



A FIELD OF OPPORTUNITIES



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“You have to understand, no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.” The words of Somali-British poet Warsan Shire poignantly describe the desperate plight of millions of people forced to flee their homes in the largest refugee and displacement crisis since the end of World War II.

In 2015, the effects of civil war, political instability and extreme poverty reached a tipping point. What ensued was a mass migration towards Europe in search of safety and shelter – even if getting there meant undertaking an arduous and perilous journey over land and across treacherous waters.

Upon reaching European borders, the physical journey may have come to an end. The arrival has not. Learning a new language, adapting to unfamiliar surroundings, being accepted by host communities are just some of the challenges in these places of “refuge”. Challenges that are particularly hard to tackle for the many children and youth among the heterogeneous group of people who have become collectively known as “migrants” and “refugees”. The proportion of young people among them is significant. In Germany, for example, about a third of all people currently seeking asylum are minors.

In addition to shelter, food and health care, children and youth need educational opportunities, supportive relationships, meaningful social interaction, and the chance to play with one another to ensure their physical and mental development. To address these challenges, the UEFA Foundation for Children and

streetfootballworld teamed up to create the Refugee Support Programme and offer funding to football-based programmes of organisations in Europe working with migrants and refugees.

But how can football play a role? Football is the most loved – and played – sport, attracting people from all walks of life, all over the world. The beautiful game is a universally understood language, is simple to set up in the most diverse environments and harbours many important social values, like respect, teamwork and fair play. Football can play a significant part in supporting the well-being of young people, helping them to more easily navigate their new surroundings and get in contact with local communities.

For the diverse groups of participants of the programmes funded through the Refugee Support Programme, football has a plethora of meanings. For some, the match is a moment of respite from challenging life circumstances; for others, the pitch is a place to make friends; the teammate a surrogate “brother” or “sister”; training sessions are perceived as a “job”.

On the following pages, we travel to Ireland, Germany and Greece to meet a few of these brave and inspiring individuals who are the budding young stars of tomorrow.

Pascal Torres,
General Secretary UEFA Foundation for Children



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CHAMPIONS OHNE GRENZEN (CHOG) BERLIN, GERMANY

“Willkommenskultur” (“Welcoming culture”), a term originally coined to attract skilled workers from abroad to Germany, gained renewed vigour and additional relevance with the onset of the refugee crisis in 2015. The non-profit organisation CHAMPIONS ohne GRENZEN has been working for several years to promote a sustainable welcoming culture in Berlin and Brandenburg. It uses sport as its main tool for empowerment, joy, participation and encounter. As well as staging its own programmes, CHoG also networks with other grassroots sports clubs to establish further meeting and exchange opportunities for refugees with locals.

With the funding from the Refugee Support Programme, CHAMPIONS ohne GRENZEN (“Champions without Borders”) implemented a series of 10 football trainings (four of them for children under 12) for refugees aged 8–30 (male and female) in addition to their “Nachspielzeit” (“Extra Time”) programme, where the organisation worked with players on different topics besides football after the training sessions. Training was held once a week to provide a regular and reliable activity for children and young people.

CHoG also supported the players on their way from the open training sessions to official football clubs based in Berlin. The biggest challenge always concerns the playing license as the local football associations in the players’ home countries are often no longer in operation. German regulations, however, require an official document in order to issue a playing license. CHoG has helped more than 20 players to connect to official football clubs, but has also noticed that many of them still return to their open training sessions as the family-like situation and the support they were receiving there was much stronger than in the clubs.

CHoG initiated a “start2coach” programme to introduce participants to the variety of roles available at regular football clubs – from coach to groundsman – and to offer coaching workshops. As well as carrying out training sessions with CHoG’s younger football groups, the trainees are also integrated into the Berlin sports landscape.

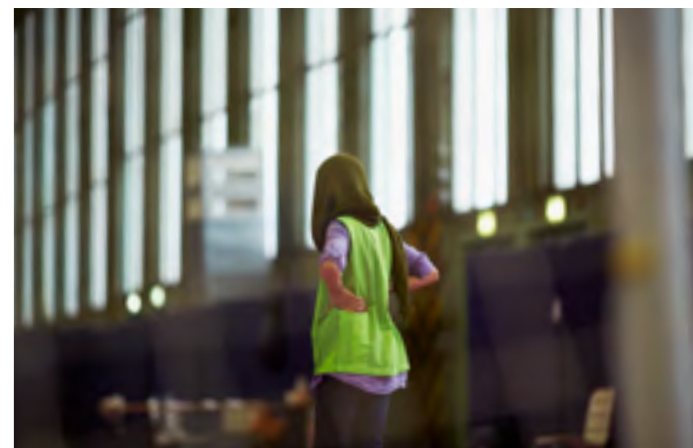
Throughout the project period, some 200 players participated every week in training sessions and the “Nachspielzeit” programme, 95 % of them refugees. By staging workshops and events, an additional 700 people were reached.



Every week, a group of 6–14-year-olds meets in one of the hangars at disused Berlin airport Tempelhof. Like the participants, many of the coaches who carry out the sessions also came to Germany as refugees. They themselves have been trained through CHAMPIONS ohne GRENZEN's "start2coach" programme.









CHAMPIONS ohne GRENZEN offers mixed training sessions for youth at two different locations in the German capital in cooperation with local football clubs. Pictured here is the weekly encounter on the pitch of Hansa 07 in Berlin's Kreuzberg district. The groups of players are diverse with people of all ages and backgrounds welcome to attend. In addition to the training sessions, the team members also gather for friendly matches and tournaments, as well as being engaged through the "Nachspielzeit" ("Extra Time") programme.







MOVEMENT ON THE GROUND LESBOS, GREECE

Over one million migrants and refugees crossed European borders in 2015. More than half of them landed on the Greek island of Lesbos. Currently, an estimated 8000 refugees live here, split between the two camps: government-run Moria and locally managed Kara Tepe.

In response to this crisis, a group of volunteers from the Netherlands spontaneously established the NGO Movement on the Ground (MOTG) in autumn 2015. The organisation started out by providing structural support to registration camps on Lesbos, as well as direct aid to refugees in the form of clothing, blankets, food and medical equipment. Over the course of the following year, MOTG shifted its focus towards maintaining higher standards of living at refugee camps and initiating recreational and educational programmes. The organisation continues to provide assistance to the residents of Kara Tepe camp, which houses 800 people with a majority from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The complicated and slow-moving asylum process, in combination with other legal matters,

means that most asylum seekers are expected to remain on the island for months or, in some cases, years. This is a particular issue for children who cannot attend regular schools and are thus faced with a lack of educational opportunities. Consequently, Movement on the Ground decided to implement a football programme with the football3 methodology to help residents to deal with their traumatic situation and to facilitate community development between the camp and the local community.

Four times a week, 150 boys and girls attend football training sessions at a local professional pitch. With the funding from the UEFA Foundation for Children, a small-scale pitch was also built on the camp grounds for the young residents of Kara Tepe to play beyond the training sessions.

By using the football3 methodology, life lessons and values such as fair play and gender equality are incorporated into each session. This also provides the framework within which older participants are trained as coaches and learn valuable skills and qualifications that they can use in future life.



Several times a week the footballers from Kara Tepe refugee camp board the “team bus” to journey five minutes down the coastal road for training and tournaments at a professional pitch. Upon arrival, 14-year-old Mohammed from Syria (pictured above) carefully picks out “the best” football boots.







Here the pitch is a level playing field: Many of the girls weren't able or allowed to play football in their native countries. One of the most talented among them is 17-year-old Dima (page 28, centre) from Iraqi Kurdistan: "When I was in my country, I never played football," she says. After arriving on Lesbos, she quickly joined the other girls on the pitch where, she enthuses, "I saw that girls can do anything!"







RHEINFLANKE BERLIN, GERMANY

Since 2016, the hangars of Berlin's decommissioned Tempelhof Airport have been used as an emergency shelter for refugees. Up to 2500 women, men and children have lived here in makeshift tents at any given time. In October 2016, RheinFlanke Berlin began offering football training sessions to the young people residing here. Twice a week, 15 to 20 young players gather for a 90-minute training session held by a coaching team consisting of a social worker and a football coach.

The aim of the programme titled "Learning German through play" is to support these young people, who otherwise lack opportunities in education and personal development. The main goal of the project is to promote integration through language acquisition. RheinFlanke employs street football

activities as a successful method for engaging children and young people and as an easy means of introducing them to the German language in a playful and enjoyable way. The team of trainers carefully moderate sessions to teach players football-related vocabulary and allow them to improve their language skills in a manner and an environment without the pressure often experienced at school or in German courses. The football training sessions also serve to boost participants' self-esteem, enabling them to overcome barriers along the road to integration. The players are trained not only in their football performance, but also in their ability to act and play fairly. This has supported their development not only as a team, but also as individuals able to play an active part in German society.



Not take-off, but kick-off: Berlin's Tempelhof airport has been out of service for several years. Today, it is a place of shelter and a football ground. RheinFlanke coach Dennis Wolf (page 34, right) arrives to carry out a training session with some of the residents. Football practice takes place twice a week with 15–20 participants aged 16 and above.





"I've got your back": For participants, RheinFlanke's football programme offers a support system, a source of encouragement and achievement. The project "Spielend Deutsch lernen" (Learning German through play") is also an opportunity for the young players to acquire and perfect their language skills in an enjoyable way.









SPORT AGAINST RACISM IRELAND (SARI) THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Sport Against Racism Ireland (SARI) was founded in 1997 as a direct response to the growth of racist attacks from a small but vocal section of the population in Ireland. SARI's mission is to support cultural integration and social inclusion in Ireland by using sport, particularly football, as a medium to combat racism, sectarianism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination. To do so, SARI organises regular football programmes, annual sporting events, school sports and educational programmes and cultural activities across all 26 counties of the Irish Republic.

Within the framework of the Refugee Support Programme, SARI ran a series of programmes including football education sessions at Direct Provision Centres (where asylum seekers are housed) and in refugee communities, a football programme targeted at young Muslim girls and two football integration festivals (one of which on World Refugee Day in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Ireland).

Through "Soccernites" boys and girls aged 14–18 living in Dublin receive free weekly training sessions to facilitate the integration of young people from migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds into Irish society. A Young Leaders programme also allows participants to earn their coaching badges and become trainers. To cater specifically to the needs of young Muslim girls and women, SARI initiated the programme "Hijabs and Hat-tricks", where young SARI coaches who have come

through the Young Leaders Programme deliver weekly training sessions to girls aged 14–20 in the Dublin area.

Projects implemented across the country include the "Count Us In" anti-discrimination football training workshops delivered to children aged 11 to 13 at 130 primary schools – specifically targeting areas with a high percentage of migrants and ethnic minorities. The workshops include football3 with sessions carried out by SARI coaches from both migrant and indigenous backgrounds. The main aim is to create awareness about – and understanding of – discrimination in all its forms, promote cultural integration and social inclusion.

SARI has also collaborated with a number of Direct Provision Centres to provide football training sessions on site. There are currently 34 DPCs in Ireland housing approximately 4500 asylum seekers, of whom 1650 are children aged 10–16. SARI offers weekly training sessions, as well as Training-of-the-Trainer programmes for youth and adult coaches within the DPCs. The programme seeks to create stronger bonds between DPCs and local clubs, schools and local communities.

Every SARI programme, except for training sessions within the DPCs, is open to all members of society and is not exclusively for migrants and refugees, to support the organisation's goal of fostering social inclusion. All football training sessions include the football3 methodology to promote fair play and respect and encourage participants to take responsibility for their actions.



Hands up who wants to play football: The enthusiastic group at Lissywollen Direct Provision Centre in Athlone, central Ireland. Football programmes are offered to the asylum-seekers living here once a month to foster social inclusion, health and well-being. 400 children and youth of a wide age-range have been engaged through the project.







As darkness falls, the stadium lights at Dublin's Clontarf pitch shine the way for the participants of SARI's Soccernites programme. Every week, girls and boys aged 14–18 gather for football training, as well as representing SARI to compete at national and international events. The diverse team includes players from migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds, unaccompanied minors and indigenous Irish minors.





SARI originally launched its “Hijabs and Hat-tricks” programme to encourage more Muslim girls and women to play football. Since its inception, the project has been expanded to include players of other faiths or without religious affiliation.







DIOGENES NGO ATHENS, GREECE

In Athens, the exponential effects of Greece’s two concurrent crises are brought into sharp focus: the ongoing repercussions of the 2007/8 financial crisis and as one of the countries most affected by the refugee crisis. Today, through Diogenes’ programmes, the two most afflicted protagonists of each crisis meet on the playing field.

Established in the midst of Greece’s spiral into economic turmoil, Diogenes has focussed its work on reaching out to those who fell into poverty as a consequence. The Athens-based organisation runs the street magazine ‘Shedia’, the Greek National Homeless Football Team and a variety of other programmes to offer homeless people a means of income and a way back into society. With increasing numbers of refugees arriving on Greek shores, Diogenes already began expanding its programmes. Today, half of the Homeless Football team’s players are refugees. The Refugee Support Programme was a further incentive and means to increase these efforts and reach out to a number of refugee camps in Athens and other parts of Greece. For the project, the homeless beneficiaries changed their roles from being participants to coaches and tournament organisers.

The majority of the refugees engaged in the programme are from Afghanistan and Iraq with an increasing number of Syrian refugees joining the programme after the last year. Diogenes not only welcomes them into its football activities, but also collaborates with a large network of other NGOs, state

and local governments to provide additional support through shelter, medical services, legal assistance, access to education and Greek language classes.

The project funded through the UEFA Foundation for Children entailed visits to refugee hotspots, organising football tournaments, involving the Greek National Homeless Football Team and teams of refugees as well as teams consisting of volunteers, other NGOs’ members, the local communities and schools. From September 2016 to June 2017, these social tournaments travelled to three major Greek cities (Athens, Thessaloniki, Larisa) as well as small towns with a refugee camp. As no football facilities were available, Diogenes brought its own mobile football pitch.

At the end of each tournament, balls and sports gear were donated to the refugees, leaving a tangible lasting effect of the initiative. The project not only provided a wonderful opportunity for the Greek National Homeless Team to engage socially, but created new partnerships between Diogenes and the refugee centres, which the organisation is supporting to set up regular football projects.

In total, more than 1000 people, 80 % of them minors, participated in the activities. The biggest success, according to Diogenes, was “making people feel happy, less isolated. Making them feel wanted, useful, part of society, give them real hope, just by providing the simplest: a ball, a pitch, the opportunity to interact, to play the wonderful game of football.”



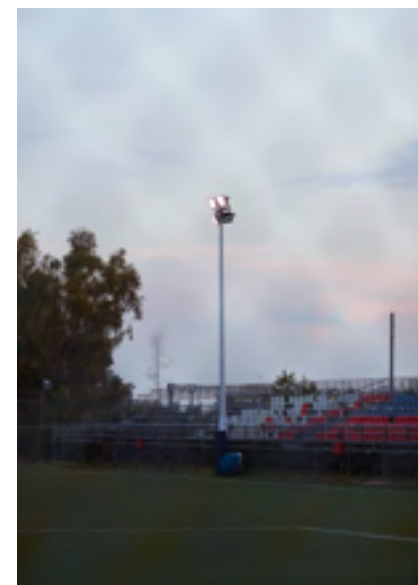
Away game for the Greek National Homeless Football Team at Eleonas refugee camp on the outskirts of Athens. Through the Refugee Support Programme, the squad has travelled around the country to play football and conduct training sessions with the residents of refugee camps.





"When I play football, I feel good, I feel at home. All the stress goes away," says Eleonas resident and player Iamande (21) from Sierra Leone.





*Sunday, 20:30, Rouf Stadium, Athens:
Kick-off for the Greek National Homeless
Football Team's training session. The
squad counts Greek nationals and
new Athenians from migrant and refugee
backgrounds amongst its ranks.*



THANK YOU

We would like to thank all of the participants featured in the previous pages and the following people for their support during the visits to the programmes and in putting together this book: CHAMPIONS ohne GRENZEN (Mohammad Ahmadi, Carolin Gaffron, Sofie Goetze, Christine Schröder), Diogenes (Chris Alefantis, Dora Maslintsi), FC Internationale (Gerd Thomas), Movement on the Ground (Adil Izemrane, David Koning, Stephanie Rueb-Fairbank, Stella & Vaggelis Spanos), RheinFlanke (Julia Baumhauer, Arne Dreyer, Julia Kandzia, Juliane Metzner, Dennis Wolf), SARI (Kerrie Clohessy, Amina Moustafa, Perry Ogden, Robbie Taylor, Azeez Yusuff).

