SPORT AS A TOOL FOR CHANGE IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG AND INFANT REFUGEES

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In the 21st century, a border is no longer just a line on a map; it is a system for filtering people that stretches from the edges of a territory to its heart.

There are currently more than 68 million people who have been forced to flee their homes due to wars and conflicts, and half of them are minors. The Syrian war has resulted in one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time, in which 6.5 million people have been obliged to leave their country. At least 1 million Syrian refugees have sought security and shelter in Lebanon, a country with a population of 4.4 million.

The Bekaa Valley region, close to the Syrian border, currently houses 350,000 refugees in various makeshift camps. Other crises, such as those in the south of the Sudan or Afghanistan, have also forced millions of people to flee. Many refugee families have sought refuge in Europe, with the Mediterranean Sea the setting for countless tragedies and survival stories. In Greece there are now 51,000 registered refugees, of which 21,000 are children. The amount of unaccompanied minors (MENA) that arrived in Europe increased by 31% in 2017, and in Italy alone some 86% of the children arriving are unaccompanied minors (MENA).

Children and young people are the most vulnerable of the affected population. Many of them have experienced traumatic situations, have lost their social support networks and their education has been interrupted.

The effects of sport can be of great importance for children and young people. While they play, children explore, discover and grow. At the same time, they develop social skills, learn to express their emotions and gain confidence in their own abilities.

Since June 2017, the Barça Foundation - with the support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation - has implemented a sports education program based on the FutbolNet methodology. The purpose of the program is to improve the lives of children and refugees, and is aimed at children and young people in communities and centres with a large number of refugees, such as Greece, Italy and Lebanon.

This document summarises the results of an external evaluation of the programme’s social impact, and highlights how sport, used as a pedagogical and developmental tool, can help improve the emotional wellbeing and social skills of children and young people in adverse conditions.
Program Scope

The refugee support program for children and young people through sport is implemented in several different contexts: Refugee camps (Skaramagas, Lesbos and Mória in Greece); school environments in urban areas (Athens), municipal environments (6 municipalities in the Bekaa region, Lebanon); and centres for hosting unaccompanied minors (Sicily and Calabria, Italy).
The objective of the program is to improve the emotional well-being and social skills of these refugee children and young people, as well as foster social cohesion between refugees and host communities.

The focus of the programme is based on transmitting the methodology to local entities and partners that implement FutbolNet in each country. The FutbolNet methodology consists of a curriculum that uses sport as a means of promoting dialogue, respect, tolerance and understanding between children, boys and girls, through the use of physical activity and games as tools for reflection and educational activities. The Barça Foundation created a total of 191 young leaders and educators between July 2017 and February 2018 using this methodology, as well as implementing it in 19 locations in Lebanon, Greece and Italy.

FutbolNet sessions, lasting two hours in duration, were carried out as extracurricular activities twice a week, with an average intervention of between 21 and 48 weeks, depending on the place.

A total of 3,266 children and young people participated in the programme (1,227 in Greece, 1,747 in Lebanon and 292 in Italy), and received a total of 426 hours and 528 minutes of sports education through the program.
This evaluation is based on the Theory of Change, and specifically inspired by contribution analysis. The evaluation has been designed so that it generates evidence that evaluates if the programme’s activities have been implemented as planned. Other factors influencing the program have been identified and classified in two categories: They have not shown any significant contribution or, if they have contributed, the contribution has been acknowledged.

The assessment focused on four main areas: the activities carried out by the programme; the most immediate effects of the program, the specific changes in the participants expressed on an individual level, and the explanatory mechanisms of the programme that justify and explain the results observed. For each area, the key questions, indicators and tools and methods of data collection were defined.

The evaluation was carried out externally and independently by Roots for Sustainability (R4S) and B.LINK-Barcelona Strategic Projects. (*) Quantitative research is based on samples, but efforts have been made to obtain a high number of responses. When it was not possible to collect data from all participants, several strategies have been found to obtain the largest number of representative samples.

**EVALUATION — STUDY POPULATION:**

**LEBANON:**
- 238 participants
- 6 in-depth interviews with 15 educators
- 80 boys and girls
- 8 stories of change

**GREECE:**
- 110 participants
- 14 in-depth interviews with 13 educators
- 94 boys and girls
- 57 stories of change

**ITALY:**
- 87 participants
- 3 in-depth interviews with 12 educators
- 34 boys and girls
- 14 stories of change
A STORY OF CHANGE

This story is based on the evidence obtained during the evaluation. It has been written to facilitate communication about the findings and achievements of this programme. All names and characters are fictitious but are also representative.
Amadou does not like to give interviews. The questions and forms remind him of the eternal days that he spent waiting, at the mercy of the elements, on the border between Libya and Egypt. They remind him of his first days in Europe, and long months he spent on the highways. Those were the hardest moments, hidden in refuges, scared by the possibility that his trip could end abruptly at the next border. Not knowing where he was going and unable to turn back.

At just 15 years old, Mamadou left his small town east of Mali behind, loading only clothes, a sleeping bag and what little money he had been able to save. He left home without telling anyone, without saying goodbye, to find a better future in Europe.

Mamadou now speaks 4 languages. He ended up living in module for unaccompanied minors in Mória, the largest refugee camp in the Greek island of Lesbos. Like some of his colleagues in the refugee camp, he helped us with this evaluation.

This was possible because Martina, the educator who has been assigned through the Barça Foundation programme with the FutbolNet methodology, asked them. Two days a week, Martina goes with Mamadou and his colleagues to a small football field near Mória. With her they board the bus, they dance together while the song Run the World (Girls) by Beyoncé echoes through the bus, and for four hours a week they play, reflect, take decisions and learn that, from now on, their lives can be governed by values such as respect and teamwork.

The bond that Mamadou and his colleagues in the refugee camp formed with Martina is very special. For many of them, Martina represents their first formal educational figure for a long time. For others it is the first time they have had one. Anyone watching from outside would not hesitate to say that the trust they have forged with her is the catalyst for everything. This emotional bond is what gradually eroded Mamadou and his colleagues’ suspicious, closed and at times aggressive attitudes, and she has been able to convince all those boys and girls that, here they are all the same. “I’m happy to help all my colleagues, I don’t care where they are from,” says Mamadou, proudly.

FutbolNet has offered them the opportunity to play. But, above all, it has helped them to see and communicate with each other in a different way. Mamadou is no longer the boy who only wanted to play with other people who spoke his language; who did not want to play with girls on his team; or who refused to be coached by a white woman; who fought with younger guys and did not want anyone on his team who couldn’t control the ball as well as him.

I am happy to help all my teammates. I don’t care where they are from. —Mamadou says proudly.
The same thing that happened to Mamadou has happened to Zahara, an 11-year-old girl who does not know Mamadou, but, like him, fled from his country: Syria. She took refuge in the Bekaa Valley, 90km north of Beirut.

For Zahara, in the beginning going to FutbolNet sessions near the hut that her parents built just arrived simply meant going to a place where she could play in a safe area. She has not spent much time in Lebanon, but knows that there is no place for girls in the street games in the Bekaa Valley. However, she has made many friends through the programme. Some are Lebanese, and one has persuaded his father to take his companions from the refugee camp to activities by car.

But what has also been happening is that Zahara is realising that playing is actually a tool for building relationships and accepting others. Besides that playing FutbolNet explicitly means making this connection. In other words, it means that he is constantly encouraged to express himself, to make decisions about the rules, to resolve conflicts through dialogue and to celebrate things as a group.

"When we play on the street, we play without limits. Everyone does what they want. When we are in FutbolNet, however, we decide on rules by ourselves that help us to play well. It’s more fun and we can be a team that way," says Zahara.

This means that Zahara, like Mamadou, no longer needs an educator to solve misunderstandings during games, nor an arbitrator who tells her how to behave or what rules must follow. And, if they knew each other, they would both agree that the most valuable thing that FutbolNet offers is the opportunity to be someone else.

For the educators, the opportunity is clear and enormously beneficial. They know that they are equal, and they will also know this when they are looking for a job later on, as well as the fact that they have the ability to do the job like any other person.

These are the words of David, a FutbolNet educator at Skaramagas, another refugee camp in Greece, located in Athens. 1,500 people live in Skaramagas, and it is the largest refugee camp in Greece. It is an open field, guarded by police, where no family is obliged to sleep in the open air.

Before FutbolNet, no project in Skaramagas has involved so many families. The efforts made by educators in all countries to involve parents (and by doing so, ensure that they help to solidify the positive effects of the project) are clearly reflected in Skaramagas more than anywhere else.

Despite the difficulties, FutbolNet has made it possible for more than 40 families to find time to participate in this programme and learn more about its mission. In fact, one of the most striking discoveries has been the role that FutbolNet has had as a catalyst for the routine that parents consider to be the healthiest: "My son used to go to bed very late, in the early hours of the morning. Now he goes to sleep early to be able to go to FutbolNet. He is the first to get up, and even showers when he returns from training without complaining, because his educator suggests it.”

This is what Bares’ parents told us. He is an Iraqi boy that FutbolNet educators know very well. Bares is very good at football; In fact, everybody in Skaramagas thinks that he has an extraordinary talent. Despite this, the educators who have spent the most time with him are convinced that without FutbolNet he would likely not have the excitement that he shows every day when he wakes at dawn. It isn’t about the ball, it’s about laughter, challenges and the implication that the group offers to everyone.

The boys and girls who participate in FutbolNet in the afternoon after finishing the school day in Athens say the same thing. And there are many parents and educators who describe, with a mixture of pride and surprise, how important this group is to establishing a different way of relating to one other. The coordinator of the project could not believe it when one of the FutbolNet groups requested a meeting with her to ask her to organise more matches with teams of local boys and girls. It was something that would have been unthinkable only a few months ago!

"What they used to do was come to ask us while they played, from time to time. They proposed it as a complaint, and not in such a constructive way. It took us by surprise "

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weeks later, “I love when we play against Greek teams, but it was a little frustrating to see that Greek children did not behave like us: We do not insult our teammates, and we help opposition players when they fall!” Mamamdou, Zahara and Bares are in very different situations and countries, but they would tell us very similar things about the FutbolNet program.

However, their respective educators tell us that working with an unaccompanied minor with a routine at a reception centre and working with a girl who lives with her family in a Lebanese refugee camp are not the same thing. They say that, if the FutbolNet objectives could be adapted to each situation, it would be much easier for them to find a way to monitor each individual situation closer and more carefully.

What they would all agree on is that the approach and consistency that FutbolNet has achieved have resulted in a suitable programme for creating compassion and education through sport. Although demonstrating the benefits of sporting activities for the emotional, cognitive and emotional development of vulnerable children is not part of this evaluation, what this report makes very clear is that this programme and the FutbolNet methodology create conditions that promote and make visible any development that may come about.
The main results set out below summarize the most relevant findings of the evaluation. All have been identified as signifiers through a wide variety of sources and data collection methods. In addition, they have been shown to be relevant in a wide variety of contexts and focus groups (for example, different implementation locations).
REDUCTION OF CONFLICTIVE SITUATIONS

Regular participation in the FutbolNet sessions usually translates into warmer and more respectful relationships. Confictive situations are reduced after one or two months of exposure to the programme. At first, the conflicts that arose during the games carried on beyond the session and entered into their everyday life. Now it’s different. They supervise each other to resolve conflictive situations and their daily lives are more calm. “Educator

The specific dynamics of the methodology contribute to neutralising cultural stereotypes and encouraging intercultural dialogue, as well as more respectful and tolerant attitudes.

CHILDREN ARE CALMER, WITH LESS PAIN AND LESS ANGER

Initially the children are depressed, frustrated and aggressive, but after a few sessions they feel calmer, relaxed, less frightened and less angry.

The methodology increases emotional wellbeing, as the more sessions the boys and girls participate in, the clearer the improvement in their emotional wellbeing is.

“I used to be aggressive and angry with people. I learned to control myself in order to work better with my colleagues and friends. Since the programme started, I’m more polite. In general, I think I’m improving my personality and character every day.” Child

Especially in places like Mória (Lesbos) and Lebanon, the environment is not especially safe for children. FutbolNet offers a safe environment for children, free from tension, accidents and fights.

45.3% of children interviewed have a reduced feeling of fear.

FutbolNet provides an opportunity to meet new friends and connect with them in a very special way. FutbolNet facilitates friendship that goes beyond the programme (especially amongst those who live together or close).

58.2% of children interviewed have increased their socialisation.

The indicators regarding socialization, self-esteem and autonomy improve significantly during the first phases of the programme (the first 25 sessions), and it is particularly evident among unaccompanied children (MENA) interviewed.

71.4% of unaccompanied minors who participated in 25 sessions, show significant improvement.

With time, girls grow in trust and empowerment, and are capable of communicating and building relationships.

44.8% of children interviewed have increased their self-esteem. In the case of children, some 43.7% feel stronger than before.

EMPOWERMENT OF CHILDREN AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

809x616 to 949x757
The dream forest

"The two hands I left
They accompany me like a moon.
By day they are outlined like trees in the way
and at night the waters of the imagination flow
they precede me to the dream forest.
The two hands I left
They open like butterflies inside my eyes."

Joumana Haddad, Lebanese poet
MECHANISMS

THE EVALUATION ALSO HIGHLIGHTS MECHANISMS
AND OTHER KEY FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE
SIGNIFICANT RESULTS FOUND

The full evaluation report can be found at the following link:
fundacio.fcbarcelona.cat/actuality

MECHANISMS

SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATORS

When educators have socio-educational frameworks and the associated tools to observe the children, constantly adapt and understand their behaviour, they can fully incorporate FutbolNet’s educational approach and, therefore, bring out all potential for change that resides in the children through a methodology implemented correctly.

Educators lacking qualifications or educational competencies, such as some coaches in Lebanon, are less able to activate certain aspects of the socio-educational part of the program, although they can implement the methodology in terms of norms and structures.

FutbolNet’s training sessions are sensitive to the fact that the methodology should be used as a driving force to generate a significant change in boys and girls, and therefore they include a variety of socio-educational content designed to provoke significant learning about how the change happens when the children are educated—and how it should be implemented.

On the other hand, three days of training are not enough to instil educators with the frameworks and/or sensitivity to educational capacity they lack to provide a personalised response to the needs of each child.

THE BARÇA BRAND FACILITATES IMPLICATION IN ACTIVITY: PLAYING AND ENJOYING

FC Barcelona have a worldwide reputation and generate an admiration that facilitates significant participation in the programme. The boys and girls want to be part of the Barça family.

Children like to play sports and, despite everything, when they play, they have a good time, they enjoy the game and they forget about their problems and their situations.

Therefore, football is one of the best sports to practice, and this translates into boys and girls participating and enjoying an educational programme, including norms and structures and learning through sport.

Additionally, FutbolNet offers a structured and consistent programme, every week, in a safe place, outside of usually harsh living conditions.

During FutbolNet, the children feel happy, with less fear and anger than they feel outside the program. And when this emotional state remains over time, even though it is only for a few hours a week, a child’s overall mood is better.

CHILDREN RAISE THEIR VOICES AND ASSUME LEADERSHIP IN TAKING DECISIONS

Norms are usually given by an authority figure, most often an adult, and are restrictive in nature. When children get the responsibility of making the rules in an open and horizontal way, they understand why some rules are necessary and become responsible not only for deciding on them but also for being conscientious.

CHILDREN INCREASE THEIR FEELING OF BELONGING IN A GROUP

When children enjoy happy experiences together in a structured routine and framework, there is a sense of belonging, in this case to FutbolNet. At the same time, this facilitates the creation (and constant reinforcement) of stronger emotional ties between boys and girls—so as well as educators.

In this situation, children don’t feel alone. They feel reciprocal care and a mutual understanding of their current (bad) situations, and have access to emotional support. As the literature confirms, the feeling of belonging is a psychological lever that triggers better emotional wellbeing, and even provides resistance to a stressful life, events and transitions, and a shared meaning or purpose.

OTHER PEOPLE PROVIDE SUPPORT (PARENTS, TUTORS, ETC.)

Having a family that supports, promotes and recognises the changes that have been made thanks to FutbolNet helps. Having a specific space for boys and girls to recognise their own progress also helps. Some children, especially the older ones, are able to identify and express what changes of behaviour and feelings they made so far as a result of the FutbolNet sessions.

In relation to this, it should be mentioned that in all indicators, children with educated parents have better results: Children who have a non-educated mother improve much less than those who have an educated mother.

In these locations in Greece where the community seems more accepting of girls playing football, there is a strong emotional bond between the educator and the boys and girls—most importantly—a closer relationship between educators and the families of the children.

When educators share closer relationships with parents, they can work together to support the changes that occur during the sessions, and even pass on these lessons and values.

EQUALITY AS A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE

When all peers perform equally, under the same rules and values they have decided upon together, everything is fairer and they have the opportunity to collaborate and play together in a more efficient and fun way.

When boys and girls realise that they are equals on the pitch, because everyone decides and applies the same rules, they also understand that they are equal, despite differences in gender, origin, religion, football talent etc. When this acceptance and increase of tolerance become a reality, there is a decrease in conflict, which had mainly been caused by previous patterns of behaviour, related to a lack of respect and to discrimination.

After playing together regularly, boys and girls can accept that on the pitch (and off it) everyone is the same, and boys treat girls as equals.

EXPLICIT SPACE FOR REFLECTION AND AUTO EXPRESSION

Unlike schools and other activities, FutbolNet provides children with formal and consistent structures and secure, organised spaces where they can learn, decide, reflect and express their values, behaviour and feelings freely. Therefore, children are forced to make a conscious mental process.

When a conversation and reflection happens between boys and girls who accept and assume the norms and values of FutbolNet, the improvement in their pattern of behaviour while playing is more easily transferred to real life situations at home or at school.

During the sessions, children have a place for self-expression that opens up two possibilities for improving their communicative skills: On the one hand, they connect better with each other and improve their emotional control (for example, anger management is more effective), and on the other hand, they learn to communicate and make themselves heard more effectively. Therefore, when children learn to better control themselves and communicate effectively with each other, there is less conflict—and any conflict is also managed more adequately.

Acceptance and application of this place for reflection and self-expression, and the increase of tolerance and respect towards others, facilitates the creation of effective bonds and significant friendships between boys and girls.
The evaluation has shown sufficient evidence about how children and young people participating in the programme have improved their social skills, emotional wellbeing and self-esteem during its duration.

This has contributed to a more respectful and tolerant attitude, to the reduction of conflictive situations and to an increase in socialisation opportunities. The importance of the educator as an agent of change is also evident, and is one of the key factors in the success of the programme.

The FutbolNet methodology is also a key factor in the programme. The methodology is perceived as respectful, not trying to impose a particular way of educating.

On the contrary, it is considered to be a complementary strategy to promote value-based education. Its application allows a structured routine that fosters expression and reflection amongst participants, and to an increase in socialisation and to an increase in socialisation opportunities.

A number of challenges have been identified that will contribute to improving the impact of the programme:

1. The selection of educators with training or experience in socio-educational fields, or with a certain sensitivity towards education through a framework of competence that includes transversal skills such as empathy and commitment.

2. Specialised training that is relevant to the correct implementation of this programme (positive conflict management, intersection between racism and gender inequality, etc.).

3. Reflection on the central component of football (reviewing the importance of other sports), being a crucial factor but also an obstacle to increasing participation by girls.

4. A strategic approach to gender perspective, taking into account the social and cultural norms and traditions that determine the position of girls within the social structure, in order to achieve a better participation from girls in the programme.

5. The promotion of the participation of families in the programme, so that they can play a key role in consolidating the learning achieved through it, such as: Periodic sessions in which parents (and other adult figures) can play with the boys and girls to emphasise the mechanisms and benefits of FutbolNet, and follow-up meetings with parents (and other adult figures) to discuss the progress of the participating children.

Improving the local community strategy, adapting the approach for interaction to the specific conditions of each location, while promoting the interaction between refugees and children in the local community, favoursing any option that improves and stimulates interaction between them.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY
This collection has the purpose of explaining the projects and the work of the Barça Foundation, as well as facilitating the study and reflection of social issues. It is another step in the commitment of the Foundation to understanding the world in which we live.