FOOTBALL FOR REFUGEES

A TOOLKIT TO DRIVE INCLUSION ON AND OFF THE PITCH

CORE GUIDANCE

REFUGEE SUPPORT



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 as 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 and documentary
- **UEFA Outraged - Refugees** – educational paper

This Core Guidance Document covers the following content:

- **UEFA Refugee Toolkit** – What - Why - Who - How
- **Forced displacement** – introduction and data
- **6-step pathway** to building a programme
- **Overcoming barriers** to refugee participation
- **Best practice** – examples
- **UEFA resources** to support action
- **Glossary**
- **UEFA Refugee Toolkit** components

WHAT | WHY | WHO | HOW

What
is the toolkit?
A set of practical resources designed to equip football organisations to adapt, improve and expand the implementation of refugee support initiatives.

Why
has the toolkit been developed?
To mobilise the football community around tangible ways to support refugees by sharing practical advice and best practices examples.

Who
has the toolkit been developed for?
For anyone interacting with refugees through football, on and off the pitch.

How
to use the toolkit?
Through a 6-step approach to implement football programmes fostering refugee inclusion.



FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Definition

Forced displacement is 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

Displacement is often driven by violence, persecution, and war. Armed conflict can force people to flee their homes in search of safety. Fear of persecution—based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group—also contributes to displacement.



Who is affected?

Asylum-seekers

Individuals who have applied for asylum in another country, but whose claim to refugee status has not yet been processed

Refugees

Individuals who have been granted international protection by a host country

Internally displaced people (IDPs)

Individuals who were forcibly displaced within their own country

Host communities

Local population and infrastructure where refugees, asylum seekers or IDPs settle temporarily or permanently

FORCED DISPLACEMENT

European context



2015

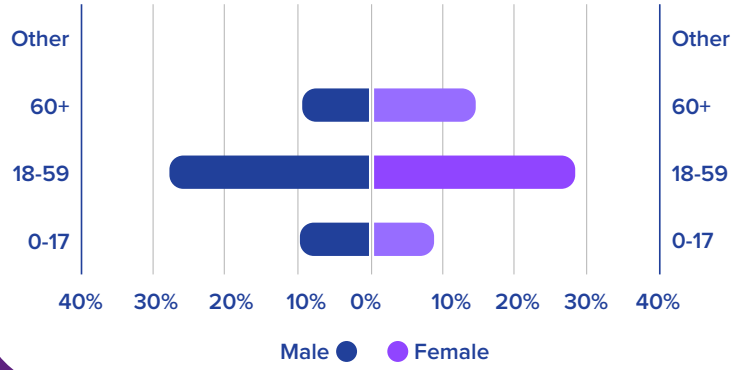
In 2015, Europe hosted roughly **9,5** million forcibly displaced people.

2025

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

By age and gender breakdown



Source: UNHCR Refugee Data Finder

THE 6-STEP PATHWAY TO BUILDING A PROGRAMME



STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5	STEP 6
Analyse your context	Commit to supporting refugees	Create ownership	Identify partners	Take action	Monitor, evaluate, communicate

STEP 01:
ANALYSE YOUR CONTEXT

The refugee population in your country

- What is the size of the refugee population in your country?
- What are the demographics of the refugee population in your area?
- Is your country primarily a host country where refugees settle? A transit country that refugees pass through? Or both?
- Are refugees located in urban or rural areas? In reception centres or camps used for initial intake and orientation, collective accommodation, host families or individual flats and houses?



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

UNHCR
Geneva HQ and country offices

Governmental agency
responsible for asylum and refugee matters in your country

Local authorities
responsible for providing accommodation, healthcare, education and integration programmes

NGOs
and local partners working on refugee protection and inclusion. UNHCR and your governmental agency can provide guidance.

STEP 02:
COMMIT TO SUPPORTING REFUGEES

Analyse the extent to which your organisation can support refugees.

- Are you in a position to commit to this initiative over the long term?
- 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

STEP 03:
CREATE OWNERSHIP

Programme focal point

To ensure that your commitment translates into action, it is important to establish clear ownership of your activities by appointing a programme focal point.



The programme focal point is responsible for:

Developing your programme
ensuring it responds to real needs and builds on each partner's strengths

Implemeting your programme
ensuring activities progress in line with the approved action plan, timeline, and scope

Overseeing resources
ensuring their effective use

Monitoring
the programme's impact, making adjustments where necessary to respond to emerging needs

Leveraging communication channels
online and offline, to enhance the programme's visibility, attract new participants and supporters, and inspire others.

Generating interest and support
from the football and broader local community

STEP 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.

How to identify potential partners

Conduct desk research, reach out to the relevant authorities and institutions, contact community foundations and leverage your existing network to explore who can offer introductions and insights.



Football ecosystem	Public sector	Private sector	Civil society
National and regional associations, professional and amateur clubs, leagues, coaches, referees, players and fans	International institutions, governmental agencies, local authorities, operators of reception centres, social and healthcare providers, schools	Commercial partners, foundations, local businesses and media	Local community members, refugee participants and leaders, volunteers and NGOs

STEP 05:
TAKE ACTION | TYPES OF PROGRAMMES

Mixed initiatives engaging with the host community

Inclusion from the start is the most impactful approach, with refugees participating in the same activities as their local peers. Mixed programmes should therefore be prioritised, as they foster mutual respect and reinforce the perception of refugees as integral members of the community among local residents.

Programmes designed exclusively for refugee participants

Refugee-only programmes may work well in the early stages of resettlement, but can unintentionally reinforce social isolation and limit opportunities for integration. This type of initiative should therefore only be used where no viable alternatives immediately exist, and gradual transitioning to mixed initiatives should be explored.

Short-term versus long-term programmes

Authorities tend to relocate asylum seekers from one facility to another, sometimes with little notice, which makes informal, short-term activities more practical for this group.

For settled populations, such as refugees with a secure status, longer-term integration programmes can be envisaged.



Involve refugees as co-designers

Whenever possible, engage refugees as co-designers and co-evaluators of programmes. Meaningful participation strengthens impact and helps ensure activities reflect refugees' needs.

Remember that **refugees are not a homogeneous group.** Recognising diversity in background and life circumstances when designing programmes helps reduce unintentional barriers and promotes inclusive participation.

STEP 05:
TAKE ACTION | ON THE PITCH

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

Training sessions at clubs

Clubs can offer refugees access to regular training sessions, which helps create a sense of stability. This is crucial for individuals whose lives have been disrupted by displacement.

Football in reception centres

Football organisations can host or support sessions in reception centres, by providing expertise, coaches and equipment. Training the facility's staff to lead football activities helps ensure the initiative can continue over time.

Festivals and community programmes

These programmes, often organised in collaboration with NGOs and local associations, provide a relaxed environment for cultural exchange and fun. They are well suited to refugee families or individuals who prefer recreational activities.

Tournaments

Football tournaments, structured around competition and offering a sense of achievement, appeal to refugees motivated by performance and challenge.

Becoming a referee

Refereeing creates opportunities for skills development. By supporting refugees with access to referee courses, football organisations provide them with an empowering role and help address shortages of qualified referees in amateur football.

For practical guidance on how to become a referee, see UEFA Be a referee!

Becoming a coach

Coaching is another meaningful pathway into football. A variety of NGOs and foundations offer community coach education training. For more widely recognised qualifications, the UEFA Grassroots Leader Certificate is an ideal entry point into coaching.

For practical guidance on recognised coach education courses, contact your national football association.

Recreational vs competitive football

Recreational football tends to be more accessible for refugee players than the competitive game, which requires a formal player licence in compliance with FIFA transfer regulations.

STEP 05:
TAKE ACTION | OFF THE PITCH

Actions off the pitch allow refugees who may not wish to play football to get involved, while contributing to a more inclusive environment.

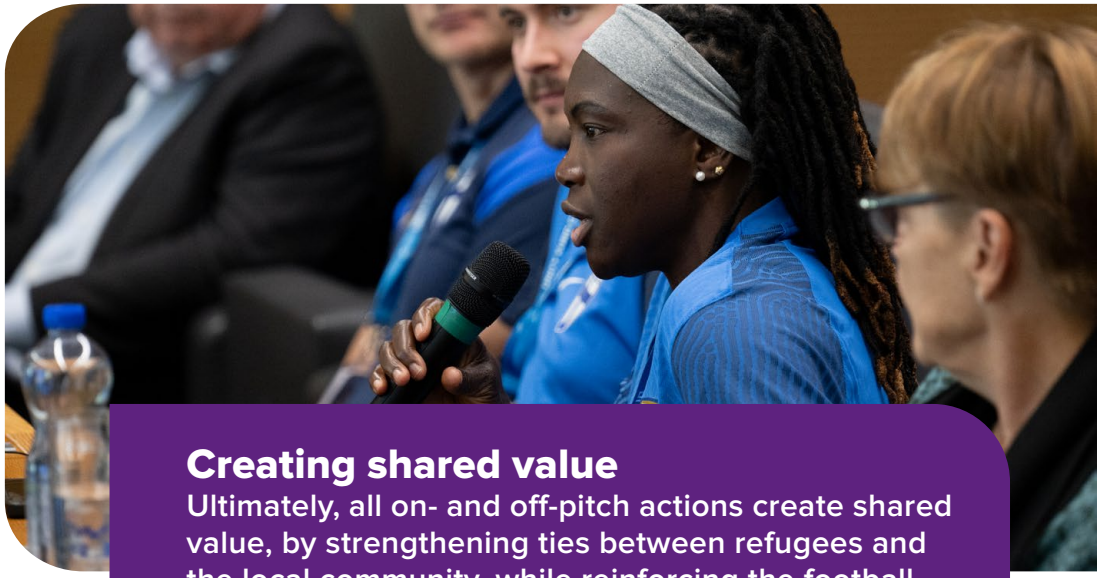
Expanding your fan base
Encouraging refugees to attend official matches and join fan clubs makes them feel valued as part of the wider football community, while expanding and diversifying your fan base.

Volunteering
Inviting refugees to volunteer at events brings them into contact with the local community and helps ease some of the operational burdens football organisations face in running their activities.

Creating job opportunities through the football network
Football organisations can help refugees access vocational training, internships and paid roles in coaching, refereeing and many other staff positions. Job fairs that rally refugees, businesses and locals around football activities create networking opportunities that can lead to job offers.

Addressing language barriers
To facilitate communication between refugees, coaches and team-mates, provide interpreters, multilingual coaches and use digital translation tools. Multilingual Information material and linking football to language learning are also effective ways of overcoming language barriers.

Increasing cultural awareness
To create mutual understanding between refugees and locals, organise activities such as mixed-team matches, food-sharing events and intercultural workshops that familiarise participants with each other's cultural norms.



Creating shared value
Ultimately, all on- and off-pitch actions create shared value, by strengthening ties between refugees and the local community, while reinforcing the football organisation's position as a socially impactful actor.

STEP 06: MONITOR, EVALUATE, COMMUNICATE

Monitoring and evaluating the programme's implementation provides an understanding of its impact and identifies opportunities for improvement. Leveraging online and offline communication channels enhances visibility, attracts new participants and supporters, and inspires others.

Monitor

Clearly define the outcomes you want to achieve and set measurable objectives that can realistically be tracked and reported on.

Evaluate

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

Direct consultation with refugee participants – through informal conversations, surveys or feedback sessions – offers valuable insights, but should be conducted sensitively.



Communicate

Create internal awareness
Inform staff and community members of your refugee support activities, to encourage engagement and create a sense of shared responsibility for welcoming refugees into the football community.

Host or participate in advocacy events
Forums focused on refugee inclusion provide a platform for sharing insights, learning from refugees' experiences, and connect with other stakeholders.

Promote positive narrative about refugees
Share refugees' personal stories (with their consent) to help build understanding and connection with a wider audience.

Ambassadors
By using their platforms, footballers can mobilise support for refugee protection and inclusion.

Mark World Refugee Day
On 20 June, highlight your commitment to supporting refugees.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO REFUGEE PARTICIPATION

Refugees' unique circumstances can create barriers to their participation in football. This section summarises the most common barriers and offers practical recommendations for overcoming them.



FINANCIAL BARRIERS

BARRIER	OVERCOMING THE BARRIER
Refugees may not be able to afford club membership or registration fees	Subsidise or waive fees for refugees
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
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
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
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
Programmes may be located too far from refugee accommodations	Hold sessions in or near reception centers, collective accommodation facilities and other places where refugees live

LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

BARRIER	OVERCOMING THE BARRIER
Language barriers can make it difficult for refugees, coaches and team-mates to communicate with each other	Provide interpreters, hire multilingual coaches, create multilingual information materials, use translation apps and highlight how playing football is an opportunity to practise the local language
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 Provide coaches, volunteers and staff with training to understand the refugee population's cultural norms, traditions, religious practices and attitudes to sport

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO REFUGEE PARTICIPATION



PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL BARRIERS

BARRIER	OVERCOMING THE BARRIER
Refugees may be concerned about racism, exclusion and other negative reactions from local communities	Organise inclusivity events such as cultural workshops and "meet and greet" opportunities. Apply a policy of zero tolerance to racism and other forms of discrimination.
Trauma and stress may affect a person's confidence or willingness to engage	Team up with psychologists and expert organisations to train staff on how to provide trauma-sensitive support to participants

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS

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

BARRIERS PARTICULARLY AFFECTING GIRLS AND WOMEN

BARRIER	OVERCOMING THE BARRIER
Cultural norms may restrict participation for women and girls, and some women may feel unsafe in mixed-gender environments or unfamiliar locations	Consider creating female-only environments, with female coaches and leaders Invite family members to observe the activities and to occasionally participate in them, to reassure them about the environment Allow participants to wear sportswear that respects their cultural and religious beliefs and that they feel comfortable in
Women refugees may have childcare duties that prevent them from attending football sessions.	Organise activities where mothers and children can participate together, engage trusted volunteers or members of the refugee community to assist with childcare during sessions, offer activities for mothers during their children's school hours

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Football and cultural exchange in Croatia

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.

Girl Power in Denmark, England and Germany

Founded by former Afghanistan international Khalida Popal, Denmark-based Girl Power collaborates with football clubs and community organisations across Europe to create safe, inclusive spaces for female refugees and asylum-seekers.

In Denmark, Girl Power partners with AB Gladsaxe to deliver football and leadership sessions. Weekly activities 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.

UEFA RESOURCES TO SUPPORT ACTION



UEFA Child and youth protection resources

A comprehensive set of learning resources, practical guidelines and templates for everyone working with children across the football pyramid.

UEFA Take Care

Take Care leverages the power of football to promote healthy habits. It currently comprises six modules, addressing physical activity, nutrition, mental health, digital addiction, substance awareness and road safety, and offers a set of practical tools including white papers, posters, podcasts, documentaries and educational sessions.



UEFA Walking Football Toolkit

This resource promotes healthy ageing and explores the health benefits of walking football, the needs of older participants and medical recommendations to ensure player safety. The toolkit includes practical guidance, forms, suggested training sessions and checklists to support recreational play, as well as the Laws of the Game for walking football.



UEFA Outraged

This anti-discrimination programme is designed to help run educational sessions on the topics of refugee discrimination, disability, homophobia, online abuse, racism, and sexism. For each of the six topics, UEFA Outraged features a video subtitled in 35 European languages and educational toolkit.



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.

READ MORE

GLOSSARY



Asylum seekers
Individuals who were forced to flee their country of origin and have applied for asylum in another country, but whose claim to refugee status has not yet been processed.

Forced displacement
A situation in which individuals or communities are forced to leave their homes or places of residence due to violence, persecution, armed conflict, fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, as well as natural disasters that undermine livelihoods and access to food and water.

Host communities
Refers to the local population and infrastructure in the area where refugees, asylum seekers or IDPs settle, either temporarily or permanently.

Internally displaced people (IDPs)
Individuals who were forced to flee their homes, while remaining in their own country.

Migrants
Individuals who have voluntarily moved within a country or across borders for personal reasons.

Refugees
Individuals who were forced to flee their country of origin, and have been granted international protection by a host country.

Unaccompanied minors
Under-aged individuals who arrive without a parent or legal guardian, putting them at higher risk of trafficking, exploitation and abuse.

UNHCR
The UN agency responsible for the protection of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons.

UEFA REFUGEE TOOLKIT



Access all the tools here:

uefa.com/refugeesupport

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 Support

a short explanation of UEFA's Refugee Support initiatives

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Union of European Football Associations

Executive
Michele Uva, UEFA Executive Director for Social and Environmental Sustainability

Author
Monica Namy, UEFA Senior Social and Environmental Sustainability Expert

Support
UNHCR Sports Team
hqsport@unhcr.org

Design and layout
Filipa Manzoni Palmeirim

For enquiries or feedback
UEFA Social and Environmental Sustainability Division
+41 848 00 27 27 | sustainability@uefa.ch

