



# Realities, Challenges and Approaches in combating racism in grassroots and professional football: a European perspective



## Transnational Comparative Report Cyprus – Greece – Ireland – Netherlands – Romania



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## Imprint

This report is an output of the TACKLE project. It aims to examine, analyse and present the current realities, challenges and gaps as to the presence of racist behaviours and incidents in grassroots football in 5 European countries. As a result of desk and field research at national level, a comparative perspective allows to identify and illustrate effective approaches and policies to address the issue. For further information on the project, as well as downloadable research and support material, go to:

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Methodology.....	4
Main issues of discrimination in football in project countries .....	8
Experiences and perceptions of racism in grassroots football.....	15
Measures taken by the state institutions, football associations, clubs, academies and NGOs to tackle racism and discrimination in football .....	23
Gaps and challenges in tackling discrimination in football.....	31
Effective transferrable practices to tackle discrimination in professional and grassroots football .....	39
Bibliography. ....	62





## Introduction

Tackling Racism in Grassroots Football (TACKLE) is a European project implemented by a consortium of six organizations and institutions from Greece, Cyprus, Ireland, Netherlands and Romania in cooperation with the UEFA Foundation in Switzerland. The project aims to support and educate football coaches and managers working in grassroots football to proactively tackle and prevent racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. The project seeks to enhance awareness among national and European football stakeholders as well as the general public about the severe impact of racism on players, grassroots football and sports in general. In addition, project intends to contribute to addressing such incidents and their effects to players, teams and all people involved by developing an educational toolkit, curriculum and an eLearning platform for coaches and players.

This transnational comparative report represents the first phase of the project, analysing the situation with racism and discrimination in grassroots and professional football in five countries, identifying gaps and challenges in tackling the problem as well as assessing the needs of the target groups – grassroots coaches, players and parents in measures to tackle the discrimination. Project partners in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands and Romania undertook desk research as well as field research examining secondary sources and producing original research using quantitative and qualitative methods, project partners identified the most effective measures and best practice examples to tackle discrimination in grassroots football, amateur clubs and academies.

The project countries, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands and Romania, present a challenge for comparative research on discrimination in football due to the differences in population characteristics, varying history of migration and diversity, football infrastructure, as well as resources available to respective football associations. Nevertheless, each of the countries is facing some similar challenges in tackling discrimination in football and represent a spectrum of issues characteristic of their wider regions, allowing to reconstruct part of the European picture and identify gaps and challenges in tackling discrimination in football relevant beyond the project countries.

Following this transnational comparative report, the TACKLE project will develop and make available a set of innovative resources and tools to educate, train and empower professionals working in football (coaches, trainers and managers) and stakeholders in the field so that they are in a position to identify, prevent and mitigate racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance.

The final result of the project includes the development of tools and resources that will empower the people working at the forefront of grassroots football to take up an active role in combating all forms of racism. In this way, the project aims to contribute to the prevention and mitigation of racism and xenophobic incidents in grassroots football.

## Methodology

As part of the transnational comparative report, project partners have undertaken research in two phases: desk research and field research. In the first stage, partners conducted review of secondary sources, media and national football association data as well as relevant NGOs to map the situation with discrimination in respective countries, identify measures undertaken by various stakeholders as well as identifying gaps and best practice examples in tackling discrimination in football. In the second phase, project partners conducted a series of interviews, focus groups and a survey with players, coaches and other stakeholders in football at grassroots and professional level.





The main target groups of the project are grassroots and amateur clubs and academies, particularly coaches and players between 12 and 18 years old. For the practical purposes of this project, we use the UEFA definition of grassroots football as:

*"All football that is non-professional and non-elite. Examples include children's football, school or youth football, amateur football, football for disabled players, even football for veterans. In short, it is the football played by the masses at a level where participation and a love of the game are paramount."*

The project scope is limited to racism in men's and women's grassroots and amateur football in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands and Romania.

For the practical purposes of this project, we are using the definition of racism as defined by the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination:

*"...any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life". (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, OHCHR, 1965)*

The definition would include the most common forms and overt manifestations of racism and xenophobia in football, such as anti-black, anti-Roma abuse, xenophobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia, extreme nationalism, neo-Nazi displays in football, as well as less evident manifestations such as bias and prejudice.

During the first phase of the research, project partners identified and reviewed the relevant secondary sources in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands and Romania, such as policy documents, academic publications, national and regional football associations' regulations, media articles and reports, relevant NGOs reports and other sources.

The aim of the field research was to assess the situation with racism and xenophobia in each country based on the desk review undertaken in the first phase, verifying the validity of the findings and identify the needs of the project target groups in tackling racism and xenophobia in football.

An online survey targeting football players at grassroots and professional level, including football academies in the 12-18 years-old range was conducted by all partners. Selection of survey participants was conducted using selective sampling to produce qualitative results representing the experiences of male and female football players with racism in football.

The sample size for each country varied according to the population between 15 participants in Cyprus to 35 in the Netherlands and Romania. Project partners aimed for the survey to be taken by at least 50% of respondents of ethnic minority background and 30% of participants to be women. The results were anonymized and analysed using percentage points to illustrate each answer.

Participants were provided with a summary of the project, its aims and how the results will be used. Informed consent was received, including the consent of parents/ legal guardians in case of respondents being minors. Each partner had a Child Protection Policy in place conducting the survey with minors. The survey questions were formulated in a neutral way not to cause offence or harm, especially to minors.

For the practical purposes of this research, the following working definition of 'ethnic minority' was adopted:

'The term ethnic minority is used as a broad descriptive marker to refer to ethnically distinct populations drawn from non-European heritage who reside in countries in Europe in which they make up a numerical minority.'





These 'visible' minorities include generationally settled and new migrant populations drawn from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. They also include Europe's largest indigenous ethnic minority grouping - the Roma population (which include e.g. the 'Oriental' Roma, the Sinti, 'Travellers/Gypsies') - and migrant Turkish populations whose ethnic, cultural and religious visibility is heightened in many countries of settlement in Europe. This also includes visible minorities from Latin America who are black.

Each project partner in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands and Romania organised one focus group discussion to verify the findings of the desk review and identify the needs of the project target group.

The focus group comprised up to 10 people working in grassroots football, national or regional football associations, clubs, academies, minority groups or NGOs tackling discrimination and promoting inclusion in football.

The focus group discussion is a qualitative research method that serves as a complimentary tool to gather information about racism and discrimination in grassroots football.

Each project partner selected a diverse group of participants that meet the following criteria:

- Have significant experience in grassroots or professional football or tackling discrimination and promoting inclusion in football.
- Be directly involved in delivery of football activities or administrative roles in football clubs or NGOs working in football.
- Demonstrate interest in tackling discrimination and promoting inclusion in football.

Each partner strived to ensure the adequate representation of ethnic and other minority communities in the focus group with a minimum of 30%. Focus group represents a guided discussion involving all members of the group led by a facilitator appointed by the project partners.

Each project partner conducted 10 interviews with grassroots coaches from a minimum of 5 clubs or academies in each country and 5 interviews with parents of grassroots or academy players. The same requirement to ensure representation of ethnic and other minority communities and women in the focus group applied, with a minimum of 30%.

Interviews are a complimentary qualitative research method allowing to gather opinions from the target group about the most effective interventions to tackle racism and discrimination in grassroots football. Project partners in each country used a set of standardised questions but guided the interview with additional follow-up questions based on the answers of the interviewees.

In Cyprus, the field research team conducted 15 interviews (with 9 coaches, 1 academy owner/coach and 5 parents). The interviews were conducted between June and August 2021 and included participants from span over the most populous cities of Cyprus – Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca.

Romanian partners conducted three focus group sessions with 5 male and 1 female; 5 participants are football coaches (out of which 3 are also former footballers, who played football both in clubs for junior and senior professionals, 2 are also physical education teachers in pre-university schools and 1 at university level), 1 is football club owner. 2 participants work with children who currently play football at High School with Sports Program in Pitești. Further 10 interviews with football coaches and 5 interviews with parents of athletes were conducted, where 30% of the interviewees identified as ethnic minorities. In the interviewees group there are 12 men and 3 women aged between 34 and 50 years old. Ten of these are coaches of boys' teams aged between 12 and 18 years old and two are coaches of girls' teams.





Online survey included 47 football players, from grassroots football (42) and professional football (5), with 89% male participants and 11% female.

The distribution of participants per age categories was the following:

	<i>Number of participants</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
12-14 years	10	21.3%
14-16 years	11	23.5%
16-18 years	21	44.6%
Other age: (from 26 to 36 years of age)	5	10.6%

In the Netherlands, the field research has been conducted with a survey for 9 grassroots football clubs, interviews with four parents of grassroots football players and four grassroots football coaches as well as an expert meeting with academics and other experts working on the sociology and history of sport complemented by more informal interviews with parents and spectators at a multi-ethnic football club in Rotterdam.

The research team in Ireland visited a summer football camp facilitated by the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and made contact with four grassroots football clubs and attended their grounds during scheduled training sessions. The team distributed the TACKLE questionnaire to players between the ages of 15-17 years and it was completed by 20 young people. The clubs included rural, peri-urban, and urban locations and the results were consistent across the sample. Several discussion groups with players were hosted to introduce the project and discuss the general issues of racism in football.

The research team carried out in-person interviews with five parents attending and supporting the summer camp activities. The parents comprised 2 males and 3 females and ranged from 35 to 47 years of age and were asked the same seven questions. The interviews were conducted in-person on a one-on-one basis with the parents.

The focus group meeting lasted approximately 90 minutes with participants representing all stakeholders in the research process and discussed the issue of racism in football, the reporting mechanisms, training support and the impact of racism on young players.

The field research conducted in Greece aimed to examine the situation regarding racism and xenophobia in grassroots football, by referring to a range of target groups: coaches, academic experts, football players, and parents of football players. The focus group was conducted by one facilitator and one note-taker and lasted approximately 65 minutes. The research team made use of the Lime Survey to design two anonymous survey questionnaires: the first was addressed to coaches and parents and comprised of 27 questions, while the second one was addressed to football players and comprised of 25 questions. The surveys ran for about 30-40 days, taking into consideration difficulties arising from the Greek restricting measures due to Covid-19 emergency.

The Greek research team managed to approach 57 individuals through online survey, of which 33 fully completed the questionnaire, and four participants for the focus group. The online questionnaire was disseminated to all football stakeholders in Greece. Specifically, the questionnaire was sent to the following organizations and federations:

- Hellenic Football Federation
- Union of Football Coaches in Greece
- Various professional and amateur football teams in Greece





The questionnaire was filled by 32 coaches (31 men and one woman) and one female guardian. The target for ethnic representation was unfortunately not achieved as only one individual self-identified as being of ethnic minority background, which could be partly explained by people unwilling to self-identify as ethnic minority while participating in such surveys. The vast majority of coaches claimed that they have more than five years of experience in coaching, while seven participants have 1-5 years of experience and five participants have less than one year experience working as a coach. One parent declared that her child has been member of a football team for more than five years.

A survey for players above the age of 16 was conducted in Greece addressing the following stakeholders to promote it and reach the corresponding target group of football players:

- Hellenic Football Federation
- Pan-Hellenic Professional Football Players' Association
- Various football academies in Greece
- Various professional and amateur clubs in Greece

The survey reached 76 individuals, of which 30 fully completed the questionnaire. The final sample comprised of 9 women or girls and 21 boys or men, with 26,3 years old of median age. In terms of ethnicity, only three individuals declared having a migrant background, and the majority declared being Greek nationals. The majority of the respondents (25 football players) claimed that they play football for more than five years, with four participants being in the field between 1-5 years and one for less than a year.

Further, the focus group with Greek stakeholders comprised of one academic expert, one football player and two coaches. In terms of gender, three participants were male and one female. Engaging from an early age, they all have long experience in football, in which they are all involved with more than one role (i.e., coach, player, academic).

## Main issues of discrimination in football in project countries

This section outlines the main issues of discrimination in football in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands and Romania in comparative perspective, analysing the most notable incidents and trends based on desk and field research. While significant attention is given to discriminatory incidents in professional football in all project countries, incidents at grassroots level receive significantly less coverage and no data collection systems or reporting mechanisms are available at most football associations except Netherlands and Ireland.

The secondary sources analysed by project partners thus mostly deal with professional football, with the majority of incidents discussed in the media and dealt with by football associations focus on higher tiers. The field research focused on grassroots football which presents a challenge in certain discrepancy of perceptions of the problem of discrimination in football at grassroots level. In countries featuring relatively low ethnic diversity, racism in football is perceived as not very big of a problem by some respondents despite a number of high-profile incidents in professional game which features more ethnic minority players relative to the population.

Racism in Cyprus football is most frequently perpetrated by organized groups far-right groups. Nationalism has deep historic roots in sports in Cyprus and especially in football (Maniou 2019). Football and politics have been interlinked since the beginning of the development of the sport in the early 1900s with many football clubs and their fans traditionally having roots in the development of the nationalist ideology in the context of the fight against British colonialism. Cyprus also saw the development of clubs linked with socialist ideology on the other end of the political spectrum (Stylianou and Theodoropoulou 2018).







The division was so deep that for a number of years there have been two federations, in which teams espousing nationalist and irredentist ideologies played in a different league to those who espoused socialist and humanist ideologies (Ibid). This division has evolved into the fabric of Cypriot society and although there has been an acceptance or tolerance towards the other, it is still visible today in terms of values and ideas. It has also provided a fertile ground for the promotion, support or the tacit approval of the expression of political views in football grounds. Recent media, government and public discourse on migration and highlighting cultural differences of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers to Cypriot culture<sup>1</sup>, have also influenced and cross-pollinated covert and overt forms of racism.

One of the main issues identified in a 2009 report (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2009)<sup>2</sup> is that despite the existence of racist incidents (via institutionalized or informal cultural practices) the competent authorities often refuse to fully acknowledge racism as an issue, thus limiting successful remedies to the problem. Specifically, the report claimed that:

“The main problem with racism in sport is primarily located in male professional football (and mostly in the higher leagues) and to a lesser extent in basketball; no problem in athletics was located. This study has identified a number of racial discriminatory acts and some racial incidents that warrant action by the authorities. However, the line taken by the sports authorities and the Cyprus Football Association (CFA) is the denial of the existence of any real problem, claiming that it is unnecessary and indeed inappropriate for the ruling body to take action to combat racial incidents and discrimination.”

This can also be backed by Kassimeris’ (2018) claim that “racism is still an issue of concern in football (in Greece and) Cyprus and, in the case of Cyprus, is institutionalized, as evidenced by the “kind of myopia that characterizes football officials” regarding this issue.”<sup>3</sup> The connection of nationalism and racism is evident in other recent studies such as the one by Stevens et al. (2015) who suggested that the tolerance by school authorities of nationalist symbols may have led to the polarization between majority and minority ethnic groups in schools.

One incident of racism that drew considerable press attention happened during French-born Benin forward Mickael Pote’s spell at Omonia Nicosia. “I’ve heard these sorts of noises before, during a game, but it was usually isolated and so I never reacted. This time it was from a large group which made it difficult for me not to react” (Stevenson 2014). The noises heard were monkey chants by fans of APOEL, a rival football club with a history of explicit nationalist fan culture. Pote reacted and was booked with a yellow card by the referee, showing the inability of match authorities to protect the footballer. Later, the Cyprus FA fined APOEL with 10 thousand euros and a partial stadium closure.

Another incident that received attention occurred in early 2020, concerned an alleged racial abuse towards a footballer at a minor league (Chris, APEA Akrotiri)<sup>4</sup>. The incident took place in a fourth-tier match between A.E Korakou vs APEA Akrotiri, with fans of the former team shouting “slave” towards the footballer<sup>5</sup>, among other insults. According to reports from national digital media, the referee interrupted the match and, astonishingly, blamed the team of the player who was racially abused because its players walked off the pitch in protest. The player later reported the incident to the police and the national association of footballers

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<sup>1</sup> For a mix and match of such discourse, see here <http://apokalipsi.com/site/?p=26524>

<sup>2</sup> The report is available [here](#)

<sup>3</sup> An online version of this chapter is available here,

<http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/62138/1/352.pdf.pdf#page=94>

<sup>4</sup> For a short video on the incident, <https://www.kerkida.net/eidiseis/g-epilekti-agrotiko/apea-akrotiri/ointeo-i-ratsistiki-epithesi-poy-kataggellei-i-apea>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.kerkida.net/eidiseis/g-epilekti-agrotiko/kataggelia-ratsistikis-epithesis-se-agona-tis-stok-brisies-kai-sklabos>



(PASP) initiated an investigation. However, the media did not follow up the incident, so there is no available evidence in press on the conclusion of such investigation. From its part, A.E Korakou's board issued a statement following the event, rejecting the claim. The statement ended suggesting, that A.E Korakou cannot be racist, as they allow the training of three asylum seekers with the team<sup>6</sup>.

The two examples are clear indication of the present realities at play in regard to the actions and steps being taken to address incidents of racism in Cyprus football. Firstly, it is evident that though the Football federation, the media and the general public react against incidents of racisms when these arise and express an interest in addressing them, there is an absence of institutional steps and actions to root it out of the game. Most importantly, such actions are mostly responsive and ad-hoc. Thus, in the absence of the significant coverage, interest and scrutiny, incidents of racism in grassroots football receive less attention and may be overlooked.

Greece is facing a similar situation to Cyprus in professional football with most incidents of discrimination perpetrated by organized far-right groups. The only systematic data records on incidents is derived from Fare network incident list published on their web-site, in which reports have been brought to Fare's attention through eyewitness or media accounts as well as through the functioning of the dedicated Fare observer system at UEFA and FIFA competitions<sup>7</sup>. Since 2013, Fare network has recorded 20 discriminatory incidents in Greek football; most of them were racist and nationalist or neo-Nazi; the sexist, homophobic and antisemitic incidents were limited. The most affected by racist abuse were nationals of neighboring countries, such as Albania and Turkey, and African or Afro-Greek athletes (less incidents towards referees, team officials or the audience were reported); interestingly Fare recorded incidents that were mostly neo-Nazi manifestations without specific target present in the stadium, such as Nazi salutes, neo-Nazi banners, flyers distributed in stadiums, burning of Turkish flags. The fans constituted the main perpetrator (in 16 out of the 20 incidents reported), as less football players and team officials were mentioned by Fare. In the period 2015-2020, the phenomena of intolerance seemed to decline, as only six incidents were reported.

The Greek major sports media, such as SPORT248, Filathlos<sup>9</sup>, and gazzetta.gr<sup>10</sup>, tend to cover discrimination incidents, mostly in professional football. However, considering that a wide range of mass media and sports press are controlled by executives that may also own football teams (Zaimakis, 2016), the published (or unpublished) incidents should be examined carefully. In the public sphere, when the debate shifts to the racist or xenophobic incidents during or after a sport event, the focus is directed to the activity of the few hooligan groups (Pavlou, 2009), neglecting the deep and institutional roots of discrimination.

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, it is inferred that the incidents peaked during 2013-2014. This condition is highly related to the social and political circumstances in Greece. This is not new however, as fandom performative acts and sports in general, as social fields with their own narratives and patterns of behaviour, are "contextual, relational and negotiable" (Zaimakis, 2016, p. 1). In this context, 2013-2014 constitutes the period of the strong presence and activity of the "Golden Dawn", Greek neo-Nazi political party, which had entered the Parliament in 2012 and later banned by court in 2020. The populist, ethnocentric, anti-immigrant, anti-globalization and anti-communist discourse of Golden Dawn had

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<sup>6</sup> See the statement here, <https://www.kerkida.net/eidiseis/g-epilekti-agrotiko/diapseydoyn-gia-ratsistiko-epeisodio>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.farenet.org/get-involved/report-discrimination/observer-scheme-faq/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sport24.gr/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://filathlos.gr/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gazzetta.gr/>





managed to enter not only Greek society, but Greek stadia, too, through its nationalist symbols on flags and banners, its nationalist chants and salutes (Zaimakis, 2016).

In Ireland the most prevalent types of discrimination reported are racism and sectarian abuse. The main targets for this type of abuse are the players. The most common perpetrators are players and spectators. There is no difference between grassroots and professional in terms of the most frequent perpetrators however with social media providing easy access and reach, professional players are now more targeted than before. In a recent Irish survey which 135 volunteers completed, 63% replied that they had witnessed or experienced racism in Irish football over various levels.

The players in lower divisions often do not have a platform to have their voice heard especially in the mainstream media. Racism and discrimination issues at grassroots level may reach a local news authority but that's often as far as it goes. Cyrus Christie, a Republic of Ireland International believes this is because it doesn't get the same traction. He says "players in the lower divisions, their voice isn't as powerful as a Marcus Rashford, or a Raheem Sterling and people don't generally want to pick up on it. I think that's the fault of everyone, whether it's me or journalists, the media, the clubs, or other professionals... we should all be standing together. We should be highlighting all these issues."

A 2018 study by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, titled "Being Black in the EU", surveyed almost 6,000 migrants in 12 EU countries and concluded racism "remains a pervasive scourge" across the continent. "Ireland is one of the countries that come out worse, frankly", said the Agency's director Michael O'Flaherty. The rate in Ireland was 51%, well above average and the third highest among those surveyed.

Sectarian abuse is defined as the following 'narrow-minded beliefs that lead to prejudice, discrimination, malice and ill-will towards members, or presumed members, of a religious denomination'. A denomination – is a division or grouping within a faith e.g., Protestants and Catholics within Christianity.

One example where this abuse has taken place is towards Stoke winger and Ireland International James McClean. James has been targeted by opposition supporters on several occasions, often due to his decision not to wear a poppy on his shirt to mark Remembrance Day. McClean has explained that he does not wear a poppy because of Bloody Sunday in 1972, where British soldiers shot dead civilian protesters in his hometown of Derry. McClean was subjected to sectarian abuse on several occasions, leading to anti-racism group Kick It Out and The FAI urging the authorities to act as "the current situation cannot continue". The FAI Chief Executive Jonathan Hill said that the association: "remains committed to safeguarding all of our players against any form of abuse on any social media platform. To abuse or threaten James or any player because of his nationality should not be tolerated by society.

In the Netherlands, when looking at the most frequent perpetrators and victims of discrimination in Dutch football and how this discrimination relates to wider societal configurations and patterns of discrimination it will be helpful to look at the three most frequently identified forms of discrimination separately (although they are interlinking and occasionally overlap). These are 1) discrimination based on 'race', ethnicity, culture and religion 2) sexism and homophobia, and 3) antisemitic chants (Romijn & Van Kalmthout, 2018; Cijfers in Beeld, 2020).

The fact that the Dutch professional and grassroots football are sites in which various forms of discrimination regularly occur has long been recognized by the various stakeholders in Dutch football, most prominently the Dutch Royal Football Association (KNVB) and Dutch government ministries, often working together with or alongside other stakeholders and advocacy groups. From 1994 onwards anti-discrimination regulations and initiatives have attempted to counter discrimination in both professional and grassroots football, but up until 2018 attention and resources given to anti-discrimination measures were intermittent (Elling





et al., 2020). This was mostly due to the sensitivity of debates surrounding multiculturalism, racism and discrimination that take place in wider Dutch society and in the political sphere (Elling et al., 2020) Media attention to discrimination in football was also irregular and primarily reactive, increasing when explicit forms of discrimination occurred but usually ebbing away again until the next incident.

In 2018 the topic of discrimination in football was taken up again on the level of national policy makers with the Nationaal Sportakkoord (National Sport Agreement), but the topic became particularly salient in public and political debates after an incident in November 2019 during the game between FC Den Bosch and Excelsior in the Dutch 2<sup>nd</sup> league. Excelsior player Ahmed Mendes Moreira, a Dutch player whose parents were born in Guinea-Bissau and Guinea, was the victim of racial abuse by people in the stands after which the game was temporarily abandoned. The incident sparked debates about racism in Dutch football, media, and wider society and led to many high-profile players, coaches and other people involved in football to speak out against racism in football, including the Dutch national team. Besides sparking an enduring public debate about racism in sport, the incident also led the KNVB, in concert with the Dutch professional football leagues, and the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport, to release a plan called “Our Football is for Everyone” (2020) which lays out a comprehensive set of ideas and policies to tackle racism in both professional and amateur football.

This renewed salience also led to more attention being given to ensure discrimination is accurately identified and reported in both professional and grassroots football. Before 2019 discriminatory acts in football – except for chants by football fans in professional football – were often left unreported or not reported specifically as racism or discrimination by the KNVB, who are primarily involved in collecting statistics regarding these incidents. Besides the KNVB, also the Dutch police, local councils, and public prosecution services keep track on discriminatory incidents in both professional and grassroots football. These statistics show that:

- Between April 2019 – when the KNVB first launched an online form to report discrimination - and November 2020, the KNVB registered 115 unique incidents involving discrimination in professional and grassroots football (Elling et al., 2020)
- Between 2014 and 2019 the police registered a yearly average of around 60 insulting chants in and around football stadiums. The insulting character of these chants was not necessarily discriminatory in nature, but many of them contained racist and/or antisemitic language (Elling et al., 2020).
- In 2019 alone, 40% of all prosecuted discriminatory acts in The Netherlands were committed by football fans. In 2020 this dropped to 3%, most likely due to the Coronavirus which meant that supporters were generally not allowed in stadiums (Cijfers in Beeld, 2020).

#### 1) Discrimination based on ‘race’, ethnicity, culture, and religion

In this section, discrimination based on various social identity dimensions are surveyed together. This is to reflect how in everyday discourses about ‘race’ (in Dutch everyday parlance the term ‘race’ is uncommon and generally considered taboo) and ethnicity as social identity dimensions often are conflated (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2012). Rather than explicitly referring to it, everyday discourses circumvent ‘race’ and instead often refer to other social categories, for instance ethnicity, or the national background of ethnic groups: (White) Dutch, Moroccan, Surinamese, Antillean and Turkish. Also, religion (particularly Islam/Muslims) is often invoked to simultaneously refer to Turkish and Moroccan minorities (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2012) Exact numbers as to which ethnic minority group is the victim of discrimination in Dutch football most frequently are not available. However, a rapport of the Dutch public prosecutor in 2020 revealed that in wider Dutch society, most prosecuted racist acts and statements are committed by White Dutch people and aimed at Black and African people (34%), followed by



Turkish & Moroccan people (both 4%), and Antillean people (3%). Although this report was nation-wide and related not specifically to football it seems to reflect news reports on discrimination in professional and grassroots football and our field work analysis which show that Black, Moroccan, and Turkish football players appear to be the victim of discrimination most often. Wider patterns of discrimination in Dutch society thus appear to be mirrored in Dutch professional and amateur football. In terms of media attention, it is usually discrimination happening at the highest professional levels that receive media interest. Discrimination on the grassroots football not only remains relatively unnoticed on the level of reporting and sanctioning, but also receives little media attention. This also goes for more implicit forms of discrimination. Harmsen et al. (2019) note for instance, how 'jokes' by coaches aimed at players of color are often not registered as racist by the perpetrators whilst nevertheless causing offense to the victims, something that also came up during our field work analysis. The problem of discrimination in Dutch football might thus be bigger due to many acts remaining unacknowledged.

## 2) Sexism and homophobia

A 2018 report surveying board members, referees and sport staff in grassroots football found that 15% of respondents had been witness to sexist behavior and acts, and 5% encountered sexual intimidation and homophobia (Romijn & Van Kalmhout, 2018). Another poll found that 23% of football fans encountered homophobic discrimination in football stadiums (EenVandaag, 2020). These numbers indicate that various manifestations of discrimination based on sex, gender and sexual orientation remain prevalent in Dutch football, in which classical notions of 'tough' and straight masculinity remain normative. For instance, Elling & Hoeijmakers (2018) note that 84% of men in team-sports have a positive approach towards homosexuality, which is slightly below the national average of 86%. At the same time, however, a culture in which words denoting homosexuality are used as swear-words on the football pitch and in football stadiums remains commonplace and a minority of men in team-sports think this should be penalized by referees (46%).

## 3) Antisemitic chants

Another frequently reported form of discrimination in Dutch football is the singing of antisemitic chants in football stadiums. The report by the Dutch public prosecutor reveals that 75% of charges of antisemitic discrimination occurs in and around football stadiums (Cijfers in Beeld, 2020). Antisemitic chants in Dutch football stadiums has been a long-lasting problem in Dutch football. These chants are often linked to the supposedly 'Jewish' club Ajax. Ajax fans have long adopted the nickname of 'Jews' – due to the long historical or perceived links between the city of Amsterdam, Judaism and Ajax – and this has sparked antisemitic chants from rival fan groups. Although antisemitism is on the rise in the Netherlands in general– not dissimilar to many other Western European countries – prosecuted discriminatory offences seem to be mainly taking place in the context of football stadiums and rivalry with Ajax. The use of anti-Semitic epithets in Dutch football is often perceived as a part of 'football culture' and has transposed from being directed only at Ajax and its fans to also be used against match officials and other fan groups (Het Parool, 2020). Nonetheless, these anti-Semitic chants are perceived as painful and offensive by the Jewish community and have to be recognized as discriminatory (Verhoeven & Wagenaar, 2021).

In Romania, where ethnic minorities represent approximately 11% of the population, discrimination in football and society most frequently targets two largest minority groups - Hungarians and Roma. The media discourse around football and major stakeholders recognise racism and discrimination as a major issue, but often treat cases as isolated incidents rather than a systematic problem. Anti-Hungarian and anti-Roma chants are a frequent feature of professional football games both at club and national team level in Romania. In 2019/20 season alone, several incidents of anti-Hungarian chants at national team and club level were recorded, with UEFA imposing sanctions on Romanian football association ordering them to play several matches behind closed doors. Racist abuse between





players has also been a feature in the past several years, as well as sexist and homophobic comments by Gigi Becali, owner of FCSB Bucharest, for which he was sanctioned by both the Romanian football association and the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD).

Many discriminatory incidents, anti-Hungarian, anti-Roma chants, banners targeting refugees and LGBTIQ+ community have been perpetrated by organised far-right groups in Romanian football, including the biggest national team ultras group 'Uniti Sub Tricolor.' Former leader of the group, George Simion, currently heads a far-right political party 'AUR' which won seats in the national parliament in 2020.

The most recent high-profile incident related to racism in Romania has been nevertheless associated with Romanian referee team. During the Champions League match between Paris Saint-Germain and Istanbul Başakşehir on 8th of December 2020, Romanian referee Sebastian Colțescu's team was at the center of racism allegations using skin colour to refer to Black members of Istanbul coaching staff. The incident received wide attention internationally and led to condemnation by Romanian authorities. The match was abandoned and replayed the next day with a new referee team after both teams refused to return to the pitch. Although the term used by Colțescu's referee team is not explicitly racist, it highlights the lack of awareness of using racially insensitive language and referring to people using only their skin colour as inappropriate.

While the President of the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) once claimed that "In Romanian football we have enough problems, but in no case can it be said about our supporters that they are racists", the reality presents a different picture:

- 15.03.2010 Gigi Becali, owner of Steaua Club (now FCSB), made a racist statement about Rapidul Club stating "if Rapid withdraws from the championship, we get rid of them, the championship becomes whiter" (alluding that Rapidul players are gypsies, the chant Steaua fans have been targeting Rapid players and fans with during the matches);
- In 2014, a supporter of Rapidul Club threw bananas at the Brazilian striker of an opposing team and made racist chants;
- In August 2014, Cornel Dinu, the administrator of Dinamo Club had a strong racist reaction addressed to club's ex-player Ousmane N'Doye: "He's part of the mess in Africa that we don't need. He's a strange African wizard."

Despite the fact that there have been many racists and discriminatory incidents reported in the media in the past several years perpetrated by team owners, supporters and players, there is no systematic data collection undertaken by the Romanian Football Federation.

Based on analysis of media reports and publications, we may suggest that most of the reported incidents in the last decade have had, in decreasing order of their number, racist, anti-Roma and anti-Hungarian (with the same frequency) and homophobic as well as Islamophobic nature.

At grassroots level, one of the incidents that made it into the national media, was the abuse by parents at an U-11 match in 2019. In front of their own children, the parents present at Galați stadium at the third tournament of the Junior football competition "U11" racially abused referees, opposing players and parents from opposing clubs.

When it comes to dealing with discrimination in football, the Romanian National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD) is actively prosecuting discriminatory incidents alongside the work of the FRF. According to NCCD reports between 2010 and 2020, out of the 97 cases analyzed by the Council only 4 were in football (3 anti-Roma and 1 anti-black), 3 were punished by a fine, 1 by recommendation. The 2020 NCCD report specifies that from 31 applied sanctions for discrimination, only 2 were in football (the Romanian Football Federation was fined for discriminatory chants targeting Hungarian minority during Romania v





Spain match in September 2019. In February 2020, a group of football supporters forced a young Asian man to get off the subway, in an apparent racist attack referencing Covid-19.

Both professional and grassroots football are often lauded as great social equalizers and meritocratic spaces. Reality, however, often proves to be more ambivalent. Besides its potential for being a progressive social space, wider patterns of discrimination in society appear to be mirrored in professional and grassroots football in all project countries.

## Experiences and perceptions of racism in grassroots football

The lack of systematic and reliable data on incidents of discrimination in most project countries presents a major challenge in assessing the actual state of the problem. The experiences and perceptions of racism and xenophobia in football in all project countries at grassroots level largely corresponds to the issues identified in the desk research. Respondents of the surveys, interviewees and focus group participants identified the most frequent forms of discrimination and suggested their perceptions of the scale of the problem and provided an assessment of actions to tackle it.

In Cyprus, Greece, Ireland and Romania nevertheless, respondents at grassroots level tend to downplay the scale and importance of the problem of racism and xenophobia. This could be explained by a number of factors or their combination, such as:

- Organised far-right groups in Greece, Cyprus and Romania tend to play a big role as perpetrators of discriminatory incidents, but are practically absent at grassroots level;
- Lack of awareness of racism and xenophobia and ability to recognise it leading to low attribution of importance to certain incidents and perception of their frequency;
- Lack of ethnic diversity of players at grassroots level relative to professional football
- Small numbers of ethnic minority participants among the respondents.

In Cyprus, though many of the interviewees acknowledge the destructive effect racism and discrimination, expressing their interest and support for actions to address, it became apparent that there is no clear pattern of reporting discrimination. Similarly, they noted the absence of institutional action and training on the issue (either for football personnel or players). This lack of training and structured information on the matter was evident in the differing and conflating interpretations of racism put forward during the interviews. It is also worth mentioning that some hesitation was observed in sharing information and examples of such incidents. On other occasions, although participants felt that there is a general environment which sometimes conceals racism and less overt cases of discrimination are rampant, they themselves mostly focused on overt cases of racist behavior.

The situation in non-professional and grassroots football appears to follow the pattern of professional football. Most participants have noted that they have not experienced any major incident which constitutes a discriminatory practice outright. However, some references they made while discussing personal stories and encounters within grassroots football, clearly merit a closer look. Perhaps characteristic of the Cypriot society, many participants suggested that discrimination in terms of weight, physical characteristics and gender were the most common observed. A common answer amongst participants, posits the view that football is a sport that unities, which means that by default it functions to tear down barriers. In addition, it can function as a medium for the promotion of tolerance, meaning that despite possible racist views, athletes interact with one another within the boundaries of sportsmanship. Relating to this, participant B (coach) has mentioned,

“Because football is unifying and a sport with impact, I do not think there is racism in football so much as the general society. They see you and they wonder, who is he, where he comes from, why is he here? Football is a common language: on the pitch everyone speaks the same language. Maybe in times of pressure you see some racist discourse, but this would never happen during the beginning of the match. So, people in football are more questioning





on this type of behavior and themselves. Perhaps they have something in mind, but publicly there is a lot of respect in football [...] some players may not be racist by conviction but use racist language just to pile the pressure on the opponent, if they see that they can affect the performance of another player.”

There was a general appreciation of the personal ways in which racism can emerge within the context of grassroots football, but the results show a lack of understanding of institutional ways in which racism is perpetrated and reproduced. We asked participants if they feel confident that they can recognize situations and incidents of racism: the answer was yes from all participants. However, when the participants were asked to provide, in their own words, a general definition of racism, it was evident that they do not consider it as an institutional issue. Most focus on the ways in which children are being treated, while some parents seemed to confuse differentiation because of skill and competition to racism. Overall, throughout the interviews coaches exhibited far better understanding of the phenomenon than parents.

The participants recognized some reasons as the causes of discriminatory phenomena according to what they have experience so far:

- Coaches and personal preferences
- Economic and social standing of parents
- Football being part of the rest of society
- Being part of the mob in the stands
- Competitiveness and pressure during matches
- Fear of the ‘Other’, not exposing children and parents to other cultures

However, the perspective of coaches is different to those of the parents, as well as the motivation behind their actions. Coaches put forward a different perspective from the parents, many of whom seem to be eager to see their children being accepted and told that they are ‘special’, better and more talented than others. Hence, there seems to be a mismatch between the interpretation of the situation between two important stakeholders who have direct effect on the children and hence also in the group dynamics.

“Discrimination also comes from parents, from the house. Sometimes coaches assess the level of the children with football in mind. The parent might not be able to understand that giving the children chance to grow as part of another group might be beneficial, they might instill the feeling of rejection to the children as they push coaches to train them all together. I think that much of what we call discrimination in these younger ages comes down to physical characteristics and skill rather than gender or color or origin” (participant G, coach)

Some answers were more unconventional than others. Most participants understood either that there is a problem with racism or that racism is not a big issue in football because of its unifying nature as a sport. A person of migrant background himself, participant I (parent) suggests something entirely different than what we have encountered in the rest of the target audience. He claimed, that playing with words can add to the negativity which is not necessarily helpful:

“I believe that today we are too sensitive on this issue. In my case, I try to expose my kids as much as possible to other people and cultures so that they can gain an insight. Sometimes I hear that when a black footballer steps into a team, immediately others will label him as the black person. I do not consider this to be racism, if I was white and was stepping into a team of ten black footballers, they would call me white. They are labels yes, but not necessarily racist labels. Sometimes difference is labelled for affection and as reference. This negativity can spill into everything, and in no case we can call all behaviors as racism and bullying. We need to be careful that mistakes by kids can stigmatize them as racist, for sure though they can be explained the terms and how to use language.”







The argument here was that not only many incidents understood as racism may be too far-fetched, showing lack of understanding on what constitutes a racist incident, but that accusing someone of racist behavior can impact the academy negatively. Covert cases turning to overt cases is an issue that perhaps needs more attention. For instance, some participants have mentioned the subtle ways of discriminating against ethnic minority athletes or those with migration background. Such incidents may be happening on a consistent basis, so they become overt, a reality that signifies an inability of a team or a coach to proactively assess, identify and address such situations.

A participant mentioned that his team suffered such subtle behavior with referees being stricter towards black footballers playing for his team. The discrimination was so evident that the coach routinely addressed the referees before matches sometimes to take pro-active measures in ensuring that this would not happen again. At the same time, the same participant has expressed there was a lack of awareness on the part of other teams but also referees, on how to address individuals with darker skins and how to avoid racist expressions. Taking into consideration that referees are the officials who are responsible to identify, report and call for the punishment of cases of racist discrimination, such confusion points to the assumption that there is a great deal of misperception of what constitutes racism and discrimination even amongst the officials themselves.

Most respondents in Romania suggested that racism in football is not such a big issue compared to other countries. They all agreed discrimination in Romanian football exists, but only as small incidents and only among players aged 15+. Participants believe that factors causing discriminatory behaviour are the educational level, the cultural aspects, freedom misunderstood, not enough support from parents (and parents' pressure on child to get high performance) and negative influence of mass media when it presents such incidents. Also, the social environment generates discrimination (belonging to the rural environment of physically talented children) and access to sports infrastructure (lack of access to sports facilities and material bases).

In relation to education of young football players (12-18 years) on combating racism and discrimination in grassroots football, one of the participants pointed out that 12 years is the proper age to start doing it, as youngsters are able to understand the concepts and explanations and we can efficiently work on such educational aspects. All agreed that intervention through education at a younger age is necessary (currently only bullying is treated/approached in school, but not necessarily discrimination in sports activities in schools and clubs). Anti-racism and anti-discrimination education can and should be greatly improved at junior age.

While coherent with the opinions expressed before, participants however stated that especially when it is about grassroots football, racism is still small, as the interaction and activities are reduced to friendly, amateur matches between teams in villages and small cities. Most discriminatory incidents in Romania at grassroots level target Hungarian minority and the Roma community as well as children from orphanages, followed by players with migration background, mostly Black Africans. In grassroots football, referees are also sometimes targets of such incidents, being verbally and even physically abused.

The perpetrators are generally the fans, parents of the players (as negative role models due to their behaviour) and the players themselves. The coaches and referees were not named as perpetrators from the experience of the participants. What participants mentioned however, are the cases of coaches insulting young players (insults such as "You are stupid!", "You are good for nothing!") – but these are not directly discriminations but bullying and lack of pedagogical and coaching skills.

During international matches between Romanian and foreign teams, Romanian players are often victims of discrimination with perpetrators calling the Romanian players "gypsies".





Participants emphasized that when occurred, discrimination took the form of chants such as “You, gypsy!” or “You, poor!”, with reference to ethnic, cultural or social origin. Sometimes coaches are under the pressure of parents (being requested to favour some players and discriminate others) due to the fact that coaches get their salary from parents (coaches are paid by parents).

Participants emphasized prevention as a necessary form to combat discrimination in football, prevention achieved through education (a) at home (by parents); (b) in school (by teachers) and (c) in sports clubs (by coaches, referees), to achieve a healthy society from a social point of view.

During the interviews, the first question was meant to identify the frequency of discriminatory abuse players witnessed during practice or matches. If the answer to this question was affirmative, the interviewees were asked to identify the measures that were taken by them or the regional or national sports associations to fight against the racism and the abuse they witnessed. In this way most answers identify definitive situations of abuse witnessed during training or official games. Situations were presented when racial or ethnic slurs were used against the athletes by other players, supporters or the parents of athletes from the opposing teams.

There are situations where some of the players have nicknames referencing their race or ethnicity that they apparently made to accept or tolerate. Sometimes this form of addressing people is quite frequent, public and there are no reactions of rejection from them or those around them. There are articles in the Romanian press about racism among Romanians. For example the journalist Raisa Humeniuc wrote on 10.12.2020 an article titled “Racism is a problem in Romania as well as the rest of Europe”

The article is the result of an interview with psychologist Daniel David and it talks about the causes and effects of discrimination. The psychologist says that Romanians are not educated and do not actually understand what racism is. Romanians are not more racists than others, instead they are very distrusting of one another and they generalise this towards foreigners.

According to the interviews with coaches and parents, most of the victims of discriminatory abuse are Romany players but this does not mean that this kind of abuse does not happen towards players of other ethnicities or skin colours. In sports and in football especially the most frequent offenders are the supporters.

In the same article psychologist Daniel David mentions that “furthermore we (Romanians) are not educated and we do not know what racism is exactly, but language matters, and this is something that needs to first be learnt at home and then in schools”.

It is often the case with players aged 12-18 where their parents are supporters at the official matches or spectators at trainings. Despite the fact that their children are on the pitch, they do not hesitate to use derogatory terms referring to the race and ethnicity of the opponents, who are also children the same age as their own children. This aspect clearly shows why basic education, the primary education that they should be giving their children is inadequate. This reflects their level of education but it also a consequence of the lack of reaction from other participants and of the officials involved in sports at such events.

The behavior of coaches towards athletes was further discussed. 80% of the interviewees said they do not tolerate abuse and racial or ethnic slurs during practice or during matches. Nevertheless, there are coaches/teachers that use the same nicknames or racial references used by the players when they are speaking to the players. We can say these coaches have racist attitudes towards the players although they do not think they are doing a bad thing since this form of address is used by everybody else and those referred to do not reject it. They mention that they have not considered that this attitude, which they consider normal, might affect those of a different ethnicity.





When asked about reporting the abuse they had witnessed, most interviewees mentioned the lack of information about the institutions that handle these complaints. Eight out of fifteen people interviewees mentioned The National Council of Combating Discrimination. But none of the participants have ever submitted a complaint to this institution. Three of the parents reported the incident to the team's coach. They also mentioned that they do not trust or have any expectations that the competent authorities will take any action against those who commit this type of abuse.

Regarding the survey for young players at grassroots level, high percentage of survey participants did not experience (over 85%) or witness (over 70%) racist abuse playing football. According to the answers of our respondents, when such abuses occur, they are of racist, homophobic and sexist nature.

The first place on top of frequent perpetrators of discriminatory abuse is held by supporters/fans; opponent players come second and parents of players third. To a smaller extend, referees, officials/ administrators as well as other categories do commit such abuses. Supporters seem to commit racist abuses more often compared to other categories - as acknowledged by survey respondents. This could be a problem per se, which require immediate educational and regulatory measures.

Frequency of incidents is varied, with 17% of the respondents witnessed abuses at every match and 6.4% once a week; almost half of the respondents did not witness such incidents.

Unfortunately, it seems that there is no consolidated system in Romanian football to report discriminatory incidents, as almost 40% of the participants did not report them. Those who did it, have reported - in descending order – to: referees, coaches and someone else (other people). High percentage of those who reported are neutral in terms of satisfaction on their report outcome (approx. 40%). The 'extremes' got low percentages: those who are very satisfied represents only 6%, and those who are not at all satisfied 10%.

Most people did not report discriminatory abuses because 'they do not know how and to whom to report' (34%) or from other various reasons (34%). Much smaller percent did not report due to lack of trust in the reporting mechanism or the belief that things won't change anyway, which is worrying and represents a clear sign that awareness raising campaigns and trainings about these topics are urgent measures to be put in place.

The fact that almost 70% of respondents did not receive information or invitation to trainings about anti-discrimination in football, is a solid proof on the insufficient activity and informational provisions about this topic, from authorities and civil society as well. With only about 24%, the football/ sports clubs seem the only specialised organisations providing some form of training.

The need for such trainings is high, as the majority of the respondents appreciate that anti-discrimination training is necessary (over 90%) and are interested in attending it (over 80%).

The spread of opinions regarding satisfaction on the involvement and activities of authorities and responsible organizations in combat discrimination in football is very large (see the table below): most opinions are neutral in regards to government, football or sports clubs/ associations/ academies (between 27% and 40%), but they reach also the extremes with various percent, such as over 30% 'very unsatisfied' about the government and over 13% 'very satisfied' about the football/ sports academies.

	<i>Very unsatisfied</i>	<i>Unsatisfied</i>	<i>Neutral (neither satisfied, nor unsatisfied)</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very satisfied</i>
Government	14 (30.5%)	13 (28.2%)	12 (26.1%)	5 (10.9%)	2 (4.3%)
Football clubs	2 (4.6%)	10 (23.3%)	17 (39.6%)	10 (23.3%)	4 (9.2%)
Football association	3 (7.7%)	10 (25.6%)	15 (38.4%)	8 (20.6%)	3 (7.7%)
Football academy	4(10.5%)	8 (21%)	15 (39.5%)	6 (15.8%)	5 (13.2%)

Participants of the surveys and interviews in Greece expressed their experiences and views regarding discrimination in football, attempting to provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon in grassroots level. According to the survey, respondents' experience is limited as they declared that they witness *discriminatory abuse* during training or football matches "once per year" (15 responses, following by the "never" option, with 10 responses), expressing that racism constitutes a small problem in grassroots football (17 responses in 2<sup>nd</sup> option – "A little" in the 5-point Likert scale). However, when they were asked if they have witnessed *racist incidents* during their involvement in grassroots football, 16 individuals answered positively, naming racist abuse, sexist comments and the verbal abuse from spectators to a player due to his appearance, as the most recent incidents. The majority (26 individuals) has never reported a discriminatory incident, and four out of seven that have done so, declared that no action had been taken by the competed authorities they had referred to. In the case of the focus group, only the female participant mentioned the existence of sexism in grassroots football, especially in female football teams, with the rest of the participants claiming that the entertaining (and not the commercialized) purpose and the small number of spectators in grassroots level, reduce the frequency of such phenomena.

According to the participants, both in the survey and the focus group, the players, the referees and the coaches constitute the most frequent targets of discrimination, due to i) their physical appearance (e.g., fat, hair, height), ii) their country of origin, iii) their gender, iv) their performance. Five participants also mentioned that players may constitute the easiest target of discrimination due to their greatest exposure and the leading role they have in matches. Regarding the individuals that perpetrate discrimination, the "fans" following by the "players" were the most common answers (29 and 12 responses, respectively). The participants recognized the following reasons as the root causes of the discriminatory phenomena in football:

- Fanaticism
- Low educational level
- Social factors (i.e., unemployment, poverty) that lead to general disappointment and outlet – The football field as "the mirror of the society"
- Lack of sports education
- Knowledge that no sanctions will be applied / Anonymity
- Personal benefits
- Lack of acceptance of the "Other"

Football players shared their experiences of discrimination on the pitch, either as victims or as witnesses. The majority of the respondents (27 individuals) declared that they have not experienced abuse playing football, with the rest naming racist/ nationalist abuse, sexist/ gender-based/ sexual abuse, homophobic attacks and ageism, as the forms of discrimination they have personally experienced. As witnesses, 19 football players do not have any experience, while the rest named racist and homophobic incidents as the most often forms of



assault in which they have been present. As with stakeholders regarding the most frequent perpetrators of discriminatory abuse, in the present survey the “fans” following by the “players” were also the most common answers (23 and 7 answers respectively). The participants’ experience in reporting discrimination incidents is limited, as only 9 of them claimed having previously reported the abuse to i) co-players (3 answers), ii) their coach (3 answers), iii) a board member (2 answers) and their parent (1 answer), and action for the handling of the discriminatory incident was taken only in half of the cases with a medium satisfactory outcome. From the participants that have not reported an incident despite knowing, witnessing or experiencing one:

- three individuals claimed that they think that nothing would change;
- three individuals mentioned that they didn’t witness an incident themselves, so they didn’t feel comfortable reporting;
- two participants didn’t know the reporting procedure;
- one participant was afraid of reporting and another wasn’t interested in being involved in such procedures.

In the Netherlands, recognition that there is a problem in Dutch football with discrimination was practically ubiquitous through all responses. A majority of the survey respondents had witnessed racism, homophobia and/or sexism in both professional and grassroots football, and both fans and players were identified as frequent culprits. A few survey respondents had been victim of racist discrimination themselves. In interviews with parents and coaches of grassroots football players it became apparent that although all recognized that there exists a problem with discrimination in Dutch football, experiences widely differed based on the social positionality of the respondents. A Dutch-Turkish parent could recall several instances where players in his children’s team were racially abused, once to the point where they had abandoned the game. A Dutch-Moroccan participant in the expert meeting and himself a grassroots football player could also recall an incident where his coach had made a discriminatory remark to him. Most White Dutch respondents had no first-hand experience of incidents or highlighted more subtle mechanisms of exclusion. ‘Everyday’ homophobia was also mentioned as pervasive in Dutch football, confirming earlier findings that a culture of ‘tough straightness’ remains the norm. However, coaches in women’s football mentioned that this culture was absent in women’s football and that acceptance of members of the LGBTQ+ community was high.

65% of survey participants in Ireland stated that they had not witnessed racist abuse whilst playing football; when such abuse did occur, it tended to be racist in nature and focused on the person’s skin colour. There were a number of examples shared by young people with one person stating that they heard a young player being abused because of their skin colour at an under 10’s football match where the use of the “n” word was witnessed by another player of the same age. It was also mentioned that members of the Traveller community also experience discrimination and abuse because of their ethnicity and are referred to in derogatory terms when on the pitch.

The questionnaire results suggest that most of the discrimination towards players comes from fans and supporters. The younger generation are more aware of racism and what impact it has on people, especially their peers. This is predominately because young people are growing up in more intercultural environments, in schools, as part of sports teams and clubs and are more open-minded than older generations. The younger generation have friends in school that may be from other countries and are more accepting of difference and more tolerant towards their peers. This is not necessarily the case for their parents and often it is this cohort that were attributed as being the main culprits in terms of sideline abuse at grassroots football matches.





Unfortunately, awareness of the reporting mechanisms for reporting racism was nil within the survey group as no young person surveyed could tell us who they would report an incident too. They were also not confident that even if they reported an incident that anything would happen. On several occasions during the survey with young players, terms like “what is the point”; “nothing changes”; “I don’t want to get in further trouble” or “bring attention to me” were mentioned.

It also emerged that none of the five clubs that we engaged with us as part of the research process had delivered or offered anti-discrimination or anti-racism training in the recent past – at least the past five years. This was confirmed by the FAI through our stakeholder interviews that under the laws and regulations of the game, there is no requirement for grassroots clubs to undertake or complete this type of training unless it is sanctioned or recommended on a reactionary basis when there has been a proven case of racism or racist behaviour within the club or during a football match. However, when asked, the young players indicated that they would be interested in attending training if it was offered to them.

It also emerged that most people did not report discriminatory abuses because ‘they do not know how and to whom to report’ or because they were afraid of what they might have to go through and didn’t want to cause any further conflict between teams, parents, and coaches.

Overall, the young players agreed that racism is a small problem in their communities but present nonetheless and they believed that something must be done to address it and support the victims of the abuse. However, many of the young players stated that they were not optimistic that a reporting and sanction mechanism would work in a consistent and fair manner as the structures are not in place to address the matter in an open and transparent way. They had no suggestions as to what might work, but some stated that they would be willing to help in further discussions and take part in a working group to find a solution.

All parents were quick to mention that racism was not as big a problem at grassroots level when compared with professional football. One parent from a migrant background stated that often parents from outside the community struggle to integrate but found that for him participating in the football club was a way to get to know people and for his children to make friends. He found the football club to be an open and inviting setting and personally had not experienced racism. Some parents mentioned that the young people look out for each other and know each other from school and that there was rarely an issue of racism within the clubs’ involving players. It was mentioned that for some visiting teams, the supporters often parents, were likely to be the main perpetrators of racism – either directing negative comments at other parents or focusing on one or two players on the team. It was highlighted that these people often do not realize the impact of their words and actions on the young players or other adults. In all cases, the parents stated that if they heard or witnessed racism at football matches that they would report it to the team coach in the first instance and then the referee.

Most of the parents stated that they could not recall or highlight any initiatives or campaigns that took place at grassroots level to address the issue of racism in football. Two parents remarked that young people tended to watch the English Premier League matches at the weekends and would be aware of the racism campaigns at that level where “professional players would take the knee before kickoff” however they were very skeptical as to the effectiveness of this action stating that it “won’t change anything; we need to educate the racist people for things to change”.

Many of the parents interviewed mentioned that the people involved in grassroots football - players, coaches, parents, sports club officials, academy staff and volunteers need to be supported (trained) to become more aware of the damaging effects of racism and the impact it can have on young people and their personal development. They suggested that as part of the TACKLE project, we could organise educational activities focusing on all kinds of



discrimination, racism, eliminating explicit biases, the use of language and the meaning behind words.

The Parents were asked about the measures they think should be taken to fight against racism and discrimination in football. The parents most common answer was that there needs to be a clear mechanism to report incidents and having better support systems in place for players who are targeted with discriminatory abuse such as counseling as if the support is not offered, they will turn away from the game forever.

The focus group participants stated that racism in Irish football exists, but it is a far lesser problem in Ireland when compared with the UK. The issue was deemed to be almost non-existent at underage (grassroots) level however it was noted that when it did occur the impact on both the young person/adult and the football club were significant.

During the focus group session, the use of social media for online abuse was discussed at length, and it was the view that online abuse and victimization is both mentally and emotionally damaging but it was considered a wider societal issue rather than an issue confined to grassroots football. It was highlighted that any educational initiative to tackle racism in football must consider online activities and online social media behaviour. The participants discussed the recent events such as the discrimination and online abuse targeted against England's players after the UEFA EURO 2020 and the impact that this can have on young players, especially those from black or ethnic minority backgrounds. The response by the football association was not deemed as adequate and insufficient and there was a feeling that many young black players may feel "what's the point and turn away from the game" if that is the way that professional players can be treated and not protected.

Although the incidents of racism at grassroots level were deemed to be minimal in Ireland, it was regarded as an issue that needs more attention as it could cause young players to stop playing football and missing character-building life lessons. They believed the issue was not discussed enough by the regional or national associations or adequately addressed through training or capacity building sessions. The FAI participants highlighted that there is a serious underfunding for educational initiatives within the association and that they were in fact at cross-roads themselves in terms of re-vamping their educational offer. They are working with a leading psychologist now to look at the impact of racism and discrimination particularly amongst the LGBTQ+ community and how best to address these issues within the game.

According to the focus group participants, the supporters/fans came across to be the most common perpetrators; in that they support their team but if the team loses or underperforms it is usually their own fans that target their own players. One member of the focus group recalled an incident that involved a juvenile player making a racist slur to an opposing player but said that "it was a one off and that he hadn't seen anything like it since." There was a feeling of disgust and shock that he had witnessed this at a juvenile level and commented that the young person "could only be picked up that attitude and language at home or online".

### **Measures taken by the state institutions, football associations, clubs, academies and NGOs to tackle racism and discrimination in football**

An overwhelming majority of participants of surveys, focus groups and interviews in all project countries assessed the actions to tackle discrimination in football by all stakeholders as unsatisfactory. The lack of systematic policies, action plans, reporting mechanisms and trainings, reactive communication and underplaying the problem have been named as main features of existing state and football institutions in tackling discrimination. Although disciplinary regulations to tackle discrimination exist in most national football associations and follow FIFA and UEFA disciplinary codes, they application is often seen as inconsistent.





During the interviews in Cyprus, it became noticeable that the participants felt that there is a lack of information, support and training to help them improve their knowledge and skills on the issue. Participants expressed the view that the Cyprus Football Association should take more steps to educate and raise awareness among football personnel and stakeholders on the issue of racism in football and in grassroots football in particular. Additionally, though they acknowledged that the state is not directly involved in football affairs, some noted that they would also have liked the state to do more, noting that racism is a social issue and is interrelated with education.

When asked whether they are happy with what the governing bodies are doing on the matter and whether they would have liked to do more, the majority of the participants did not consider the state and football association are doing enough. They expressed the belief that they should be more invested in offering training and information on the issue and most importantly they should be taking concrete, structured actions. Some have even suggested that they are completely absent. Additionally, they noted that though there are official rules of punishment in cases of racist discrimination they are not provided with a clear illustration and explanation of said rule and how are they being enforced. Some stated that they are unaware of such rules altogether, which shows the distance between rules on paper and what is actually happening on the ground. Furthermore, it once again became apparent that though professional football is much more aware and sensitive towards such incidents, a different reality is observed in grassroots amateur football. A statement from participant H (coach) is indicative:

*“Regarding training on issues of discrimination, I think that this is a problem that the football association needs to take care of. All clubs are active under the umbrella of the football association. So if they say, we want to gather the trainers to further train you on matters of discrimination they can do it. This is not the problem of the academy or club, there is no academy that can further the education of its trainers by itself on these matters. I think we need to be more proactive on these issues, as Cypriots we usually tend to take action in response to an issue and in a bid to deal with problems that arise.”*

On the part of the parents, though many of the interviewees noted that they are in regular contact with the management of the club their children train, none has been provided with any training opportunities or information on issues of racism. Similarly, they noted that they are in no contact between parents and the governing bodies of football on amateur level. Moreover, parents informed the research team that they are out of the picture when their children are in the football ground and they come back into it when the training or match is over (as a policy, some football academies, opt not to allow parents to attend trainings). There is also no interaction between either the parents and the federation or between the trio federation-coaches-parents on how to best navigate on such issues. Normally, parents do see the campaigns of the football federation when it comes to professional football, but many state that they have not observed any concrete action on the issue in grassroots football. Participant A (parent) says that he can see the official language being used, but more actions and concrete action needs to be taken, from the football association’s part on a grassroots level.

*“On many occasions we see on TV the association that it is against racism but there is nothing being done to suggest that they are interested to take action and alter the phenomenon”*

Interestingly, the absence of action from governing bodies, NGOs and the media (who are not covering any part of amateur football) at grassroots football, gives room for other forms of participation and understanding to come into the picture. The internet is changing the behavior of parents in terms of hidden discourses, and internet is being used to fill the vacuum of information. This may of course be positive as parents can identify credible and valid sources on the internet that can help them develop their understanding on the issue. However,







it is important to take into consideration that the social media landscape which resonates with racist discourse and fake news might further confuse the general public and trivialize racism.

*“I think that internet culture that comes from social movements (such as the ‘Black lives matter movement’) plays part in learning more about issues of racism and discrimination” (Participant G, coach).*

Left without guidance, many parents resort to personal methods of developing understanding of such phenomena. It is perhaps also worth noting that younger coaches (under 45 years old) exhibit a higher interest and willingness to learn more and take action against racism and social issues. This view was also put forward by a coach who claimed that there is a mentality gap between the younger and older generations. For him, the older generation is unable to distance their ideas from their experiences and the ideas they attained growing up. As such, he suggested, the goal should be to change the older generation as much as possible but focus on younger generations, noting that the federation should do more to guide the coaches on the matter.

In the absence of concrete action from the authorities on this matter, it was noted that football academies have tried to develop their own system based on the principles of tolerance and understanding of differences. Some of the participants referred to the existence of internal rules in academies and clubs that seek to combat discrimination and instill a culture of acceptance from within. However, this is not a common practice, and depends on the status and scale of the academy or a football club, as well as the will of its management. Some replies have expressed their readiness to develop rules and further train on the matter, but unable to do so by themselves within the academies, whereas others felt that the personal position of the coach would suffice in combating such phenomena. The below replies testify to this argument:

*“We do not have any specific rules internally at the academy, we think that each coach can managed such issues. We did have a sexist incident before but the coach handled this very well so that the child continued and was happy with the outcome.” Participant E (coach)*

*“I have been trained to recognize such incidents during my training to get my coaching license, but after that it’s up to the trainer to manage each case. Our club has internal rules but there is no coordination with the association. I think that the football association is in the best position to start something and then coordinate with academies and the trainers.” Participant M (coach)*

The insistence on the rules of the academy and faith in the ability of the coach to manage such issues can be deduced to show a lack of understanding of the institutional aspect of the phenomenon. Indeed, future research could do more to uncover socio-economic factors and variables in such understandings. In context of this research, it is evident that amateur football is a low priority for the governing bodies and the media. The absence of actions from NGOs in the issue was also a surprising finding. As a result, some participants were not familiar with the concept of NGOs. From those who did have an understanding of their role in civil society, they did not see how they could help on matters of inclusion. None of the participants has been involved in any inclusion training carried out by any NGO.

In the Netherlands, there exist several regulatory and educational initiatives to tackle discrimination. In regulatory sphere, the new KNVB plan “Our Football is for Everyone” – a plan that is monitored yearly and evaluated in 2022 – mentions that from the 2020-2021 season the disciplinary law of the KNVB will make explicit mention of the prohibition on discrimination and racism within the category of ‘insults’ (2020). Within this category, racism and discrimination are now categorized as offenses of the highest degree. This applies both to professional football and grassroots football. The minimum sanction for discrimination against other football players in professional and grassroots football is a 5-to-7-week suspension for football players. Discrimination by players towards officials entails an 8-to-10-





week suspension. Team officials can receive a minimum of 3-to-8 months suspension in case of discriminatory acts or statements. In case of repeated discrimination by individuals and fans, clubs can receive increasing fines, deduction of points, and finally face relegation from the league. In the case of offensive chants in football stadiums, referees can stop a game “if persistent chants cause the offended parties” to “no longer be able to function, seriously compromising the course of the match” (“Spreekkoren”, n.d.). In this they follow the 3-step protocol to discriminatory behaviour as stipulated by UEFA and FIFA. Sanctions are decided by the disciplinary judge of the KNVB. Other forms of sanctions also exist, such as mediation and training. In extreme instances, cases will be taken up by Dutch public prosecutors.

When considering how these official KNVB sanctions are enacted in practice, we see that this happens rarely, if ever, so far. This is partly because the KNVB has only recently re-intensified its efforts to tackle discrimination in Dutch football. In Dutch professional football there has been one high profile case of discrimination which involved behavior of fans towards an individual player. This high-profile case was taken on by the Dutch prosecution services, but in April 2021 they announced that due to a lack of evidence there would be no prosecutions, leading to widespread indignation in Dutch society. In grassroots football, despite the new measures and introduction of an app to report discrimination, it appears that sanctions that explicitly deal with discrimination remain few if any. Nonetheless, it appears that an increasing awareness and readiness to sanction discrimination can be witnessed on the level of match officials, both in professional and grassroots football (Heins, 2019). Occasionally, clubs report discrimination by individual players to the board of the perpetrator’s football club. This, in turn, occasionally leads to actions taken by these clubs, but this happens outside the purview of the disciplinary law of the KNVB so exact numbers on how often this happens are lacking.

Commitments to diversity and tackling discrimination are communicated in varying ways and by different actors. The most high-profile media campaign is called #OneLove, launched in late 2020, instigated by the KNVB and promoted by various famous personalities in the world of Dutch football through videos and a public advertisement. This campaign reached around 60% of football fans (Elling et al., 2020). As part of this campaign, captains of professional football clubs also wear rainbow-colored captain armbands to raise awareness of LGBTIQ+ discrimination in Dutch football. Professional football clubs participate in this campaign through the leagues they participate in. Some clubs also have their own programs in working to increase diversity and tackle discrimination in football.

As part of the new KNVB plan, referees now have a specific section in their official match report in which they can report discrimination and a wide-ranging training program has been initiated in which referees and officials and trainers of professional and grassroots football clubs will get training in signaling and reporting discrimination in football. The KNVB also made efforts in communicating the launch of a new app that is aimed at making it easier to report various forms of discrimination on the (grassroots) pitch. Also, in 2020, the KNVB hired a ‘program manager discrimination and racism’, former footballer Houssin Bezzai. He has been fairly visible in Dutch media, as has the newly formed Commissie Mijns, a think tank that is formed by but is independent from the KNVB. This think tank consists of various experts from football, media, academia, and law enforcement and often publicly criticizes the KNVB’s hiring policies (diversity in Dutch football governance remains limited) and other matters surrounding diversity in football. In terms of prevention, the new KNVB plan also states the intention for a wider implementation of the Fair Play workshops organized by the Anne Frank Foundation. These workshops are aimed for children aged 12 to 16 and are used to educate them about various forms of discrimination in football.

In Ireland, the FAI works alongside civil society organisations to try and combat racism in the sport, namely Sport Against Racism Ireland (SARI) and Show Racism the Red Card (The Immigrant Council of Ireland). In 2007 the FAI launched an intercultural football plan with the main objectives being to: combat ‘racism’ in football; promote participation among minority





ethnicities & multicultural communities; and to contribute to the wider process of integration. This is the only plan prepared by the FAI and has not been superseded to date. Show Racism the Red Card have recorded 16 reported racist incidents for the 2019/20, although these are only the cases that involved the FAI and so exclude incidents managed by affiliate leagues that did not go to appeal or involved any oversight by the FAI.

It was acknowledged that there are anti-discrimination initiatives incorporated in the FAI's strategic plans and training materials targeting coaches within the game, in addition to those resources mandated by UEFA and FIFA but based on the experience of the focus group participants; they were rated as ineffective and often not included or incorporated as part of training sessions offered within the clubs.

The general picture of Greece in tackling phenomena of intolerance in sports is not satisfactory enough as there is not a comprehensive and holistic approach followed. In the legislative system, the Article 41F paragraph 2 (Law 2725/1999) declares the imprisonment of up to one year and a fine, unless the offense is more severely punished in accordance with another provision, for anyone who uses, individually or as a team member, expressions that offend the national identity of individuals, or are racist in nature, or insult the national anthem, the Olympic symbols or the Olympic Games. In the newly established Law 4726/2020 specific modifications in Article 22 were made for the enhancement of the Statute of the Hellenic Olympic Commission. More specifically, Article 2 of the Statute describes, among others, the Hellenic Olympic Commission's duty of "development and implementation of actions and interventions against all forms of discrimination and violence in sports, as well as the development and implementation of actions to raise awareness and inform society about the battle against all forms of discrimination and violence in sports". Article 22 of the Statute is additionally referred, among others, to the intervention of Sportsmanship, Ethics and Deontology Committee in cases of formal accusations of disrespect to diversity (race, color, language, gender, religion, politics or other beliefs, etc.). Additionally, according to the National Action Plan against Racism and Intolerance 2020-2023 (2020), a new era seems to start for Greek football, as "legislative proposals and recommendations are formulated in the sports clubs and the federations" (p.34) for the first time.

In this context, the Hellenic Football Federation (EPO) promotes specific regulations to prevent and address intolerance in football fields. According to EPO:

*"Football should be attractive and enjoyable for the players, the referees, the coaches, as well as for the spectators, the fans, the administrators, etc. The Rules should help make the game attractive and enjoyable so that people, regardless of age, race, religion, culture, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc. want to take part and enjoy their participation in football."* (Laws of the Game 20/21, n.d., p.5)

The Disciplinary Code (2020) of EPO indicates specific sanctions to football players, team officials and fans who belittles or discriminates against anyone, because of their race, color, language, religion or ethnic origin, or commits any other, racist or contemptuous, act.

- If the discriminatory act is committed by a football player, they are banned for at least five games, and they are punished with a fine of at least 30,000€.
- If the discriminatory act is committed by a team official, they are banned from entering the stadia from three months to one year, and they are punished with a fine of at least 50,000€, if they are Football Société Anonyme officials, and 2,000€, if they are union officials.
- If the discriminatory act is committed by a fan, they are banned from entering the stadia for six months to two years, and their team is punished with a fine ranged from 10,000€ - 30,000 €, if they are Football Société Anonyme, and from 500€ - 1,000 euros, if it is a union.

According to the same article (Article 18) of the Disciplinary Code (2020):





- If officials or football players of a team commit a racist or contemptuous act, the match is forfeited, and the responsible team is punished, in addition to the penalties already mentioned above, with a fine of 20,000€ - 80,000€ (in case of Football Société Anonyme), and of 2,000€ (in case of unions). In case of a second violation, except from the defeat of the match, the above fine will be doubled and in case of a new (third) violation, the team will be relegated to the lower category at the end of the running championship.
- If fans of a team commit racist or contemptuous acts, the competent body may impose, in addition to the fine referred above, the penalty of holding a match without an audience (behind closed doors).

Considering the equipment, the slogans, the announcements, the images and the advertisements, the Regulation 4 of the Laws of the Game 20/21 (n.d.) prohibits the reference of

- i. people, either dead or alive (unless it is part of the official name of a team/union),
- ii. local/regional/national/international political parties, organizations or groups.
- iii. any local, regional or national government or any of its departments, offices or functions,
- iv. any movement which promotes discrimination,
- v. any organization whose goals / actions are likely to offend a significant number of people,
- vi. any specific political action / event.

Moreover, professional football players who demonstrate the clothes under their formal t-shirt, and on which they advertise products or reveal racist or political or abusive slogans, are punished with a fine of 4,000€, in addition to the sanctions that may be imposed for this violation by the Disciplinary Code (Football Match Regulation– Professional and Amateur Championships, 2020).

All disciplinary decisions are publicly available on websites coordinated by EPO ([www.epo.gr](http://www.epo.gr)) and Super League ([www.slgr.gr](http://www.slgr.gr); <https://sl2fl.gr/>, together with Football League).

Guidelines for the prevention and handling of discrimination are also given by EPO to children grassroots football teams. EPO indicates discrimination may lead to verbal, physical or cyber abuse of team members and in case of such incidents, the officials ought to inform player's family for any violation of the Code of Conduct. At the same time, members are called to inform all players about the consequences of abuse and the Child Protection Policy (2020) in effect.

In Greece, despite the existence of regulations and guidelines, there is not an independent equality body or state agency, in the sense of the Council of Europe, UN or EU definition, that deals with discrimination in football. Additionally, no information was found in national or regional football associations' websites about a specific monitoring system to record discriminatory incidents during matches. Towards that direction the contribution of the CoE Standing Committee on Violence is valuable, considering that one of its main duties is the continuous study of the phenomenon of all forms of violence in sports, the search for the causes and the suggestions for the necessary measures to tackle it (Article 41A, Law 2725/1999). The provisions made by Fare network are also assessed as valuable, especially with the operation of Fare Observer Scheme and the Incident Reporting Form.

Considering the UEFA and FIFA three-step protocol, the referees have the authority to initially halt play and, if the racist behavior continues after two restarts, abandon the match. However, the training implemented for referees in Greece includes only the two first steps (temporal pause of the game and announcements over the public address system), as the





third one (the referee abandons the match and the game stops permanently) has been considered an extreme measure, which is difficult to be implemented. This condition is present as result of the ambiguity in referees' duties, as in case of repeated racist behaviors, UEFA's Disciplinary Code gives the right to the referee to abandon the match (Article 14), while EPO's Disciplinary Code does not provide referees with such power (Mplounas, 2014). In any case, the referees can include in their match reports information about incidents of discrimination witnessed, in the section "Other Comments", without the existence of any specific designed for this purpose space.

In addition to the formal guidelines and procedures, active participation in social engagement and awareness raising are also considered highly important. In this context, the Panhellenic Association of Paid Footballers (PSAP) condemns any form and expression of racist attacks against professional footballers and makes public statements after each racist incident witnessed in Greek stadia. At the same time, PSAP participates in conferences and campaigns spreading the message of inclusion (PSAP, n.d.).

During the last years, Greek football associations have been particularly active in their participation in raising awareness campaigns promoted by UEFA. More specifically, Super League participated in the European campaign "Red Card to Racism", in which spectators were distributed red cards with the slogan "Red Card to Racism" and players wore T-shirts with anti-discriminatory messages (Red card to Racism from OFI, 2018). Super League participated also in the "No to Racism" campaign, by using the hashtag #slgr\_notoracism, creating a promo video with anti-racist messages by football players, and dedicating the 18th game of the Super League Interwetten (23-24/01/2021), against racism, violence and discrimination (Syriodis, 2021). Certain football clubs (e.g., AEK FC, Panserraikos FC) participated also in the UEFA "Equal Game" campaign, promoting inclusion, diversity and accessibility (EqualGame, 2019). Lastly, many athletes participated in the governmental campaign "Sports in the Spotlight", by creating a video with key-messages against violence, discrimination, racism, corruption and abuse of power (Sport in the foreground, 2021). Interestingly, according to the Fare network (n.d.) many Greek football teams (e.g., Panathinaikos FC, PAOK, FC, Panserraikos FC) have participated in Fare Football People Weeks, by taking part in tournaments, panel discussions, speeches and visits at schools, raising children's awareness and bringing them closer to populations facing discrimination (e.g, refugees, Roma).

Overall, the main findings of the research in Greece can be summarised as follows:

- The Greek **legislative system** is not satisfactory enough as the provisions for preventing and combating racism are limited to the newly established Law 4726/2020.
- The Hellenic Football Federation (EPO) promotes and applies specific **regulations and penalties**, and all disciplinary decisions are publicly available on websites coordinated by EPO and Super League. However, there is not **independent equality body** or state agency that deals –exclusively – with discrimination in football.
- There is not a specific **monitoring system** to record discriminatory incidents during matches. However, the contribution of the Standing Committee on Violence and the provisions made by Fare network are valuable.
- The UEFA and FIFA **three-steps protocol** for referees is partly applied due to the ambiguity in referees' duties as referred in UEFA's Disciplinary Code and EPO's Disciplinary Code.
- There are **no available data** recorded by national or regional football associations or non-governmental organizations, active in Greece.
- There is not a specific designed space on referees' **match reports** in order them to include information about incidents of discrimination witnessed.



- The vast majority of the **reported incidents** are racist and nationalist or neo-Nazi in nature, according to the Fare Network. The field research revealed that participants' experience in reporting is limited.
- The main **perpetrators** are reported to be the spectators, and secondarily, the players. Stakeholders named a range of social factors, from lack of education to the general disappointment, as "football constitutes the mirror of the society".
- The main **targets** of discrimination are reported to be the football players, receiving abuse due to their ethnicity, gender or physical appearance. Interestingly, the majority of the football players participating in the field research have not had such experience so far.
- Greek football associations tend to participate in **raising awareness campaigns** (e.g., Red Card to Racism, No to Racism, Equal Game, Sports in the Spotlight) and in Football People Weeks organized by Fare Network. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives is debatable, while the vast majority of the respondents has limited knowledge on the actions implemented by the government, the football clubs, the football associations and the academies to tackle discrimination in grassroots football.
- Football players are highly interested in **anti-discriminatory training**, as their previous experience is limited

Romanian Football Federation provides in its Disciplinary Regulations sanctions for players, coaches, officials and spectators for acts of racism, xenophobia, discrimination and denigration (art. 54). However, there is room for improvement, as a country report from 2018 states that in Romania "only a quarter of (n.a. sports) federations take action to draw attention to discrimination issues or establish a formal policy outlining specific objectives and actions to combat rigged matches.", although the same source shows that, for two NSGO11 indicators in focus for our TACKLE research - namely "antidiscrimination" and "players' rights", FRF got green scores, meaning it reached these indicators very well (80-100%).

It is notable that authorities supported by civil society make effort to combat racism and discrimination in football. Thus, in a public report of 2009 on Romanian football and society, the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES) pointed out that "racism in football is being punished more and more often". NetRangers' annual report on hate speech in 2014-2015 reveals that in 2010-2015 there was a significant reduction in racist or xenophobic manifestations inside stadiums in Romania, suggesting that the intervention of football authorities had an effect. In 2017, the series of events "Action Weeks - Football People" organized by Semper Musica Association in partnership with the FRF and the Fare Network, have placed 'Combating Discrimination in Football' as a priority for civil society and the world of football. In Romania, the rights and interests of professional and amateur footballers in Leagues I, II and III and in the lower football leagues, including women's football, futsal, juniors, as well as those of football coaches are defended by Romanian Association of Amateur and Non-Amateur Footballers (AFAN) [17].

There are anti-discrimination programs included in the strategic plans and documents of the Romanian Football Federation addressed to coaches and imposed by UEFA and FIFA, but from the information that the focus group participants have to date, currently there are no national level workshops, or any other activities organised with and for (young) players in grassroots football to teach them on combating discrimination and racism in football.

Nevertheless, on a local level, there are meetings between club owner/ president and other representatives to agree on behaviour rules during matches; also, short trainings are implemented before every match, in the form of 10-15 minutes meetings, in which

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<sup>11</sup> NSGO = National Sports Governance Observer





psychologists, observers and heads of the fan groups are invited to talk each other and then with their junior players and their supporters, in order to prepare them for correct behaviour during the match.

Only few football clubs and associations have anti-discrimination strategies (e.g. “Universitatea Craiova” Football Club), thus the responsibility falls on the coaches, as they do such trainings and educational activities with players.

A greater concern about the education of children can be seen in football academies. Here training and education are interlinked. Considering that some of the players train, study and spend leisure time in an organized fashion, behaviour rules and discipline are stricter. Educational progress is as closely monitored as sporting achievements, the leadership of these academies holding themselves responsible for the development of these children especially since they are far from family. The description at the Gheorghe Hagi Football Academy website says that: “The Academy is more than a sport’s project to train future professional footballers it is also a social and educational project. At the Academy children and young people benefit from formal education as well as sport’s training and many of them receive scholarships in order to support themselves. Education is highly valued. At the Academy a special schedule was developed so that the athletes can attend school classes as well as a rest schedule between school classes and training”

## Gaps and challenges in tackling discrimination in football

Some of the gaps identified through desk and field research in the project countries can be addressed through offering training developed in the TACKLE project, while others are more structural and require a concerted effort by football associations and state institutions.

In Cyprus, some of the most vital challenges in tackling discrimination is the absence of training of personnel which have a front-line position in grassroots football. Many stakeholders and more specifically coaches have been aware in various degrees on what constitutes an incident of discrimination, but few have exhibited awareness that discrimination goes beyond what seems like an overt and outright incident. Despite an implicit understanding, in most cases it appears that there is a lack of awareness of academic and policy literature on systemic racism and what is consciously recognized as racist discrimination in amateur football. A general lack of inclusion and anti-discrimination lifelong learning workshops and learning opportunities was also observed. As a result, football coaches are not provided with information and support to develop their understanding and knowledge on the issue as well as with examples of best practices and approaches to effectively address it. Thus the absence of relevant training and concrete action leaves the issue unattended, until it becomes a problem that cannot be ignored. During the research, it became evident that most participants showed intuitive action in terms of re-active measures and punishment to address racist incidents, but there are not enough pro-active measures which emphasize a culture of inclusion.

In addition, there seems to be a gap in coordination between football academies - clubs and the educational system that, participants noted, would be extremely helpful in their work. Furthermore, during interviews and the focus group, participants expressed their support for holistic and structured action that would involve a coordination and joint initiatives with the involvement of football clubs, the football authorities and parents. The research team was told that it is very important to bring parents into the debate in order to be able to create a culture of acceptance and not have noise in the signals the children receive. The competitive nature of some academies seems to add to the pressure children receive and releases contradictory messages. These different pedagogical approaches produce cultural noise that may confuse footballers and increase the chances of non-inclusive messages coming across.





Another challenge is the absence of distinct standardized procedures for reporting incidents, despite the readiness of participants to utilize such procedures. The general guidelines by the football federation largely leaves things to interpretation from match officials (on what constitutes a racist incident for example), many of whom are not in position to understand or manage incidents of discrimination. All answers point towards a lack of training for said officials as it is being perceived a low priority issue. In the absence of a clear reporting mechanism, most of incidents are thus going unnoticed, or in some cases are subject to negotiations between the stakeholders during the match (referees, association, management, coaches, even parents). Participant D (coach) mentions:

*“I do not think that in Cyprus there is any such thing as a reporting mechanism for discrimination. If something happens, it might be because someone went to the media and has managed to attract some attention. Otherwise, nothing will be done. I suspect that academies are usually keeping incidents internally, since there is no official way to do it, also to protect their reputation.”*

The lack of pro-active institutionalised forms to tackle discrimination is a need that has been mentioned during the focus group, but which interviewees appear to have limited things to say about. Partly because there seems to be an invisibility on the structures that govern the form of grassroots football in Cyprus, but also due to lack of training to do so. “I think that football is a brick bridge, it unites people so institutionally football by definition builds relationships and breaks racist behavior” participant I (parent) stated, suggesting that he sees no reason for the football association to do more on this, as the sport itself can sort these behaviors. Such views are thus indicative of a lack of institutional understanding of racism.

In the Netherlands, through the various methods we asked respondents and experts about their opinion on the potential impact of current KNVB initiatives. Challenges were identified particularly concerning 1) the newly launched app to report discrimination and 2) communicating commitments to anti-discrimination efforts by both the KNVB and grassroots football clubs.

Throughout the field work various respondents raised issues with the newly launched anti-discrimination app, particularly concerning its usability and how and by who reported incidents would be followed up. This latter point recurred frequently, also in discussions about enforcing sanctions. Many respondents felt it remained unclear what would happen after an incident was reported, which organization would deal with these reports, and how this would eventually lead to sanctions. Many were skeptical about a report on the app being enough in legal terms to lead to sanctions and how individuals involved in incidents could later be identified. Nonetheless, respondents also argued that the use of the app could be a good way to finally get a better overview of the extent that discrimination in Dutch grassroots football occurs, which, as mentioned above, has proven difficult to quantify so far. However, clear communication about how reports are followed up by various stakeholders to those that encounter discriminatory incidents and would like to report them seems crucial in order to motivate people to use the app.

This brings us to the next challenge that was identified frequently, that of communicating anti-discrimination efforts by both the KNVB and football clubs. To start with the #OneLove campaign, most respondents had heard about the campaign vaguely but could not immediately name elements of the campaign. There was also a feeling that although professional footballers serve as role models for youth, such campaigns were mainly perceived as window-dressing and would not change most people’s attitude towards diversity. Particularly striking, however, was the fact that the absolute majority of respondents were not aware of their respective football clubs communicating about either the KNVB plans or anti-discrimination efforts in general to their members. An exception here was a coach of a football team for students that had a special annual ‘Pink Saturday’ for LGBTQ+ members, but overall communication from football clubs about discrimination was lacking. One expert indicated that in her work she often found that many clubs lacked a clear definition of what they saw as







discrimination. This also came to the fore in the survey where most respondents indicated they felt football clubs could do more in trying to tackle discrimination. The lack of communication from football clubs was, however, not only framed as the club's fault. Some respondents pointed to the KNVB and argued it's the football association's task to initiate and facilitate this.

In Ireland, the focus group believed that a lot more is needed to be done to combat racism to protect young people and encourage new players to join the sport. Actions that address parents were also considered as important.

Having clear mechanism to report incidents and making this known to players, coaches, referees, parents, and fans was deemed very important and a current gap in the system. There is inconsistent application of the rules by the disciplinary committees within the grassroots club structures and as a result one incident can be treated differently within different clubs or different regions. This undermined stakeholder's confidence in the process and often lead to incidences going unreported.

The main findings relating to gaps in tackling discrimination in Ireland can be summarised as follows:

- Discrimination and racism are present in Irish football, but the rate of incidence was typically low.
- From the five football clubs that took part in the field research, their experience of racism and discrimination abuse at grassroots level was low and, in some cases, non-existent.
- Those playing at grassroots level are aware of the existence of racist and discriminatory abuse and they agree that more action needs to be taken but how this can be achieved – they were unsure.
- There is a general agreement from all our research activities that there is a lack and significant gap in terms of training and education initiatives provided to clubs at grassroots level by the regional or national association. Lack of funding was one of the main barriers in this regard, as the FAI wished to do more but were limited in terms of their resources.

In Greece, the majority (62,16%) of participants were aware of the awareness campaigns (e.g., Red Card Against Racism, No to Racism, Equal Game) many Greek football teams have been involved in over the past years. Most of them consider these campaigns effective due to i) the participation of global organizations and famous athletes, ii) the big number of the involving teams, and iii) their constant promotion in media and stadia. The rest of them supported that i) the generic content of the campaigns, ii) their short-run character, iii) their inability to reach all the interested parties and to the root of the problem make them less effective in tackling racism and discrimination in football. Regarding the actors responsible for taking action, the picture is not encouraging as few respondents are familiarized with the initiatives implemented by the government (12,12%), the football clubs (39,39%), the football associations (24,24%) and the academies (36,36%).

In Romania, sharing examples of positive behaviour should play a crucial role, past racist/discriminatory incidents should be analysed and explained, communication among all involved categories (players, coaches, referees, supporters, parents) should be functional and efficient, management of difficult situations should be applied, crisis situations should be de-escalated to avoid development towards violence – these are few of the easy-to-take measures that participants see as doable right now, even before taking any further steps.

An anti-discrimination guide, a manual for young players would be beneficial as a starting point, and participants in the Focus Group stated that they count on the TACKLE project and its consortium to receive it.





Other measures - as seen by participants – refer to implementation of local activities on the topics of discrimination and racism. Youth and Sports Ministry, Ministry of Education, the Romanian Olympic Committee and the Romanian Football Federation could also engage more and could support football clubs' efforts in this field.

In the school curricula for physical education and sports there should be a section on anti-racism and anti-discrimination in football included. Firstly, the sports teachers should be trained, to become able to implement such new curricula. Then, we should increase awareness at supporters' level. Last but not least, "train the parents first, and then train the children!"

Wider public should benefit from information and awareness campaigns in society in general and on social media. Overall, participants suggested that a system change would be necessary in order to obtain medium and long-term results.

### **Needs of the project target groups in tackling discrimination and promoting inclusion (grassroots players and coaches)**

Through the several methods in the field analysis not only challenges and gaps in the current anti-discrimination programs were identified, but respondents were also asked to reflect on what possible initiatives could have a greater impact in tackling discrimination. Many respondents in project countries indicated that this first and foremost could only be part of a wider cultural shift in attitudes towards discrimination, and which consequently could not be accomplished within the realm of football alone.

A definite suggestion that emerged from the research in Cyprus is the need for parents to be actively included in the formulation and implementation of policies to tackle discrimination. Parents may not see this need as they have other priorities, but it is sufficiently evident on the part of the academies and football clubs that are working with large number of footballers and for a limited time during the day /week. Most coaches, participants and other stakeholders of football expressed the serious need of more coordination on this matter. This theme was also particularly evident in our focus group. Participants noted that the time they work with footballers is not enough for them to educate them and formulate their stance on such issues.

*"As a trainer I am responsible for an hour or so to these children to show them respect and how to behave, but when the children leave, others need to fulfil their share of responsibility too. As far as I know there is some work being done at schools now on this issue, so the parents should also be responsible. It's a chain of responsibility."* (Participant G, coach)

A best practices approach that can include a multi-level approach needs to be considered as well. The role parents have to play was a recurring theme of the conversation between the research team and the participants and there seems to be a need in effective coordination between them, the coaches, the football clubs and the football association.

*"I believe that the most important people to deal with these cases are the parent and staff. If the parent is not trained, the children will most probably mirror the behavior of the parent."* Participant B (coach)

For this matter, a stakeholder coordinating committee can perhaps bring parents into the picture and minimize the gap between the federation, academies and the parents. In this way, stakeholders can be in a better position to understand each other's role and how to best support one another and the children who get in the footballing experience.

The research suggests that the promotion of inclusion is facilitated with abandoning practices of competition. A culture of collaboration and enjoyment is a need for children, especially in very young ages and early teen years. The pressure to succeed, bring in wins



and grow the reputation of a club, may sometimes hinder the process and bend the rules that already exist, although it is questionable if and how these rules can be deemed sufficient. Understandably, academies which aim to produce professional footballers may need to differentiate between footballers after mid-teen years, but as the socio-economic status of parents plays a part in creating a culture of inclusion, this is an issue that needs further consideration. Children whose parents come from lower socio-economic status have barriers (language, material, psychological) that are difficult to bridge in a competitive environment. The clarity of this need was given by the youngest coach participant (under 30 years old) who had a formal university education, aside from his coaching training-experience:

*“Grassroots football (up to 12 y.o.) should be about enjoying football, it should not be about competition and winning. I have heard from a football association trainer that he had seen coaches holding grudges or being intense for the win in such young ages that he was forced to take action and retrieve their license. The time of losing is very important in the development of children and the mentality they built, they need to learn respect their teammates but also the opponents, whoever they are. There are some rules, but I don’t know how much these rules are respected and followed. This is where I think we have problems as society and football, to follow the spirit of the rules.” Participant G (coach)*

The needs of stakeholders in Ireland concerned better training opportunities at all level and a more robust reporting system for incidents of discrimination. At present there is a programme of training, limited in some cases, that is offered at all levels of football in Ireland, therefore there is an opportunity to incorporate the TACKLE resources into these existing programmes. The use of personal stories and storytelling was seen to be an important dimension in terms of anti-racism training, as once learners (coaches, players, parents, referees etc.) understood and appreciated the impact of their behaviour or use of language on others, the likelihood that in most cases people would respond positively and change their behaviours.

Many of the participants were in favour of both online and face-to-face training, but for the online training the avoidance of click-through materials was preferred. Questions over the quality and impact of online training was also discussed and it was deemed that for the TACKLE project we must ensure that we create meaningful training resources that lead to attitudinal and value change.

There needs to be more support and more awareness on how to deal with racist issues if they arise and there needs to be a consistent mechanism in place across all clubs. Training for disciplinary committees within clubs was seen as essential.

It was stated on a number of occasions that children and young people are often more educated on the topic when compared to their parents and as a result of more tolerance, open-minded and accepting of differences within their peer group. It was stated that young players “stand together with their team; win, lose, or draw” but supporters/parents often take it out on the players if their team loose, targeting minority players in most cases.

When asked to reflect on current initiatives or potential future initiatives in the Netherlands, a few stood out for being considered potentially impactful, namely 1) workshops or training sessions for board members, coaches, and referees in grassroots football and 2) workshops organized for young football players on discrimination

The new KNVB action plan introduced the possibility to provide training programs for club officials, trainers and referees to help them identify what constitutes discrimination and how they can more clearly enforce anti-discrimination rules within grassroots football. An absolute majority of respondents and experts identified this as one of the most potentially impactful initiatives. One current coach who also had performed a function in the board of her football club stated that although (overwhelmingly White Dutch) officials and boards play an important role in reporting incidents and following up on them, basic knowledge about manifestations of



discrimination and procedures in reporting incidents was often lacking. Experts also indicated that such training programs and workshops should focus on subtle mechanism of exclusion. Examples were given about ensuring that when driving to away-games children would be made to drive with different teammates each time, ensuring contact between players from different backgrounds whereas otherwise they often (unconsciously) self-segregate. Another expert mentioned how in his White Dutch-dominated football club players were encouraged to work on teambuilding in the canteen after games but that ethnic minority players often felt barriers to participate. He argued coaches and officials should be trained to recognize this and ensure that they also join such activities. A critical note given by one expert was that although the current KNVB plan proposes such training sessions for officials and coaches, this plan only runs for 4 years which would be too short to instigate the more long-term changes that result from these training programs.

Many respondents – in particular parents of grassroots football players – also thought that the Fair Play workshops for children aged 12-16 in which children play virtual games that confronts them with various mechanisms of discrimination could be impactful in helping shifting attitudes towards diversity, although this was again a measure that would only have effect on the long-term. Respondents argued that making children aware of implicit stereotypes could help them not to resort to them when they for instance have to highlight a player of the opposing team on the pitch. Other respondents argued that such a workshop might help, but that in the end most of the associations and stereotypes come from children's upbringing and social surroundings and that such a workshop might not be enough to counter the persistence of discriminatory stereotypes alone.

A point also raised by a couple of respondents in relation to this is that these workshops should be parallel with increasing diversity within grassroots football clubs. Especially in bigger Dutch cities there is a tendency for clubs to self-segregate according to ethnic and national lines, which the respondents thought could make people more susceptible to stereotypes than if clubs would be more diverse. One parent told a story how his majority White-Dutch football club of his children got two Dutch-Moroccan coaches and that this was seen by both parents and the children as a valuable experience. Some respondents argued that players of many clubs are already rather diverse, but that boards and officials remain overwhelmingly White Dutch. One parent stated that “the same volunteers are there as when I played there myself 20 years ago, even though the demographics of the members have drastically changed in those 20 years. You can wonder whether that's a good thing”.

In Greece, participants' ideas for a more holistic approach in tackling discrimination in grassroots football take into account the active engagement of all responsible actors (government, football clubs, football associations, academies) to the following initiatives:

- establishment of a (stricter) legal framework
- awareness raising through regular events
- organization of educational programs and trainings about racism, discrimination and fair play targeted all interested parties
- regular provision of psychological support services
- establishment of stricter disciplinary actions

Speaking about past experience of diversity or anti-discrimination training or information, 17 respondents do not have such experience so far, while the rest 13 participants mentioned that they have participated in such trainings organized by i) their school/university (8 responses), ii) PSAP/EPO/their football club (3 responses), iii) their working organization (1 response) and iv) a relevant NGO (1 response). Interestingly, the vast majority finds a diversity and anti-discrimination training necessary in their club or team and would participate in such initiative. Regarding their awareness on existing actions against discrimination in football, the data are not comforting, with participants being clueless of government's, football clubs',





football associations' and academies' efforts, and asking for more events of awareness raising.

In Romania, participants answered the question what they think the authorities and organisations active in the field should do more to combat racism in football, the respondents to questionnaires identified the following needs:

The government should:

Provide support to clubs/associations/academies; implement anti-discrimination trainings and campaigns; apply fines, sanctions and correctional measures to perpetrators; achieve more education in schools; provide more information and explanations to citizens; improve rules and reinforce tougher legislation; invest more in sports; increase inclusion; prioritize sports; be more open in the dialogue with citizens.

The football clubs should:

Do not discriminate anymore; integrate players; train players; sanction discriminatory behaviours and apply fines; communicate more efficiently and educate more in depth; take immediate measures against racist incidents; develop their own strict rules against racism (e.g. stadium access rules; exclusion from the club; abandoning the match, etc.); prohibit the access to the stadium of supporters/fans with a history of racist behaviour; temporary ban on the participation in matches of players who have committed abuse; organise public campaigns to explain players and wider public the negative effects of racism and discrimination in football/sports; eliminate hatred; bring more ethnic minority football players on and off the pitch;

The football associations should:

Organise courses on racism and how to combat it; implement meetings with educational purpose; suspend the clubs for the racist behaviour of supporters; collect data about racist incidents and explain them clearly.

## Conclusions

In all five project countries, racism targeting Black players is manifested frequently. In the Netherlands, Black, Moroccan, and Turkish football players appear to be the victim of discrimination most often while antisemitic chants and sexist and homophobic abuse remain a frequent feature of Dutch football. In Romania, football reflects the discrimination targeting Black players, Hungarian minority and the largest ethnic minority in Europe – the Roma people. In Ireland, discrimination against the Travellers and religious sectarianism reflect historic divides. Organised far-right groups in football are a defining feature in Greece, Cyprus and Romania – displaying neo-Nazi paraphernalia and targeting minorities, refugees and political opponents on and off the pitch.

Many football associations across Europe do not have strategies and action plans to tackle discrimination, often denying the magnitude of the problem and participating in general awareness campaigns organised by UEFA or Fare network such as #FootballPeople action weeks. The lack of reporting mechanisms or systematic monitoring leaves much of the discrimination suffered by players remain underreported. When measures to tackle discrimination are introduced, they are rather reactive after high-profile incidents happen, and don't address structural issues neither offer sustainable anti-discrimination measures or training to players and coaches.

Despite the difference in many football and societal environments across the project countries, the needs and gaps identified by stakeholders to more effectively tackle discrimination appeared to be very similar. Lack of systematic approach and consistent actions by football associations to tackle discrimination, absence of reporting mechanisms and data





collection, as well as lack of training offered to players and coaches at both professional and grassroots level have been identified as main challenges.

Other significant findings in the field research from the project countries include:

- Lack of lifelong learning on issues of racism and discrimination and practices of inclusion;
- Lack of coordination between stakeholders and understanding of their role;
- Lack of recognition of forms of institutional racism and its reproduction;
- Trivializing of racist behavior due to lack of standards and clear reporting mechanisms;
- Lack of pro-active measures by the governing bodies and authorities in football;
- Competitive pressures in young age can result in culture of exclusion;
- Lack of conscious environment design to promote culture of inclusion due to low priority

While much of the identified issues require a concerted effort and concrete involvement and leadership of the national football associations, the training for players and coaches can be provided by the civil society organisations.

In this respect, the development of a curriculum, toolkit and an e-Learning platforms within TACKLE project can serve to meet some of the most pressing needs of the players, coaches and parents at grassroots level in tackling racism and other forms of discrimination.





## Effective transferrable practices to tackle discrimination in professional and grassroots football

### Netherlands

<b>Title of the action/ initiative</b>	<b>Het Spreekkorenproject (The chantproject)</b>
<b>Country</b>	The Netherlands
<b>Contact details of the organisation implementing the activity</b>  <i>(if available)</i>	Anne Frank Foundation, Westermarkt 20 1016 DK Amsterdam, The Netherlands
<b>Duration of the action</b> <i>(long/ short term)</i> <b>The year that it was implemented</b>	Long term project, started in 2015
<b>Aim/ Main objectives of the action</b>	The aim of this project is to create awareness of discrimination in football stadiums for football supporters. The focus is on anti-Jewish chants in particular, but also other forms of discrimination are addressed.
<b>Description of the action</b>  <i>What are the main activities carried out?</i>  <i>When and where were the activities carried out?</i>  <i>Who were the key implementers and collaborators?</i>  <i>What were the resource implications?</i>	The project consists of intensive day-programs in which football supporters are taken on a tour in their respective cities. They are taken past particular sites that are significant in the history of the Holocaust and meet other supporters who have been offended by anti-Semitic chants. Key stakeholders are, besides the Anne Frank Foundation, several professional Dutch football clubs: Feyenoord Rotterdam, FC Utrecht & AZ Alkmaar.





<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p><i>What were the concrete results achieved in terms of planned outputs vs. outcomes?</i></p> <p><i>Was an assessment of the practice carried out? If yes, what were the results?</i></p> <p><i>How sustainable is this practise? What is the impact on long term?</i></p>	<p>The impact of the project appears to be positive so far. The project initiators indicate that often participating fans seem to be more aware of the offensive nature of anti-Semitic chants. However, this evidence is at this point mostly anecdotal. Currently, a larger research project is carried out at Erasmus University in which the project is analyzed in more depth.</p>
<p><b>Transferability and replicability of project/ initiative and results</b></p> <p><i>How can the initiative or parts of the initiative be tailored to the needs of others?</i></p> <p><i>How can the initiative or parts of it be transferred to grassroots context? (what part of the initiative can be transferred to grassroots context?)</i></p> <p><i>How can the initiative results be sustained after the funding period has finished?</i></p> <p><i>What part of the initiative can be used to influence future policy and practice?</i></p>	<p>Since 2019 the project has been granted funding from the European Commission. Also, Borussia Dortmund (Germany) is now participating in the project. This shows that the project has already shown to be transferable to various national contexts.</p> <p>The focus of this project is anti-Semitic chants, but the core idea of the project (to create awareness of the offensive character of some chants) can also be replicated to cover other forms of discrimination in football stadiums.</p> <p>Replicating this project in the context of grassroots football might be more complicated, due to its focus on chants in football stadiums. Nonetheless, educational programs for discrimination offenders could also be implemented in grassroots football.</p>
<p><b>Links to reports</b></p> <p><b>Pictures from the project</b></p>	<p><a href="https://changingthechants.eu/">https://changingthechants.eu/</a></p>

<p><b>Title of the action/ initiative</b></p>	<p><b>Fair Play</b></p>
<p><b>Country</b></p>	<p>The Netherlands</p>





<p><b>Contact details of the organisation implementing the activity</b></p> <p><i>(if available)</i></p>	<p>Anne Frank Foundation, Westermarkt 20 1016 DK Amsterdam, The Netherlands</p>
<p><b>Duration of the action</b> <i>(long/ short term)</i></p> <p><b>The year that it was implemented</b></p>	<p>Long term Implemented in 2015</p>
<p><b>Aim/ Main objectives of the action</b></p>	<p>The Fair Play workshops aim to educate children (aged 12-16) about discrimination in football. In a game format, the children are challenged to learn to reflect about their own acts and choices.</p>
<p><b>Description of the action</b></p> <p><i>What are the main activities carried out?</i></p> <p><i>When and where were the activities carried out?</i></p> <p><i>Who were the key implementers and collaborators?</i></p> <p><i>What were the resource implications?</i></p>	<p>The children play a game together in which they are confronted with manifestations of everyday discrimination in football. Afterwards they discuss this game, together with an professional from the Anne Frank Foundation or by a teacher. This project is initiated by the Anne Frank Foundation, and is used by grassroots football clubs and two professional football clubs.</p> <p>The game is free to play online (also in English).</p>
<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p><i>What were the concrete results achieved in terms of planned outputs vs. outcomes?</i></p> <p><i>Was an assessment of the practice carried out? If yes, what were the results?</i></p> <p><i>How sustainable is this practise? What is the impact on long term?</i></p>	<p>Since 2015 a 162 Fair Play workshops have been organized with a total of 5634 participants. Currently, the new KNVB plan aims to increase the number of workshops, particularly through increased participation by professional football clubs.</p>



<p><b>Transferability and replicability of project/ initiative and results</b></p> <p><i>How can the initiative or parts of the initiative be tailored to the needs of others?</i></p> <p><i>How can the initiative or parts of it be transferred to grassroots context? (what part of the initiative can be transferred to grassroots context?)</i></p> <p><i>How can the initiative results be sustained after the funding period has finished?</i></p> <p><i>What part of the initiative can be used to influence future policy and practice?</i></p>	<p>The Fair Play workshops are already used in the context of grassroots football. The game itself is available in many other languages which makes it easy to play this game in other national contexts as well.</p>
<p><b>Links to reports</b></p> <p><b>Pictures from the project</b></p>	<p><a href="https://www.annefrank.org/en/education/product/27/fair-play/">https://www.annefrank.org/en/education/product/27/fair-play/</a></p>

<p><b>Title of the action/ initiative</b></p>	<p><b>Training program for clubs</b></p>
<p><b>Country</b></p>	<p>The Netherlands</p>
<p><b>Contact details of the organisation implementing the activity</b></p> <p><i>(if available)</i></p>	<p>KNVB Woudenbergseweg 56-58 3707HX Zeist</p>





<p><b>Duration of the action</b> <i>(long/ short term)</i></p> <p><b>The year that it was implemented</b></p>	<p>Long term (4 years)</p> <p>May 2020</p>
<p><b>Aim/ Main objectives of the action</b></p>	<p>The training programs of the KNVB are aiming to work on raising awareness at both professional and grassroots football clubs on how to set and enforce norms in relation to discrimination.</p>
<p><b>Description of the action</b></p> <p><i>What are the main activities carried out?</i></p> <p><i>When and where were the activities carried out?</i></p> <p><i>Who were the key implementers and collaborators?</i></p> <p><i>What were the resource implications?</i></p>	<p>50 diversity and inclusion project managers aim to visit 200 grassroots football clubs and 34 professional football clubs annually to organize training programs that are specifically tailored to the challenges particular clubs are facing regarding diversity and inclusion. This is organized by the KNVB and financed by the Dutch national government.</p>
<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p><i>What were the concrete results achieved in terms of planned outputs vs. outcomes?</i></p> <p><i>Was an assessment of the practice carried out? If yes, what were the results?</i></p> <p><i>How sustainable is this practise? What is the impact on long term?</i></p>	<p>The impact of this training program is at this point difficult to establish. Due to the COVID-pandemic the workshops have been postponed and only started after the last report on the KNVB anti-discrimination plans in 2020.</p> <p>Nonetheless, it is included due to the emphasis on its potential value in the fieldwork.</p> <p>The sustainability of the practice is high, and its impact on the long-term is deemed high as well by respondents. The financial sustainability of this project might be more complicated, given that it is funded by the Dutch national government and it is unclear</p>





	<p>what will happen with this project after the period of funding has ended</p>
<p><b>Transferability and replicability of project/initiative and results</b></p> <p><i>How can the initiative or parts of the initiative be tailored to the needs of others?</i></p> <p><i>How can the initiative or parts of it be transferred to grassroots context? (what part of the initiative can be transferred to grassroots context?)</i></p> <p><i>How can the initiative results be sustained after the funding period has finished?</i></p> <p><i>What part of the initiative can be used to influence future policy and practice?</i></p>	<p>The modules created in this particular training program can be tailored to different national contexts. The training programs take a 'ground-up' approach where modules are created together with clubs according to their challenges.</p>
<p><b>Links to reports</b></p> <p><b>Pictures from the project</b></p>	<p><a href="https://onsvoetbalisvaniedereen.nl">https://onsvoetbalisvaniedereen.nl</a></p>

<p><b>1. Title of the action/ initiative</b></p>	<p><b>UEFA inclusion and anti-discrimination course for Romanian referees</b></p>
<p><b>Country</b></p>	<p>Romania</p>
<p><b>Contact details of the organisation implementing the activity</b></p> <p><i>(if available)</i></p>	<p>Romanian Football federation (FRF)          +4 031 433 70 37          General Secretary: +4021.325.06.69          Fax: +4021.302.91.92          Email: frf@frf.ro</p>





<b>Duration of the action</b> <i>(long/ short term)</i> <b>The year that it was implemented</b>	Short term March 2021
<b>Aim/ Main objectives of the action</b>	To present the values of European football and how they apply to the work of gaming officials.
<b>Description of the action</b>  <i>What are the main activities carried out?</i>  <i>When and where were the activities carried out?</i>  <i>Who were the key implementers and collaborators?</i>  <i>What were the resource implications?</i>	<p>On 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2021, the League 1 and League 2 referees took part in an online course organized by UEFA in collaboration with the Central Commission of Referees (CCR) whose main objective was to present the values of European football and how they apply to the work of gaming officials.</p> <p>The workshop was implemented online.</p> <p>The workshop opened by FRF President Răzvan Burleanu was also attended by Sara Holmgren, Head of the UEFA Diversity and Inclusion Program, Hugh Dallas, Member of the UEFA Referees Commission, Michelle Uva, former UEFA Vice-President, and Kyros Vassaras, chairman of the Central Commission of Referees.</p> <p>The course supported the improvement of referees' skills regarding the cultural aspects and particularities of the countries where the football matches take place.</p>
<b>Impact</b>  <i>What were the concrete results achieved in terms of planned outputs vs. outcomes?</i>  <i>Was an assessment of the practice carried out? If yes, what were the results?</i>  <i>How sustainable is this practise? What is the impact on long term?</i>	<p>The course increased the referees' responsibility for their actions, language and behavior during football matches and competitions.</p> <p>The practice is sustainable – FRF can organize itself more such courses, for all Romanian football referees. On long term, the estimated impact is more positive environment in football, reduced discrimination, less incidents, increased inclusion.</p>



### Transferability and replicability of project/initiative and results

*How can the initiative or parts of the initiative be tailored to the needs of others?*

*How can the initiative or parts of it be transferred to grassroots context? (what part of the initiative can be transferred to grassroots context?)*

*How can the initiative results be sustained after the funding period has finished?*

*What part of the initiative can be used to influence future policy and practice?*

*"It was a useful course for all participants. We need to recognize the positive impact that diversity brings to sport and implement strategies to give everyone an equal chance. We must promote football in the spirit of fair play, respect and understanding, without any discrimination. The feedback from the Romanian referees who participated in the course was very good, **we already plan to introduce this topic in the courses for all categories of referees**", said Kyros Vassaras, president of the CCR.*

### Links to reports

### Pictures from the project

<https://www.frf.ro/comunicari/arbitri/curs-uefa-de-incluziune-si-antidiscriminare-pentru-arbitrii-romani/>





<b>2. Title of the action/ initiative</b>	<b>The 2021 Strategy of the U. Craiova Football Club regarding the fight against racism – Promoting Racial Equality</b>
<b>Country</b>	Romania
<b>Contact details of the organisation implementing the activity</b>  <i>(if available)</i>	Știrbei Vodă, 30, Birou 4, etaj 3 Craiova, Romania Tel: 0351 404 900 Fax: 0351 804 366
<b>Duration of the action</b> <i>(long/ short term)</i> <b>The year that it was implemented</b>	Long term
<b>Aim/ Main objectives of the action</b>	To fight against racism in football
<b>Description of the action</b>  <i>What are the main activities carried out?</i>  <i>When and where were the activities carried out?</i>  <i>Who were the key implementers and collaborators?</i>  <i>What were the resource implications?</i>	<u>Activities carried out:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acknowledging UEFA's 10-point Action Plan and assuming it.</li><li>• Elaboration and application of:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Principles of Action regarding the practicing of racial equality</li><li>- Directions of Action regarding the practicing of racial equality</li><li>- Motto of the Club: "NO to racism and intolerance!"</li></ul></li></ul> <u>When and where the activities were carried out:</u> <p>Since March 2021 onwards</p> <u>The key implementers:</u> <p>Footballers of the Club Council of Administration of the Club Responsible for order and safety</p>

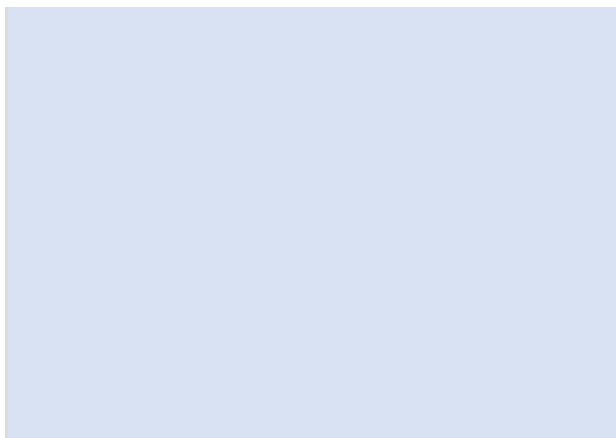




	<p>The manager of the children and junior center</p> <p><u>Collaborators:</u> UEFA, FARE, ECRI</p>
<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p><i>What were the concrete results achieved in terms of planned outputs vs. outcomes?</i></p> <p><i>Was an assessment of the practice carried out? If yes, what were the results?</i></p> <p><i>How sustainable is this practise? What is the impact on long term?</i></p>	<p>The estimated <u>impact</u> is increased awareness in the field of combating racism, discrimination and intolerance in football, improved knowledge and attitude towards supporting the fight against racism, more positive environment during football games and sports events, less racists incidents in football.</p> <p>No <u>assessment</u> of the practice was implemented so far.</p> <p>The practice is <u>sustainable</u>, being implemented by the Club with the support of other actors from football and local community. On long-term, the practice's impact will increase if applied consistently.</p>
<p><b>Transferability and replicability of project/initiative and results</b></p> <p><i>How can the initiative or parts of the initiative be tailored to the needs of others?</i></p> <p><i>How can the initiative or parts of it be transferred to grassroots context? (what part of the initiative can be transferred to grassroots context?)</i></p> <p><i>How can the initiative results be sustained after the funding period has finished?</i></p> <p><i>What part of the initiative can be used to influence future policy and practice?</i></p>	<p>The practice is largely transferable to any football club, does not envisage high implementation costs and is easily adaptable to local context in terms of directions of action.</p> <p>It can be transferred entirely to grassroots context.</p> <p>The Action Plan and Principles of Action may be valorized within future policies and practices.</p>
<p><b>Links to reports</b></p> <p><b>Pictures from the project</b></p>	<p><a href="http://www.ucv1948.ro/Promovarea-egalitatii-rasiale">http://www.ucv1948.ro/Promovarea-egalitatii-rasiale</a></p>







<b>3. Title of the action/ initiative</b>	<b>NetRangers/Active Watch “Annual report on hate speech in Romania 2014 – 2015” (3.5. Self-regulation at the level of sports federations)</b>
<b>Country</b>	Romania
<b>Contact details of the organisation implementing the activity</b>  <i>(if available)</i>	Calea Plevnei nr. 98, bl. 10C, sector 1, Bucureşti, Romania +4021 313 40 47 021 637 37 67 office@activewatch.ro
<b>Duration of the action</b> <i>(long/ short term)</i> <b>The year that it was implemented</b>	Short-term 2014-2015
<b>Aim/ Main objectives of the action</b>	To identify the existence or the lack of self-regulations regarding the sanctioning of the discourse instigating to hate, within sports associations that more often face problems of hate speech due to the behavior of fans  teams from Romania (Romanian Football Federation, Professional Football League, Romanian Federation of Ice Hockey).



<p><b>Description of the action</b></p> <p><i>What are the main activities carried out?</i></p> <p><i>When and where were the activities carried out?</i></p> <p><i>Who were the key implementers and collaborators?</i></p> <p><i>What were the resource implications?</i></p>	<p><u>Activities carried out</u> (in Oct. 2014 – Oct. 2015, in Romania):</p> <p>Research and analysis of self-regulations.</p> <p>Request of information on how these provisions are put into practice.</p> <p>Identification of pro-tolerance public manifestations.</p> <p><u>Implementers</u>: the staffs of NetRangers</p> <p><u>Collaborators</u>: Active Watch and the analysed sports federations</p>
<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p><i>What were the concrete results achieved in terms of planned outputs vs. outcomes?</i></p> <p><i>Was an assessment of the practice carried out? If yes, what were the results?</i></p> <p><i>How sustainable is this practise? What is the impact on long term?</i></p>	<p>Being a monitoring intervention (report), we do not know the exact impact. We can only estimate that the report has initiated the activation of authorities and monitored federations, and has generated specific practical measures on their behalf.</p>
<p><b>Transferability and replicability of project/initiative and results</b></p> <p><i>How can the initiative or parts of the initiative be tailored to the needs of others?</i></p> <p><i>How can the initiative or parts of it be transferred to grassroots context? (what part of the initiative can be transferred to grassroots context?)</i></p> <p><i>How can the initiative results be sustained after the funding period has finished?</i></p> <p><i>What part of the initiative can be used to influence future policy and practice?</i></p>	<p>This monitoring practice is highly replicable, as any grassroots football, amateur club and academy can be monitored and assessed in the view of identifying its strong and weak points in handling hate speech, what actions it takes to combat discourse instigating to hate and how it promotes tolerance in football environment.</p>



### Links to reports

### Pictures from the project

[https://activewatch.ro/Assets/Upload/files/Raport%20anual%20cu%20privire%20la%20discursul%20instigator%20la%20ura%202014%20-%202015\(1\).pdf](https://activewatch.ro/Assets/Upload/files/Raport%20anual%20cu%20privire%20la%20discursul%20instigator%20la%20ura%202014%20-%202015(1).pdf)



<b>Title of the action/ initiative</b>	Hope Refugee F.C.
<b>Country</b>	Greece
<b>Contact details of the organisation implementing the activity</b>  (if available)	Vaggelis Manolopoulos, Sport for Development Programs Manager Organization Earth vm@organizationearth.org
<b>Duration of the action</b> (long/ short term)  <b>The year that it was implemented</b>	Long term  2016-2020 (interrupted by COVID-19 restrictions)
<b>Aim/ Main objectives of the action</b>	Hope Refugee F.C. was founded in 2016 at Piraeus, Greece as the first football club consisted solely from refugees and asylum seekers. Hope Refugee F.C.'s aim was to offer sport opportunities to newcomers, supporting their sporting, personal and social development with the host community.
<b>Description of the action</b>	The football team was practicing football trainings twice per week and participated in Independent League of Attica during the weekends. This offered the opportunity of



<p><b>What are the main activities carried out?</b></p> <p><b>When and where were the activities carried out?</b></p> <p><b>Who were the key implementers and collaborators?</b></p> <p><b>What were the resource implications?</b></p>	<p>sport participation to people who did not have the legal status for registering in the football clubs under the national federation. Besides of the sport participation, the players of the team were taking part in workshops focusing on enhancing personal and professional soft and hard skills such as language &amp; IT classes, CV building and community activities. The players were also taking part in Organization Earth's other implemented project and were gaining volunteering and professional experience. In fact, 10 of the team's players were given working opportunities within organization's projects. The team was founded and managed by Organization Earth, the staff of which was responsible for all team's activities. The team had received support from UEFA Foundation for Children, Olympiakos FC and other local stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p><b>What were the concrete results achieved in terms of planned outputs vs. outcomes?</b></p> <p><b>Was an assessment of the practice carried out? If yes, what were the results?</b></p> <p><b>How sustainable is this practise? What is the impact on long term?</b></p>	<p>During implementation period more than 230 players from 21 countries took part in the team's activities (trainings, matches, workshops). Although there was not a concrete M&amp;E procedure with regards to team's impact, there are a few players' success stories including players turning into professional ones in 2nd and 3rd Greek Division, players seeking other working opportunities abroad (e.g., France, Luxembourg, Germany) and players gaining work experience within Organization Earth's projects.</p> <p>The main challenge regards team's sustainability as, despite its social impact, securing financial support has proven a difficult task for covering running costs.</p>

## Transferability and replicability of project/initiative and results

**How can the initiative or parts of the initiative be tailored to the needs of others?**

**How can the initiative or parts of it be transferred to grassroots context? (what part of the initiative can be transferred to grassroots context?)**

**How can the initiative results be sustained after the funding period has finished?**

**What part of the initiative can be used to influence future policy and practice?**

Hope Refugee F.C. has been an excellent example of how offering sport activities can enhance one's integration process in the host community. The players have been given the chance of forming a team identity, interacting with the host community and gaining experiences. All the aforementioned can be tailored in the needs of any social context in order to meet the community's demands. The example can be transferred to the grassroots context as its financial demands are not too high. Securing municipal fields or volunteer coaches can be seen as a key objective while donations for sport equipment can be requested. Sport activities have been proved as an effective integration practice all around Europe during the last years. Each country's policy makers should integrate sports within their national integration strategies, as sports provide a common language and a safe place for social interaction.

## Pictures from the project





<b>Title of the action/ initiative</b>	Greek Forum of Refugees (GFR) F.C.
<b>Country</b>	Greece
<b>Contact details of the organisation implementing the activity</b>  (if available)	Greek Forum of Refugees is an association of refugee and migrant communities, as well as individuals and professionals that work all together in the support of asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and stateless people.  <a href="https://www.facebook.com/Greekforumofrefugees/">https://www.facebook.com/Greekforumofrefugees/</a>
<b>Duration of the action</b> (long/ short term)  <b>The year that it was implemented</b>	The football team was shaped under an Erasmus+ project (MATCH Project in Greece), which was completed in 2018. Technically, GFR F.C. has been expanding ever since, by attracting more local youths that wish to chase their football through our team. The action is still ongoing, mostly because of the team's own will to continue.
<b>Aim/ Main objectives of the action</b>	The GFR F.C. aims to fulfill the following goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- To activate refugees living in camps or in the urban area, getting them out of the limbo state which keeps them excluded and marginalized, providing them at the same time a creative and alternative way out of their daily burdens;</li><li>- To enhance their social inclusion by highlighting the importance of the interaction between them and the local society through sports;</li><li>- To bring closer the diverse refugee communities that are set up in Athens, in order to consolidate their cultural differences and promote solidarity among them through dialogue and sports' activities;</li><li>- To promote the European core values in the sense of a wider understanding of the European spectrum, as citizens with rights and obligations;</li><li>- To scout for young talented players with a refugee background, living in the camps or in the urban area, aiming to recruit them and</li></ul>





	<p>highlight their unique talent as a tool of improvement;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To understand the challenges that refugee and migrant communities constantly face;</li> <li>- To arrange football matches with other European football teams in the context of a wider interaction among EU citizens and potential co-citizens, regardless the national identity;</li> <li>- To tackle any form of discrimination through the establishment of a football club in the heart of Athens, aiming to bridge differences through sports;</li> <li>- To change the dominant narrative, by contributing with positive examples of proper social inclusion of refugee and migrant youths.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Description of the action</b></p> <p><b>What are the main activities carried out?</b></p> <p><b>When and where were the activities carried out?</b></p> <p><b>Who were the key implementers and collaborators?</b></p> <p><b>What were the resource implications?</b></p>	<p>The team trains regularly five days per week and plays a football match every weekend. It takes part at one of the most historic amateur leagues, the anexartito.com, organizes friendly matches in order to remain in shape and participates in various tournaments for good causes. The Greek Forum of Refugees coordinates the football team, which functions as a mapping tool of understanding the challenges with the refugee communities.</p>
<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p><b>What were the concrete results achieved in terms of planned outputs vs. outcomes?</b></p> <p><b>Was an assessment of the practice carried out? If yes, what were the results?</b></p> <p><b>How sustainable is this practise? What is the impact on long term?</b></p>	<p>The project, under which this team was brought together, made the members understand the dynamics of a well – established football team by the Greek Forum of Refugees. It made them realize that a rallying point is needed especially for refugee men, a target group which is rarely drawing attention. Greek Forum of Refugees perceived the positive outcome of empowering refugee communities and realized that they are able to contribute on shifting the public narrative towards a more positive perspective. They wish to pose a much more increased impact by building stronger bonds with the local society,</p>



**Transferability and replicability of project/initiative and results**

**How can the initiative or parts of the initiative be tailored to the needs of others?**

**How can the initiative or parts of it be transferred to grassroots context? (what part of the initiative can be transferred to grassroots context?)**

**How can the initiative results be sustained after the funding period has finished?**

**What part of the initiative can be used to influence future policy and practice?**

**Pictures from the project**

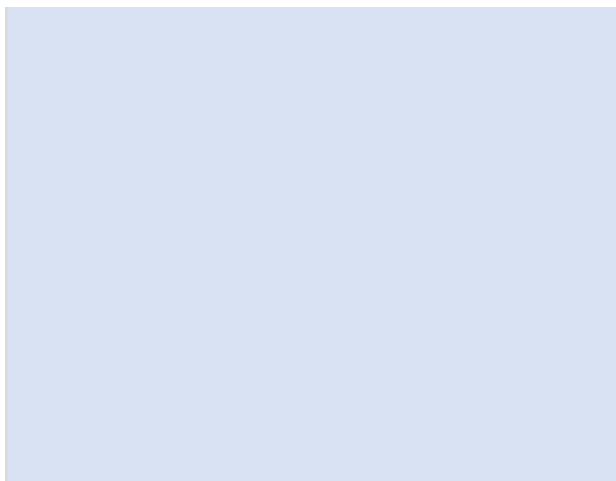
enhancing a holistic and realistic interaction between refugees and locals.

GFR's participation in the football league and in friendly matches will empower the sense of belonging and it will provide a solid cause under which we could contribute to a more concrete inclusion in the new host society. They have, already, set a three-year plan, having implemented a specific organizational format, addressing upcoming challenges and targeting strategic points to upscale the team's impact.

The GFR F.C. could feed semi – professional and local football leagues with talented young players. The team works on a grassroots level, given the fact that every player comes directly either from the camps or the communities living in the urban area. This team has given the opportunity to plenty of youths (around 70 players at the moment) to empower themselves and step up for their life. There are youths dealing with immense challenges, such as lack of documents, homelessness, anxiety and stress, lack of access to the labor market or at a stable income. GFR F.C. acts as a rallying point, as a collective community where each member is addressing to each other for support. GFR has established solidarity as a powerful tool for proper inclusion and empowerment of the refugee communities based on Athens. However, they still struggle to answer the funding challenges in order to achieve sustainability for their long – term schedule.







<b>Title of the action/ initiative</b>	DIALECT project
<b>Country</b>	Greece
<b>Contact details of the organisation implementing the activity</b>  (if available)	ActionAid Hellas Community Centre in Athens Tel: +30 215 555 7345 Email: athens@actionaid.org
<b>Duration of the action</b> (long/ short term)  <b>The year that it was implemented</b>	Long term  Initiated in January 2019 (UEFA foundation for Children Fund)
<b>Aim/ Main objectives of the action</b>	Two out of five youth and children in Greece live in low-income households at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The situation is even worse when we count the 50.000 refugee and migrant children in Greece. They face numerous challenges, including lack of basic resources, lack of education support, frequently school dropout, high stress and depression, domestic violence and a lack of creative and life-skills education, which leads to fewer opportunities and social exclusion.





	<p>ActionAid Hellas aims through this programmatic pillar at creating poles of understanding, building a network of youth agents of change at local level and promote community building through football in order to combat social exclusion as well as polarisation existing at local level.</p>
<b>Description of the action</b>	<p>Main activities:</p>
<b>What are the main activities carried out?</b>	<p>Weekly football trainings Local tournaments Side events for parents</p>
<b>When and where were the activities carried out?</b>	<p>Capacity building activities for other key stakeholders (CSOs, sports professionals, educational units)</p>
<b>Who were the key implementers and collaborators?</b>	<p>Youth led initiatives</p>
<b>What were the resource implications?</b>	<p>The activities are carried out in Akadimia Platonos football pitch, granted by OPANDA_Municipality of Athens.</p> <p>Dimitris Papadopoulos an international football player acts as the main ambassador of the project and Thomai Vardali from PAOK FC is the female ambassador. At national level Municipality of Athens, colleagues from CSOs and sports professionals are the key partners.</p> <p>EKKE, Melissa: Network of Migrant Women in Greece, OSA in Hungary, Football Friends in Serbia, ActionAid Italy and Streetfootballworld are the key partners of the transnational DIALECT project.</p> <p>COVID 19 restrictive measures have been the main implication, affecting the activities that were planned. ActionAid Hellas decided to continue the trainings and conduct the capacity building activities online.</p>





## Impact

**What were the concrete results achieved in terms of planned outputs vs. outcomes?**

**Was an assessment of the practice carried out? If yes, what were the results?**

**How sustainable is this practise? What is the impact on long term?**

Programme started at regional level in January 2019 with the project RISE Beyond Goals funded by UEFA Foundation for Children, creating from within the premises of the Community Centre of ActionAid Hellas in Kolonos area the core football team consisted of teenagers (girls and boys) from different cultural backgrounds. In January 2020 the programmatic pillar expanded with the introduction of the- co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union- project DIALECT aiming at creating long-term collaborations, involve 500 adolescents and their parents across 4 countries, disseminate the message “football for all” and ultimately build resilient communities at local level.

In March 2021 “Beyond goals2”, a 18-months programme that creates the linkages between RISE-Beyond Goals1 through two key intervention pillars: A. Development of empowered youth at local level based on a 3-way approach addressing youth disengagement, social exclusion and community building issues through continuation and built up of football activities in ActionAid Hellas Community Centre and the respective youth club; and B: Scaling up of the project at national level through targeted dissemination and capacity building to sports professionals, CSOs representatives and educators in schools across the country, with a focus on areas where disadvantaged youth reside, ensuring that the methodology is mainstreamed with wider impact.

Assessments take place on a regular basis following the completion of activities. Participants understand the effect the methodology has in their lives or could have in their area of work in order to achieve change at personal and collective level. A volunteer who participated in the project said:

“It has been an experiment for me. I could not imagine that participants from such different backgrounds could co-exist. I would not believe the process would run so smoothly, given the diversity of the team. In terms of inclusion, it is logical to create such





	<p>projects, especially from a political point of view. What strikes to me as most important is co-existence. I was thinking that at their age I wouldn't play football with girls. At this given moment, the social climate in relation to migration is quite different from when I was at school. It is therefore logical [for organisations] to run such projects. It is valid from a social point of view" (L., male volunteer).</p> <p>Managing to guarantee free space with the support of Municipality of Athens and succeeding in granting continuation of activities through funded projects have played a key role with regards to the impact Action Aid Hellas envisions to see in the long run. Social inclusion and combatting polarisation are at the core of the work.</p>
<p><b>Transferability and replicability of project/initiative and results</b></p> <p><b>How can the initiative or parts of the initiative be tailored to the needs of others?</b></p> <p><b>How can the initiative or parts of it be transferred to grassroots context? (what part of the initiative can be transferred to grassroots context?)</b></p> <p><b>How can the initiative results be sustained after the funding period has finished?</b></p> <p><b>What part of the initiative can be used to influence future policy and practice?</b></p>	<p>Football3 methodology, which is the methodology used by ActionAid Hellas and which has been created by Streetfootballworld appears to be an effective tool, supporting the development of community building at local level. Based on the specific needs and objectives of different organisations it can certainly be tailored in order to support different scopes of work that have at their basis social and behavioural change.</p> <p>The role of the mediator and the dissemination of the methodology to schools and sports associations can play a key role in the maintenance and sustainability of such projects in the long run. The fact that the project requires limited resources makes it easier to be adapted by grassroots organisations.</p> <p>Involving civil servants for the purposes of the whole programmatic pillar and more specifically for the objectives of DIALECT project is aiming at creating protocols of cooperation and disseminating the methodology to actors that can jointly work towards embedment within educational curricula and sport clubs, a process which can influence future policies and field work.</p>

## Links to reports

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JoeoS1pvE4&ab\\_channel=ActionAidHellas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JoeoS1pvE4&ab_channel=ActionAidHellas)

## Pictures from the project





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