



# FOOTBALL FOR REFUGEES

A TOOLKIT TO DRIVE  
INCLUSION ON AND  
OFF THE PITCH

**FULL REFERENCE**



REFUGEE  
SUPPORT

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# FOREWORD

**MICHELE UVA**

UEFA Executive Director for Social and Environmental Sustainability

Football is one of the world's most influential social infrastructures and scalable platforms, capable of generating measurable social value and impact through concrete action.

Our sport, played and followed by millions, not only transcends borders, cultures and languages, but also fosters a sense of strong community.

In 2025, Europe hosted a total of 18.7 million forcibly displaced people. Every one of those people was forced to leave their home, and often their country, family and friends. Becoming a refugee is never a choice, but how we choose to respond, is.

As part of the [UEFA Football Sustainability Strategy 2030](#) and together with our national associations, leagues and clubs, we aim to support programmes that empower refugees to become part of their host communities through our football platform. Enabling refugees to take part in football helps inclusion,

reduces isolation, boosts health, builds life skills and self-confidence. It can also facilitate access to education and employment.

In return, refugees bring talent, diversity and new perspectives to football, enriching our game and, above all, our communities. Providing refugees with opportunities is a shared responsibility, but it is not charity – it is a smart social investment that benefits everyone.

This concrete objective is reinforced through our close and inspiring partnership with UNHCR, uniting us in the belief that sport significantly improves the lives of displaced people. We warmly thank UNHCR for their continued support.

By launching the UEFA Refugee Toolkit, we are strengthening our efforts to provide practical guidance, to inspire and activate the football family around tangible actions to support refugees. The toolkit also aims to open dialogue with local communities, ensuring that every individual has the chance to thrive, contribute and feel truly at home in our game.



# FOREWORD

**FILIPPO GRANDI**

High Commissioner of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency | 2016-2025

You may have also noticed when travelling that there are often people around playing football. This is not different in humanitarian settings. In camps, settlements or neighbourhoods hosting displaced people, I have seen how integral football is to people's day-to-day life.

That is because football unites people of all ages and backgrounds. As the global team sport, it is a force for inclusion, helping break down barriers by bringing strangers together and turning them into friends, helping refugees overcome structural, social, cultural and linguistic barriers as they try to make new homes in new countries. For many, it serves as an antidote to trauma, including that caused by persecution, conflict and displacement, providing a sense of enjoyment and a welcome distraction from myriad daily worries.

Thanks to our collaboration with UEFA, and through the annual Unity EURO Cup – a tournament that brings together teams of refugees and host community players from across Europe – I saw the pride and joy on players' faces as they wore their national team jerseys or as they celebrated a goal with their peers. I am very grateful to UEFA for

supporting this initiative and for once again showing the unifying power of football.

Off the pitch, football's influence extends even further. With hundreds of millions of fans, it has one of sport's biggest platforms to promote refugee stories and highlight their plight. It plays an important role in countering misinformation and harmful narratives, and in bringing positive, truthful stories about refugees to large audiences. With anti-refugee sentiment on the rise in an increasingly politicized and polarized environment, the need for strong advocacy is greater than ever.

There is also a remarkable potential to capitalize on support from fans and players, from grassroots all the way up to professional levels. Indeed, they have already done so, all over the world, including Europe – for example, when local clubs and fans rallied in support of Ukrainians, by helping raise funds, collect donations and inviting refugees to join their clubs. Football is a place where public solidarity meets practical action.

In this spirit, I am delighted that UEFA's Refugee Toolkit has been developed to guide and inspire the European football system in support of refugees. The footballing community can, and does, make a huge difference to the lives of people forced to flee, and the communities that host them. Long may it continue to be a force for good.

December 2025

# INTRODUCTION

The UEFA Refugee Toolkit is designed as a practical and inspirational resource for national associations, leagues, professional and amateur clubs. Football organisations are encouraged to use its guidance and adapt it to their specific needs and contexts.

The toolkit supports stakeholders by offering insights into forced displacement and its impacts, guiding the design of refugee programmes through a step-by-step process, suggesting practical actions on and off the pitch, and providing access to additional UEFA resources for a holistic approach to refugee inclusion.

## It consists of several practical components:



### Core Guidance Document

concise, practical guidance to help football organisations plan and implement the inclusion of refugees in their host communities



### Full Reference Document

in-depth guidance complemented by best practices, testimonials and suggested further reading



### Video collection

materials promoting refugee inclusion through football



### UEFA Outraged - Refugees

trailer, documentary, educational paper

# UEFA REFUGEE TOOLKIT

## WHAT IS THE TOOLKIT?

A set of practical resources for football organisations to adapt, improve and expand the implementation of their refugee support initiatives.

This toolkit mainly uses the term “refugees” for the sake of clarity and simplicity but should be understood to apply to the entire forcibly displaced population and their host communities, as described on pages 8 and 9 and regardless of legal status or the root cause of displacement.

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## WHY HAS THE TOOLKIT BEEN DEVELOPED?

UEFA wants to mobilise the football community around tangible ways to support refugees by sharing practical advice and good practices, leading to increased availability of organised football activities and events in Europe.

We want to empower refugees to become participants, contributors, leaders and role models, thus strengthening ties between them and the communities that welcome them.

## WHO HAS THE TOOLKIT BEEN CREATED FOR?

The toolkit is for anyone interacting with refugees through football, on and off the pitch.

The toolkit has primarily been designed for national and regional associations, leagues, professional and amateur clubs and any other football stakeholder using our game as a tool for refugee inclusion. Public sector, private sector and civil society organisations may also benefit from this resource.

We understand that football organisations in different countries work within different contexts, with a wide array of asylum processes, safeguarding frameworks and resources. These differences will influence the degree to which the guidance and standards in this toolkit can be applied. However, this should not be seen as a barrier to supporting refugees – every initiative, regardless of scale, contributes to meaningful impact.

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## HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT?

The toolkit is designed to serve as a supportive resource. Football organisations are encouraged to make use of the guidance and adapt it to their own contexts and needs.

In particular, the toolkit will help them to:

- **Understand** forced displacement, its causes and impacts
- **Create** refugee support programmes using a step-by-step process
- **Develop** practical actions on and off the pitch
- **Explore** additional UEFA resources to address refugee support in a holistic approach

# FORCED DISPLACEMENT

UNHCR defines forced displacement as a situation in which individuals or communities are forced to leave their homes or places of residence. The defining feature is that movement takes place without choice or consent.

## Causes of forced displacement

Displacement is often driven by violence, persecution and war. Armed conflicts can force individuals and entire communities to flee their homes in search of safety. People may also be displaced due to the fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

Forced displacement can result from natural disasters as well, which may undermine livelihoods and reduce access to essential resources such as food and water.

## Who is affected by forced displacement?

The following section clarifies the terminology used to describe those affected by forced displacement, including the legal categories that apply to displaced populations and the role of host communities.

- **Asylum seekers** have fled their country of origin and applied for asylum in another country, but their claim to refugee status has not yet been processed. Asylum seekers often spend many years waiting for a decision on their status. Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee was initially an asylum-seeker.
- **Refugees** have been granted international protection by a host country, i.e. recognised as refugees and issued refugee status. This status gives them the legal right to stay in the country and, in line with national law, access key

rights and services such as education, healthcare and employment. However, a refugee is not a national of their host country and access for refugees to these rights is not always equal to that of host nationals. Refugees may face practical barriers, including documentation requirements and administrative obstacles.

- **Internally displaced people (IDPs)** have been forced to flee their homes. However, unlike refugees, they remain in their own country. IDPs are among the most vulnerable displaced persons in the world, often trapped in dangerous conflict areas and unable to make their way to safety. They must rely on their own government to protect them, who may be unable or unwilling to do so.
- **Unaccompanied minors** are among the most at-risk groups within the refugee population. They often arrive without a parent or legal guardian, making it harder for them to navigate asylum procedures and access essential services. Many systems are not designed with unaccompanied minors in mind and may not be adapted to their age or emotional needs. Without adequate protection, unaccompanied minors are also at higher risk of trafficking, exploitation and abuse.

The term **host communities** refers to the local population and infrastructure in the area where refugees, asylum seekers or IDPs settle either temporarily or permanently.

Host communities are affected by forced displacement, because they play a vital role in providing shelter, services and support.

**Migrants** have moved within a country or across borders, but their movement is generally considered voluntary and motivated by reasons such as work or study.

Migrants are not classified as forcibly displaced. Unlike refugees, they are not covered by the specific international legal protections that apply to refugees.

## Evolution of forced displacement

### Global context

### European context

**2015**

In 2015, about **65 million** people worldwide were forcibly displaced

In 2015, Europe hosted roughly **9.5 million** forcibly displaced people

**2025**

By 2025, this number had almost doubled to **117.3 million** people

By 2025, this number had increased to **18.7 million** forcibly displaced people:

**11.8 million** refugees

**5.4 million** Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

**1.5 million** asylum seekers

Source:

[UNHCR Refugee Data Finder](#)

### Europe arrivals by sea and land

Despite efforts to reduce pressure within the region, movement towards Europe – both by land and sea – has increased in recent years.

### “Mixed movements”

This term means that refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants travel along the same routes, often facing similar risks and relying on the same networks.

For the most up-to-date data, visit:

- <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/europe-sea-arrivals>
- <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/southeasterneurope>

# THE PATHWAY TO BUILDING A REFUGEE SUPPORT PROGRAMME

The following pathway guides you through the recommended steps to increase your programme's chances of success.

<p><b>01.</b> Analyse your context</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are the size and demographics of the refugee population in your country?</li> <li>- Where are refugees located?</li> <li>- Is your country primarily a host country where refugees settle, a transit country that refugees pass through or both?</li> </ul>
<p><b>02.</b> Commit to supporting refugees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To what extent can your organisation commit to a football initiative in support of refugees strategically, operationally or financially?</li> </ul>
<p><b>03.</b> Create ownership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who will be the focal point responsible for ensuring that your commitment translates into effective actions?</li> </ul>
<p><b>04.</b> Identify partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which operational, strategic and commercial partners could help you deliver an impactful programme?</li> </ul>
<p><b>05.</b> Take action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What concrete actions can be co-developed with your partners?</li> <li>- What measurable targets can you define for monitoring purposes?</li> </ul>
<p><b>06.</b> Monitor, evaluate, communicate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How will you monitor impact to ensure that your initiative remains responsive to actual needs?</li> <li>- How will you communicate about your initiative to inspire others?</li> </ul>

## Study: UNHCR – “Beyond Full-Time”

- The “Beyond Full-Time” study commissioned by UNHCR in 2025, examined the extent to which football fans are open to supporting refugees.
- It found that highly engaged supporters, and in particular those aged 18 to 34, are generally in favour of their club supporting refugees.
- The study further concluded that female fans tend to show strong empathy towards refugees, especially women and children.
- Among the main takeaways were that while these fans are generally in favour of supporting refugees, they often feel unsure of the role they can play.
- To engage supporters, clubs need to promote clear calls to action, inviting fans to support refugees through charity initiatives, inclusive community activities, volunteering or digital advocacy.
- The study also found that fans respond better to messages of hope and resilience rather than victim-focused messaging, which can limit engagement.

# 01. Analyse your context

## The refugee population in your country

Football organisations seeking to engage with refugees must begin by understanding their national and local context, in order to create effective programmes.

What is the size of the refugee population in your country? What are its demographics, i.e. main nationalities, age groups, gender breakdown? Is your country primarily a host country where refugees settle? A transit country that refugees pass through? Or both? Are refugees located in reception centres or camps used for initial intake and orientation, collective accommodation in urban or rural areas, host families or individual flats and houses?

### **The following organisations can answer these questions and help you connect with the refugee communities:**

- The governmental agency that is responsible for asylum and refugee matters in your country. This may be the ministry for migration, ministry of the interior, home affairs office or justice department.
- Local authorities responsible for providing accommodation, healthcare, education and integration programmes for refugees
- UNHCR Sports Team at [hqsport@unhcr.org](mailto:hqsport@unhcr.org)
- UNHCR and your governmental agency may also be able to connect you with relevant NGOs and local partners working on refugee protection and inclusion.

### **Refugees: individuals, not a uniform group**

To build an effective programme, it is important to remember that while refugees often share similar traumatic experiences, they are not a single, uniform group. Like all groups of people, they come from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, have unique life experiences and face different needs. Recognising this diversity when designing refugee support programmes – by being sensitive to religious practices, dress codes and gender norms, for example – helps prevent unintentional barriers to participation.

## 02. **Commit to supporting refugees**

### **Strategically, organisationally, financially**

Analyse the extent to which your organisation can support refugees. Are you in a position to commit to this initiative over the long term or is a short-term approach better suited as a way to get started? What are the operational and financial implications of your choice?

### **What level of commitment can your organisation make over the next 12 months?**

- **Strategic:** alignment with strategy, policy commitments, leadership buy-in
- **Operational:** staff time, availability of venues, safeguarding capacity, coaching capacity
- **Financial:** available budget, fundraising potential, sponsorship options

### **What can you realistically deliver in:**

- **0–3 months** starting out
- **3–12 months** developing programme
- **12+ months** scale/legacy

## 03. Create ownership

### Programme focal point

To ensure that your commitment translates into meaningful action, it is important to establish clear ownership of the programme by appointing a programme focal point. This person is responsible for developing the initiative, ensuring it responds to real needs and builds on each partner's strengths. The programme focal point also oversees the effective use of available resources and monitors the programme's impact, making adjustments where necessary to respond to emerging needs. They leverage online and offline communication channels to enhance the programme's visibility, attract new participants and supporters, and inspire others. In addition, the focal point is encouraged to explore interest and support within the football community and the broader local community, such as from colleagues, fans, coaches, players, parents and volunteers.

## 04. Identify partners

### Impact of partnerships

Strong partnerships are essential to deliver meaningful refugee support. Collaborative initiatives that bring together diverse partners make projects more sustainable and impactful, as resources, expertise and opportunities are shared. UEFA's partnership with UNHCR, formalised through a cooperation protocol in 2021, exemplifies how strategic alliances can amplify impact. This partnership extends to UEFA's member associations, many of which work closely with UNHCR field offices to implement local initiatives.

### Potential partners

To identify potential partnerships at your own level:

- Consult refugee communities to identify trusted organisations and ensure cultural relevance.
- Look for national or local NGOs, charities and community organisations already active in refugee integration, education or sport.
- Review what other football associations or clubs are doing and who they collaborate with.
- Contact expert organisations like UNHCR or local refugee councils for guidance and partnership opportunities.
- Use relationships with sponsors and community foundations that may already have refugee-related projects.
- Participate in multi-stakeholder forums or sport-for-development networks where refugee support is a focus.

### Groups of partners

- **Football ecosystem:** National and regional associations, professional and amateur clubs, leagues, coaches, referees, players and fans
- **Public sector:** International institutions, governmental agencies responsible for refugees, local authorities, operators of reception centres or collective accommodation facilities, social and healthcare providers, schools
- **Private sector:** Commercial partners, local businesses and media organisations
- **Civil society:** Local community members, refugee participants and leaders, volunteers and NGOs

### Partner contributions and benefits

The following list highlights some of the contributions different partners can make to refugee support initiatives and the benefits they stand to gain. By working together, stakeholders can create a collaborative ecosystem where resources, expertise and opportunities are shared, ensuring that inclusion through football becomes a sustainable reality for refugees and host communities alike.

## DOMESTIC FOOTBALL ECOSYSTEM

### National associations

- **Contribute** strategic inclusion priorities at national level, coordination of funding and activities across regions, amplified engagement of diverse communities.
- **Benefit** from being perceived as socially responsible and becoming an attractive partner for NGOs, governments and sponsors.

### Regional associations

- **Contribute** coordination of programmes at regional level and sharing of best practices.
- **Benefit** from stronger grassroots engagement and opportunities for collaborative funding.

### Leagues

- **Contribute** opportunities to integrate refugee participation into league programmes and inclusion standards for member clubs.
- **Benefit** from a strengthened reputation as a socially impactful industry leaders focusing on values beyond sporting achievements.

### Football clubs

- **Contribute** access to facilities, coaching and community.
- **Benefit** from new talent, visible social impact and an increased fan base.

## PUBLIC SECTOR

### International organisations

- **Contribute** global expertise and access to international networks.
- **Benefit** from showcasing impact at scale, reinforcing their mandate for social inclusion and building partnerships with sport organisations.

### Local authorities

- **Contribute** logistical support, funding and integration services.
- **Benefit** from improved social cohesion and reduced isolation among newcomers.

### NGOs and refugee support organisations

- **Contribute** expertise and experience of working with displaced populations.
- **Benefit** from new engagement tools and broader community reach.

### Schools and other educational institutions

- **Contribute** the integration of football into language learning or social inclusion programmes for refugees.
- **Benefit** from enriched extracurricular offerings and inclusive environments.

### Social and healthcare providers

- **Contribute** support for participants' mental and physical well-being.
- **Benefit** from reduced stress and improved health outcomes among refugees.

## PRIVATE SECTOR

### Commercial partners, local businesses and foundations

- **Contribute** funding, equipment and amplified messaging.
- **Benefit** from brand association with inclusion and social responsibility.

### Media partners

- **Contribute** visibility, storytelling and amplification of inclusion messages across multiple channels.
- **Benefit** from a positive brand association, increased audience engagement and social impact narratives.

## CIVIL SOCIETY

### Volunteers and community members

- **Contribute** mentorship, companion programmes, transport, translation or administrative help.
- **Benefit** from meaningful engagement and stronger community ties.

### Refugee community members

- **Contribute** insights into effective programmes tailored to their needs, as well as new talent and fresh perspectives.
- **Benefit** from increased integration in their host communities and opportunities to contribute to football and society.

## Case study: Albanian Football Association - Diversified partnerships

- The Albanian Football Association's football festivals and school-based initiatives are made possible through close collaboration with a wide network of partners.
- UNHCR Albania provides expertise and support to address the specific needs of refugee populations.
- Local sports organisations assist with logistics and the delivery of football festivals, supplying trained volunteers and coaches to facilitate activities and mentoring.
- They also help identify potential participants from both local communities and refugee groups.
- Local NGOs contribute to outreach and engagement with refugee families, encouraging participation.
- Schools collaborate in assessing the needs of refugee students so programmes can be tailored to them and promote student involvement and parental engagement in football initiatives.

## 05. Take action

### Involvement of refugees as co-designers

Whenever possible, engage refugees as co-designers and co-evaluators of programmes. This adds authenticity, strengthens the impact of initiatives and ensures the programmes truly meet refugees' needs. Refugee leaders bring first-hand insight into the challenges faced by their communities and can help identify priorities that might otherwise be overlooked. Their input helps to ensure that programmes are culturally relevant, practical and impactful.

### Types of programmes

#### Mixed initiatives involving the host community

Mixed programmes that involve members of the host community should be prioritised as a key objective. They can reduce prejudice and foster sustainable social cohesion, mutual understanding and community-building, reinforcing the perception of refugees as integral members of the community among local residents. To succeed and ensure inclusivity, they require careful planning to manage cultural differences, a gender-sensitive approach and structured activities that encourage interaction (e.g. mixed teams or social events).

### Programmes designed exclusively for refugee participants

Inclusion from the start is the most impactful approach, with refugees participating in the same sports initiatives as their local peers. Refugee-only programmes can unintentionally reinforce social isolation and limit opportunities for integration. Where this is not immediately feasible, beginning with refugee-specific activities is nevertheless valuable, as they can focus on confidence-building, trauma recovery and language support. These programmes should then gradually transition to mixed initiatives.

### Factors influencing the choice of programme

The choice between refugee-only programmes and mixed initiatives may not be a deliberate strategic decision, but rather shaped by external factors. These can include the preferences or mandates of programme partners, the location or venue (e.g. if it takes place in a reception centre for asylum seekers that other people cannot enter) or limited infrastructure.

### Short-term versus long-term programmes

The ability to offer sustained programmes can be influenced by the type of displaced population a football organisation seeks to work with. In many countries, authorities often relocate asylum seekers from one facility to another, sometimes with little notice. As a result, they may not stay in one place long enough to be able to join a club or commit to continued attendance. This makes short-term activities – such as events in reception centres or collective accommodation facilities, football festivals or casual training sessions – more practical in certain contexts.

Where organisations work with more settled populations, including refugees with a more secure status, longer-term integration programmes may be more appropriate, provided they are designed in a flexible and modular way to accommodate differing degrees of mobility.

## Child and youth protection

Child and youth protection measures must be applied to refugee players with the same rigour and consistency as for local youth participants. These safeguards are especially critical when working with unaccompanied minors who are particularly vulnerable, as they travel without a legal guardian to protect their rights. While UNHCR recommends that a guardian or adviser is appointed as soon as an unaccompanied minor is identified, the absence of a family member may limit the quality of care and emotional security for the child.

For detailed guidance and practical tools, consult the [UEFA Child and Youth Protection Toolkit](#).

## ACTIONS ON THE PITCH

The football pitch offers diverse ways for refugees to engage with the game. Based on their interests and ambitions, they may choose to play at recreational or competitive level or pursue roles as coaches or referees.

### Playing recreational football

Recreational football is much more accessible for refugees than competitive play. It typically requires no formal player licence, registration with a national association or compliance with FIFA transfer regulations. Participation is usually open and informal and the administrative requirements are often limited to basic sign-up forms. Insurance and medical checks are recommended but not always mandatory, and there are generally no restrictions relating to residency or nationality. Examples of recreational settings are presented in the following section.

#### Training sessions at clubs

Amateur and grassroots clubs can offer refugees access to regular training sessions, which provide far-reaching benefits that extend beyond the football pitch. Consistent sessions create a sense of stability and routine, which is crucial for individuals whose lives have been disrupted by displacement. They also foster social integration by enabling refugees to engage regularly both with other refugees and members of the host community, building trust and meaningful connections. From a health perspective, ongoing physical activity supports fitness and helps alleviate stress, contributing positively to mental well-being. Furthermore, these sessions offer repeated, informal chances to practice the local language in a supportive environment, which helps their integration and cultural adaptation.

## Case study: Dragones de Lavapiés

- [Dragones de Lavapiés](#), based in one of Madrid's most diverse neighbourhoods, has become a benchmark for the inclusion of migrant and refugee minors, making football a safe, educational and accessible space for vulnerable boys and girls.
- In 2025, Dragones engaged 600 participants from over 50 nationalities, including refugees and asylum seekers from countries such as Mali, Senegal, El Salvador and Iraq.
- Activities such as street soccer serve as a catalyst for social inclusion and mental well-being, complemented by holistic support like language lessons and cultural activities.
- Gender equality is central to their mission: through the "Fútbol y Género" project, one-third of players are female, with ongoing efforts to increase participation.

### Football in reception centres or collective accommodation facilities

Football organisations can support sessions at centres where asylum seekers are housed by providing expertise and supplying equipment such as balls and kits, while also offering trained coaches to ensure that the activities are well structured.

To guarantee long-term impact, football organisations can train the facility's staff to lead football sessions, empowering them to continue the programme even after external support ends. Coach and referee education programmes can also be offered to asylum seekers living in these facilities, increasing the likelihood that they will remain engaged in football after moving on.

By promoting these initiatives through their networks, football organisations can also amplify awareness and encourage broader societal support.

## Case study: Football Association of Finland - Football in reception centres

- For its Football Belongs to Everyone tour, the Football Association of Finland partners with the Football Players Association of Finland and the Finnish immigration service.
- The programme is delivered in asylum seeker facilities across the country. It features professional players acting as ambassadors to promote football as a tool for social cohesion and for improving physical and mental well-being.
- As part of the programme, staff of the facilities are offered a two-day coaching course, equipping them to run regular, year-round football activities for asylum seekers.
- Another key objective is to involve local football clubs, creating easy pathways for asylum seekers to join nearby football or futsal activities, while the UEFA Outraged toolkit is used during workshops to spark meaningful conversations about fighting discrimination.

### Open play sessions

Are often held in parks or communal sports facilities and are typically coordinated by volunteers or social inclusion projects. Football organisations can support these sessions by providing licensed coaches, donating training materials and offering volunteering opportunities for staff or fan base members. They can also help with promotion through their communication channels, and ensure safe, inclusive environments by sharing safeguarding or anti-discrimination guidelines with the organisers.

### Football festivals and community programmes

These initiatives are usually organised in collaboration with national or international NGOs or local associations, and they provide a relaxed environment for cultural exchange, fun and inclusivity without the pressure of competition. Activities can include football or personal development skills sessions, friendly matches, personal development workshops, cultural exchange and community engagement. This type of programme is well suited to refugee families or individuals who prefer recreational activities.

## Case study: Croatian Football Federation - Football and cultural exchange

- In partnership with the Croatian Centre for Cultural Dialogue and the country's Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Croatian Football Federation's New Neighbours initiative offers weekly football activities and cultural exchange events, such as language lessons and tasting oriental sweets.
- The events unite more than 15 nationalities and the local community in Zagreb.
- As part of the programme, cultural mediation and translation services are provided for project participants and their families to support integration.
- A Youth Sports Day engages refugee and local children, and refugee children are given bags containing school supplies to support them at the start of the school year.

### Football tournaments

While football tournaments may be recreational, they are structured around competitive matches with rules and winners. Tournaments are more formal than other grassroots activities, with teams competing for a title or prize. This type of event can attract refugees who enjoy competition and structured play. Tournaments offer a sense of achievement, team identity and the excitement of winning – appealing to those motivated by performance and challenge.

### Walking football

Walking football provides an inclusive way for older refugees or those with lower fitness levels to stay active and connected. Joining existing walking football programmes is a good way for refugees to build ties with local participants – often older members of the host community who may have more time than others to dedicate to volunteering and mentoring. This makes them valuable allies in supporting refugee integration.

For more information, consult the [UEFA Walking Football Toolkit](#).

## Playing competitive football

When refugees move from recreational into competitive football, additional regulatory and administrative requirements come into play. It is best to check these with your national football association, as it must be guaranteed that the association intending to register the player for one of its affiliated clubs adheres to the relevant FIFA provisions governing the administrative procedure for the international transfer of players.

Equally important, it must also be guaranteed that the government authorities in the country of the player's nationality and former club are not able to potentially find out their whereabouts due to the international transfer certificate (ITC) proceedings, which could jeopardise the refugee player's safety as well as the safety of their family.

Alternatively, consult the relevant FIFA documentation:

[FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players \(2025 edition\)](#)

[FIFA Guide to Submitting a Minor Application](#)

[FIFA circular on international transfer of refugee players](#)

Or contact [regulatory@regulatory.fifa.org](mailto:regulatory@regulatory.fifa.org)

### Becoming a referee

Training refugees as referees offers an important alternative pathway into football that goes beyond playing. Refereeing provides opportunities for skills development, leadership and community engagement, while also opening doors to potential gainful employment – whether through paid match officiating or progression into higher levels. These initiatives not only empower refugees by giving them a respected role within the game but also address a pressing need in amateur football, where shortages of qualified referees are common. By supporting refugees with access to referee courses, mentoring and practical experience, football organisations can create inclusive programmes that strengthen the sport's infrastructure and promote social integration at the same time.

For practical guidance on what qualifications are required to become a referee and the steps to take in each country, see [UEFA Be a referee!](#)

## Case study: AVV Zeeburgia - Refugee Referees

- The Refugee Referee programme launched by amateur club AVV Zeeburgia trains refugees living nearby to become referees – a solution to the severe shortage of referees in the Netherlands.
- With the support of the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB), ARAG and the City of Amsterdam, the programme will expand to additional, strategically chosen clubs near asylum seeker centres and refugee communities.
- Participants start with a preparatory training module to learn Dutch football terminology and the basic rules, followed by practical sessions with interpreter support.
- They then complete an adapted KNVB referee course and officiate practice matches under supervision to earn an official KNVB diploma.
- Because refereeing is not tied to a club, participants can continue their involvement even if they relocate, creating a sustainable win-win for refugees and football.

### Becoming a coach

Providing refugees with opportunities to train as coaches offers another meaningful pathway into football and supports long-term integration. Coaching education equips participants with leadership skills, technical knowledge and recognised qualifications that can lead to volunteering roles, paid positions or even careers within the sport. These programmes empower refugees to take on visible, respected roles in their communities while helping address the shortage of qualified coaches in grassroots and amateur football.

A variety of NGOs and foundations offer community coach education courses. For more widely recognised qualifications, the UEFA Grassroots Leader Certificate course – often referred to as the D Diploma – is an ideal entry point into coaching. It consists of a minimum of 16 hours of training, and completing this course can serve as a useful introductory step to the UEFA C Diploma, the next level of coaching qualification.

For practical guidance on course requirements, costs, venues and dates, contact the coach education department of your national football association.

## Testimonial: Ammar Mahmoud

Ammar Mahmoud fled Sudan's civil conflict in 2017 and was granted asylum in France, where he qualified as a full-time community football coach. His coaching philosophy prioritises inclusion over performance, creating spaces where everyone feels welcome. This approach – and Ammar's new career – was nurtured by Kabubu, a non-governmental organisation partnering with the French Football Federation (FFF) to support refugee integration through sport.



[READ AMMAR'S FULL STORY HERE.](#)

## ACTIONS OFF THE PITCH

### Offering alternative pathways into football

Not every refugee wishes to play football, and the game offers many other ways to participate in the game. The following section illustrates some of these alternative pathways, ensuring that football remains an inclusive space for everyone.

#### Expanding your fan base

Encouraging refugees to attend official matches and join fan clubs fosters a sense of belonging, making them feel welcomed and valued as part of the wider football community, while also expanding and diversifying your fan base.

#### Volunteering

Inviting refugees to volunteer when organising a match, a festival, a conference or any other football-related event brings refugees and locals together and offers opportunities for personal development. Engaging refugee volunteers on a regular basis strengthens community ties and helps address volunteer shortages within clubs, easing some of the operational burdens they face in running their activities.

### Creating job opportunities through the wider football network

Many displaced individuals are highly educated or eager to develop new skills. Football organisations can play a meaningful role in helping refugees access vocational training, internships, gainful employment and economic inclusion.

Within football structures, clubs and associations can offer roles such as coaches, referees, kit managers, groundskeepers, in facility management, IT, media, the first aid team or other support staff positions – providing not only income but also a sense of purpose and belonging.

Organising career days and job fairs linked to tournaments or community events that bring together refugees, commercial partners, local businesses, authorities, media and NGOs can foster informal networking opportunities and open doors to internships and job offers.

### Case study: UEFA - ICT internships

- By connecting with graduates of the IT boot camps organised by Swiss-based NGO Powercoders, UEFA offers internship opportunities to refugees.
- At UEFA, participants gain hands-on experience in areas such as data analysis and event support within UEFA's ICT team.
- This partnership helps refugees gain professional experience within football's organisational ecosystem and eases their transition into the Swiss job market.
- [Read Dawit's story – from architecture in Ethiopia to ICT at UEFA.](#)



### Strengthening your refugee inclusion programme

A range of additional support measures can strengthen social cohesion between refugees and host communities. The following examples list some of them, providing inspiration for the creation of an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

### Addressing language barriers

Language barriers can make it difficult for refugees, coaches and team-mates to communicate with each other. It helps to provide interpreters, work with coaches who are multilingual or to use digital translation tools. In addition, informative material should be provided in the main languages of the refugee population you wish to reach.

Linking football to language learning can be an effective and fun way of helping refugees overcome the linguistic barrier in all areas of their life.

## Case study: Football Association of Ireland and England's Premier League - Learning language through football

- The Football Association of Ireland's intercultural programme [Kicking Off With English Language Skills](#) demonstrates how language learning can be combined with playing football.
- It also illustrates how female refugees can be engaged in language lessons off the pitch.
- Similarly, the [Premier Skills English](#), an initiative run by the British Council in partnership with England's Premier League, helps learners improve their English language skills through football.

### Increasing cultural awareness

Refugees may be unfamiliar with the social norms of their host communities – just as host communities and programme organisers may not be fully aware of refugees' cultural or religious backgrounds. Bridging this gap is essential to fostering mutual understanding.

Cultural awareness workshops for refugees can introduce local customs, social expectations and etiquette, including aspects like punctuality, gender dynamics in sport and communication styles.

Likewise, cultural awareness training for host community members – including coaches, volunteers, players and staff – can help them better understand refugees' traditions, religious practices that may be an obstacle to participation and cultural attitudes to sport, which vary widely.

Intercultural activities such as mixed-team matches, food-sharing events and joint volunteering opportunities can foster mutual respect.

### Creating dialogue to tackle racism and discrimination

Differences between individuals – whether refugees or members of the host community – can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, prejudice and even discrimination. To address these challenges, it is essential to create safe spaces for meaningful dialogue to promote mutual respect and understanding. One effective tool to support these conversations is UEFA Outraged, which raises awareness and educates stakeholders about combating discrimination in football and beyond.

For more information, consult [UEFA Outraged](#).

### Supporting physical and mental health

Football organisations that already collaborate with psychologists to support the well-being of players and staff can extend these resources to refugees participating in football programmes. Offering access to mental health services can help refugees process the emotional impact of displacement and contribute to a feeling of safety within their new environment.

Football organisations can furthermore leverage initiatives such as UEFA's Take Care programme, to promote healthier lifestyles and encourage positive habits among refugees and community members alike. The tools provided through the Take Care programme can be used to deliver dedicated workshops, offer tailored guidance on-site or disseminate the main messages across the organisation's communication channels.

For more information, consult [UEFA Take Care](#).

## 06. Monitor, evaluate, communicate

### Monitor, evaluate

Monitoring the implementation of your actions and evaluating their outcomes is essential to understanding the impact of your initiative and identifying opportunities for improvement.

Clearly define the outcomes you want to achieve. Set measurable objectives that can realistically be tracked and reported on, and agree on a consistent methodology to be used throughout the programme.

A simple self-evaluation checklist can help programme staff track progress, pinpoint areas of weakness and plan corrective measures.

Direct consultation with participants – through informal conversations, surveys or feedback sessions – offers valuable insights and helps ensure that initiatives remain responsive to actual needs. At the same time, consultation should be conducted sensitively. Some topics may be difficult to discuss, and refugees may experience fatigue from repeated consultations. Participation should therefore always be voluntary.

### Communicate

Leveraging both online and offline communication channels to showcase your activities regularly not only enhances visibility and attracts new participants and supporters but also builds trust among stakeholders, partners and the wider community.

#### Create internal awareness

Making staff and community members aware of your refugee support activities is crucial to fostering an inclusive culture within the organisation. Internal communication can highlight dedicated initiatives through newsletters, team meetings and digital platforms, ensuring that employees, players and volunteers understand the organisation's commitment to diversity and inclusion. Sharing success stories, programme updates and opportunities for staff involvement helps build pride, encourages engagement and creates a sense of shared responsibility for welcoming refugees into the football community.

### Promote positive narrative about refugees

Promoting a positive narrative about refugees on football's communication channels contributes to countering stereotypes. Sharing their personal stories is a powerful way to ensure that their voices are heard, and their involvement in football helps build understanding and connection with a wider audience. Showcasing refugees' skills and resilience, positioning them as not only as participants but as leaders, role models and contributors to the sport and society, challenges prejudice and demonstrates the value refugees bring to their communities.

### Testimonial: Mary Edonga

Mary Edonga, forced to escape civil conflict in South Sudan, discovered football through Street Northern Ireland, a charity partnering with the Irish FA Foundation. Three years later, Mary is studying psychology and counselling at Arden University in Manchester, determined to provide practical and emotional support for others – both within and beyond the refugee community. For Mary, football was the starting point for building confidence, social connections and a sense of belonging, and today she sees her future in helping others professionally while continuing to contribute to her community.



[READ MARY'S FULL STORY HERE](#)

### Ambassadors

Respected football personalities – players, coaches, referees, leaders of football organisations – can play a powerful role in advocacy. By sharing their stories and using their platforms, these ambassadors can help raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and mobilise support for refugee protection and inclusion.

### Host or participate in advocacy events

Hosting or participating in forums focused on refugee inclusion can be an effective advocacy strategy. These events provide a platform for organisations to share insights, learn from refugees' experiences and collaborate with stakeholders such as clubs, NGOs and policymakers. Conferences may feature interactive sessions, workshops and panel discussions exploring practical ways to welcome and integrate refugees as well as highlighting the diverse pathways into football.

### Mark notable occasions

International initiatives such as World Refugee Day on 20 June are good opportunities to highlight your commitment to supporting refugees. Football organisations can use matches, match programmes, events and communication campaigns to promote the day and engage fans and stakeholders in meaningful conversations about diversity and community cohesion.

## Case study: Football Association of Wales – Football Welcomes Refugees Conference

- Organised by the Football Association of Wales at Cardiff Stadium, this conference in April 2025 brought together refugees, clubs, coaches, volunteers and partners to share best practices and lived experiences.
  - The event highlighted football's power to break down barriers and foster inclusion, with sessions on coaching, refereeing, volunteering and community engagement pathways.
  - It marked a significant step in making football in Wales accessible and welcoming for all.
- "Before this conference, I did not realise how many opportunities there are in football beyond just playing. Hearing people share their stories and explain the pathways into coaching, refereeing and volunteering made me feel hopeful and motivated. It showed me that football in Wales can be a place where I belong." - Refugee participant

# OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO REFUGEE PARTICIPATION

## FINANCIAL BARRIERS

BARRIER	OVERCOMING THE BARRIER
<b>01.</b> Refugees may not be able to afford club membership or registration fees	Subsidise or waive fees for refugees
<b>02.</b> The cost of football kits, shoes, and other gear can be prohibitive.	Partner with sports brands, commercial partners or foundations to provide free kits and shoes or ask for donations from the community
<b>03.</b> Travel expenses to get to the training ground or match venues may be too costly.	Offer travel vouchers, organise group transport or promote car-sharing

## LOGISTICAL BARRIERS

BARRIER	OVERCOMING THE BARRIER
<b>01.</b> Refugees may not know where football programmes exist or how to take part	Share information through NGOs, community leaders, reception centres, collective accommodation facilities and social media
<b>02.</b> Programmes may be located far from refugee accommodations	Hold sessions in or near reception centers, collective accommodation facilities and other places where refugees live
<b>03.</b> Especially in rural areas, transport options may be scarce.	Offer group transport, promote car-sharing with community members or reconsider the initiative's location

**LOGISTICAL BARRIERS**

<b>BARRIER</b>	<b>OVERCOMING THE BARRIER</b>
<b>04.</b> Scheduling conflicts with school, work or language classes can prevent attendance.	Schedule sessions outside of school and work hours and check when language classes are held
<b>05.</b> Reception centres and collective accommodation facilities may lack suitable spaces for practice	Work with the relevant partners and stakeholders to upgrade or create play spaces in areas that host refugees
<b>06.</b> There may be a lack of nearby public or club football facilities	Use pop-up pitches or portable equipment

**LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS**

<b>BARRIER</b>	<b>OVERCOMING THE BARRIER</b>
<b>01.</b> Language barriers can make it difficult for refugees, coaches and team-mates to communicate with each other	Provide interpreters, hire multilingual coaches, produce multilingual information materials, use translation apps and highlight how playing football is an opportunity to practise the local language
<b>02.</b> Misunderstandings can occur if locals and refugees are unfamiliar with each other's cultural norms, beliefs and traditions	Offer cultural awareness sessions to familiarise refugees with the local customs, norms, etiquette and expectations (e.g. punctuality, gender dynamics in sports and communication styles) while encouraging open dialogue, and provide coaches, volunteers and staff with training to understand the refugee population's cultural norms, traditions, religious practices and sensitivities and cultural attitudes to sport

## PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL BARRIERS

BARRIER	OVERCOMING THE BARRIER
<p><b>01.</b> Refugees may be concerned about racism, negative reactions from local communities or exclusion</p>	<p>Promote inclusivity, for example through workshops and “meet and greet” events. Apply a policy of zero tolerance to racism and other forms of discrimination</p>
<p><b>02.</b> Trauma and stress may affect a person’s confidence or willingness to engage</p>	<p>Team up with psychologists and expert organisations to train staff on how to provide trauma-sensitive support to participants</p>

### Case study: Sport Coach+ – Trauma-informed coaching

- In collaboration with [Sport Coach+](#), an initiative developed by the Olympic Refugee Foundation in partnership with the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement’s MHPSS Hub, the English Football League organises trauma-informed training sessions for coaches from clubs such as:
  - Arsenal FC,
  - Queens Park Rangers FC,
  - AFC Wimbledon,
  - Plymouth Argyle FC,
  - Cardiff City FC, Norwich City FC,
  - Sunderland AFC and Burnley FC.
- These sessions equip football coaches with practical tools to integrate trauma-sensitive approaches into their work, making them mentors using football as a tool for resilience and recovery.

**LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS**

BARRIER	OVERCOMING THE BARRIER
<p><b>01.</b> Especially asylum seekers may lack identity documents or residence papers that some clubs require for registration</p>	<p>Accept alternative documentation for registration</p>
<p><b>02.</b> Refugees may not have access to health or liability insurance, which is sometimes mandatory for participation</p>	<p>Work with insurers to offer low-cost or group coverage options</p>
<p><b>03.</b> Complex registration processes, insurance requirements and official forms that assume each child has an adult guardian can create barriers to participation for unaccompanied minors</p>	<p>Adopt child safeguarding measures, simplify procedures and train staff to create a welcoming and protective environment</p>

**BARRIERS PARTICULARLY AFFECTING GIRLS AND WOMEN**

BARRIER	OVERCOMING THE BARRIER
<p><b>01.</b> Many women are afraid to engage when they don't see participants who look like them</p>	<p>Encourage participation from diverse backgrounds and age groups</p>
<p><b>02.</b> Cultural norms may restrict participation for women and girls, and some women may feel unsafe in mixed-gender environments or unfamiliar locations</p>	<p>Consider creating female-only environments, with female coaches and leaders, where women feel protected and heard</p> <p>If only male coaches are available, consult women participants to understand what feels safe for them</p> <p>Invite family members to observe the activities and to occasionally participate in them, to reassure them about the environment.</p>

**BARRIERS PARTICULARLY AFFECTING GIRLS AND WOMEN**

<b>BARRIER</b>	<b>OVERCOMING THE BARRIER</b>
<p><b>03.</b> Women may fear stigma or repercussions if photos or videos of them participating appear online, particularly if female participation in sport is taboo in their culture</p>	<p>Implement camera-free sessions and strict photo and video consent protocols</p>
<p><b>04.</b> Dress or kit codes that violate cultural preferences or religious beliefs may limit access to sports for women</p>	<p>Allow participants to wear sportswear that they feel comfortable in, such as loose tops or long trousers</p>
<p><b>05.</b> Physical contact and certain movements that may be deemed inappropriate can hinder female participation</p>	<p>Engage with the relevant communities to understand any cultural sensitivities around physical contact such as handshakes and to avoid training exercises involving movements that could make female participants feel uncomfortable</p>
<p><b>06.</b> Women refugees may have childcare duties that prevent them from attending football sessions.</p>	<p>Provide safe, supervised on-site childcare</p> <p>Organise activities where mothers and children can participate together or in parallel.</p> <p>Collaborate with local organisations to offer free or subsidised childcare while mothers take part in sessions.</p> <p>Offer sessions aimed at mothers during school hours</p> <p>Engage trusted volunteers or members of the refugee community to assist with childcare during events</p>

## Case study: Girl Power

- Founded by former Afghanistan international Khalida Popal, [Girl Power](#) collaborates with football clubs and community organisations across Europe to create safe, inclusive spaces for female refugees and asylum-seekers.
- In Denmark, where it was founded, Girl Power partners with AB Gladsaxe to deliver football and leadership sessions.
- Weekly sessions at the Sandholm, Holmegaard and Avenstrup Red Cross asylum seeker facilities are led by trained female refugee coaches, ensuring culturally sensitive and trauma-informed practices.
- In the UK, Girl Power works with local clubs in Doncaster and Peterborough, offering community football programmes for asylum-seeking, refugee Muslim women and girls.
- Clubs provide resources and a network, while Girl Power provides coaches – women with lived experience – to lead sessions.
- In Germany, Girl Power collaborates with the Hamburg Football Association and local clubs such as FC St Pauli, to support participation and secure fully funded scholarships for refugee women to take coaching courses.
- Partnerships like these not only promote football participation but also empower women through leadership pathways, connecting them to local clubs and regional associations to obtain qualifications.



# OTHER UEFA RESOURCES

## Unity EURO Cup

This annual tournament, organised by UEFA in partnership with UNHCR, features national association teams from across Europe.

Each gender-mixed squad consists of refugee and host community players. The event illustrates how refugees contribute to their new communities and can be replicated by any football organisation at national, regional or local level.

## UEFA Outraged

This anti-discrimination programme is designed to help national associations, clubs and schools run local educational sessions on the topics of disability, homophobia, online abuse, racism, refugee discrimination and sexism. For each of the six topics, it features a video subtitled in 35 European languages, a written overview and discussion points. The videos feature insights from football players, coaches, referees, leaders, fans and academics.

The episode on refugee discrimination addresses the xenophobia, racism and social exclusion that refugees may face in football settings and society.

## UEFA Child and youth protection resources

These resources focus on safeguarding the rights of children and young people in football and preventing any form of harm. They are a comprehensive set of learning resources, practical guidelines and templates for everyone working with children across the football pyramid – from administrators to grassroots coaches.

## **UEFA Take Care**

Take Care is a comprehensive resource that leverages the power of football to promote healthy habits. It comprises six modules addressing important and interconnected areas of daily life: physical activity, nutrition, mental health, digital addiction, substance awareness and road safety.

## **UEFA Walking Football Toolkit**

This toolkit is designed to promote healthy ageing and encourage increased participation in walking football and physical activity more broadly. It explores topics such as the health benefits of walking football, the characteristics and needs of older participants, the roles of different stakeholders and medical recommendations to ensure player safety. In addition to practical guidance, the toolkit includes forms, suggested training sessions and checklists to support recreational play.

For those interested in a more structured approach, the resource also provides the Laws of the Game for walking football.

# FURTHER READING

- [Football and Refugees: Addressing key challenges](#) published by UEFA in 2018
- [UNHCR Sport Strategy 2022–26 – More than a Game](#)
- UNHCR-led [Multi-stakeholder pledge on sport for inclusion and protection](#)
- [Football & réfugiés](#), the French Football Federation’s practical guide for 2023/24 (in French)
- [My beautiful sisters](#), Sports Book of the Year 2025, by Khalida Popal
- [Handbook on volunteering of Migrants in Sports Clubs and Organisations](#) published by the European Sport Inclusion Network (SPIN) in 2016
- [Mentoring Guidelines](#) published by SPIN in 2020
- The FA & Amnesty International’s [Football Welcomes: Good Practice Guide for Refugee Women’s Football](#)
- [Liverpool FC’s initiatives promoting health and cultural understanding](#)
- [Cardiff City FC Community Foundation’s Football for All project](#) offering football camps for Afghan refugees
- [FIRE+: Further Football Including Refugees](#) co-funded by the EU’s Erasmus+ programme
- [Refugees and Football](#), the Fare network against inequality and discrimination in football
- [Sport for Refugees Coalition](#) and [specific tools it recommends](#)



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#FOOTBALL

**FOOTBALL FOR REFUGEES**  
A TOOLKIT TO DRIVE INCLUSION  
ON AND OFF THE PITCH



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