) relevant Sporting Seasons. To ensure the rankings better reflect the latest sporting results, points obtained in each relevant Sporting Season have a different weighted value as below:

SPORTING SEASON	Y	Y-1	Y-2	Y-3	Y-4	Y-5	Y-6	Y-7
WEIGHTED VALUE	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.3

\* Y = most recently concluded AFC Club Competitions Sporting Season

\* The 2020 Sporting Season is excluded from all point calculations and Y-8 will be included instead for such cases

*e.g. calculation of points for 2025/26 ranking*

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Points for 2025/26 Ranking} = & \text{2025/26 points} \times 1 \\
 & + \text{2024/25 points} \times 0.9 \\
 & + \text{2023/24 points} \times 0.8 \\
 & + \text{2022 points} \times 0.7 \\
 & + \text{2021 points} \times 0.6 \\
 & + \text{2019 points} \times 0.5 \\
 & + \text{2018 points} \times 0.4 \\
 & + \text{2017 points} \times 0.3 \quad \text{*included as Y-8, instead of 2020}
 \end{aligned}$$

The rankings determine the slot allocation of each Member Association in forthcoming AFC Club Competitions.

## How are the Points of each Sporting Season calculated?

From the 2024/25 Sporting Season, each participating club is awarded points as follows:

		ACL Elite	ACL Two	ACGL
Preliminary Stage	Win	0.3	0.3	0.3
	Draw	0.15	0.15	0.15
League/Group Stage & Knockout Stage	Win	3	3	3
	Draw	1	1	1
Participation Bonus	Preliminary Stage			0.5
	League/Group Stage	3	3	3
	Round of 16	3	3	
	Quarter Finals	1.5	1.5	3
	Semi Finals	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Final	1.5	1.5	1.5

### Preliminary Stage

- Performance points (points for wins and draws) shall be adjusted per AFC Club Competition as follows:
  - ACL Two points = two-thirds (2/3) of ACL Elite points (i.e. 0.2 for win & 0.1 for draw)
  - ACGL points = one-third (1/3) of ACL Elite points (i.e. 0.1 for win & 0.05 for draw)
- Participation bonus points (fixed points of 0.5 without any tier adjustments) shall only be awarded to participating clubs entering and eliminated from the ACGL Preliminary Stage. For the avoidance of doubt, no bonus points shall be awarded for participating clubs entering the ACGL Preliminary Stage and subsequently qualifying to the ACGL Group Stage, as well as participating clubs in the Preliminary Stage of ACL Elite and ACL Two as they will receive separate points for participating in the League/Group Stage of an AFC Club Competition.
- Based on the above, each participating club's total points from the Preliminary Stage shall be calculated as the sum of points awarded in the relevant AFC Club Competition.

### League/Group Stage & Knockout Stage

- All points awarded in the League/Group Stage & Knockout Stage shall be adjusted per AFC Club Competition as follows:
  - ACL Two points = two-thirds (2/3) of ACL Elite points
  - ACGL points = one-third (1/3) of ACL Elite points
- In consideration of the different formats and number of matches required to reach the Final of each AFC Club Competition, the calculation shall also consider the difference in maximum points obtainable by the participating club compared to the maximum points obtainable from ACL Elite in the same Sporting Season.

- Based on the above, each participating club's total points from the League/Group Stage & Knockout Stage shall be calculated as below:
  - ACL Elite points = sum of points awarded in ACL Elite
  - ACL Two points = sum of points awarded in ACL Two  $\times$  (maximum points obtainable in ACL Elite  $\div$  maximum points obtainable in ACL Two)  $\times$  2/3
  - ACGL points = sum of points awarded in ACGL  $\times$  (maximum points obtainable in ACL Elite  $\div$  maximum points obtainable in ACGL)  $\times$  1/3
  - \* *The same principles shall apply in case of any discrepancy in the format and/or number of matches played between the participating clubs of ACL Elite. In such case, their points shall be calculated as = sum of points awarded in the ACL Elite  $\times$  (maximum points obtainable in the ACL Elite  $\div$  maximum points obtainable from relevant format and/or number of matches)*

*e.g. calculation of 2025/26 rankings points of Club A participating in ACGL*

*Max. points obtainable from ACL Elite 2025/26 = 49.5*

*Max. points obtainable from ACGL 2025/26 = 33*

*Club A is awarded 15 points from ACGL 2025/26*

*Club A's points from League/Group Stage & Knockout Stage*

*=  $15 \times (49.5 \div 33) \times 1/3 = 7.5$*

Each participating club's total points for a Sporting Season shall be calculated as below:

*Participating club's points*

*= sum of points from Preliminary Stage + sum of points from League/Group Stage & Knockout Stage*

Each Member Association's total points for a Sporting Season shall be calculated as below:

*Member Association's points*

*= sum of points of Member Association's participating clubs in Preliminary Stage + average points of Member Association's participating clubs in League/Group Stage & Knockout Stage*

## Additional Notes

Performance points (points for wins and draws) are determined based on the results at the end of normal playing time. Results of Extra Time and Penalties (Penalty Shoot-outs) shall not be taken into consideration.

Points shall be rounded up or down, as appropriate, to the third decimal point (e.g. 1.1234 becomes 1.123 and 1.1235 becomes 1.124) when calculating the total points of each Member Association.

In case of a tie in the total points of two (2) or more Member Associations, the following shall apply to determine the higher-ranked Member Association, in descending order:

- 1) ranking points of the most recent Sporting Season in which the points are not equal among the Member Associations in question; and
- 2) latest applicable FIFA Rankings of the Member Associations in question at the time of the publication of the ranking.

In the event that any Participating Club withdraws from the AFC Club Competition after it has commenced, all of its Matches shall be cancelled and considered null and void, and the relevant Participating Club shall receive zero (0) points for the purposes of the AFC Club Competitions Ranking calculations.

In cases of Force Majeure, as determined by the AFC Competitions Committee, the relevant Participating Club shall be excluded from the calculation of points for the Sporting Season.



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