



Women's World Cup & Global Politics

Creating Coexistence and Resistance on Football Fields

Prepared By: [Fatmanur Delioglu](#)

Does football as a sport and football fields as a venue allow differences to come together and coexist, or does it reinforce the discrimination that exists on the streets? It is hard to provide a clear and single answer to this question. It is possible for football fields to reproduce and strengthen racism and discrimination, as well as to increase our hope for unity, solidarity, and social peace.

Football is becoming more inclusive with the help of individuals, institutions, and brands today. An advertisement video¹ for Nike's brand in 2022 emphasizes football's unifying power. Through its work with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in London and around the world, Football Beyond Borders has been using football as a tool to positively impact the lives of young people since 2011.² In 2014, Football Beyond Borders became a charity organization, making football a place of resistance against discrimination and touching the lives of many young people. Football teams are also working to make football more inclusive. By cooperating with football teams, UNHCR draws attention to the refugee issue and ensures that football plays an active role in the integration process. In this context, in 2022, FC Barcelona and UNHCR started a partnership with a new football jersey to support refugee children.³ On FC Barcelona's new women's and men's jerseys, UNHCR's logo was featured for the first time, showing solidarity with the more than 100 million displaced people. In addition to providing refugee children with opportunities to achieve their full potential, this collaboration also aims to help them develop basic skills. Additionally, the FC Barcelona Team and Foundation will fund four projects in Colombia, Uganda, Turkey, and Malaysia. It is not limited to this to support refugees around the world through football. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Union of European

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxxXXwTMQcQ>

² <https://www.footballbeyondborders.org/>

³ <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/35595-fc-barcelona-and-unhcr-kick-off-partnership-with-new-football-jersey-in-support-of-refugee-children.html>

Football Associations (UEFA) have signed a Protocol of Cooperation to improve refugees' access to sports and improve their social integration.⁴ Football's transformative and healing powers were highlighted through this cooperation. As part of this cooperation, the Grassroots Children's Football Event, initiated and sponsored by UEFA and the International Association of Football Federation (FIFA), brings together children ages 6-12 in Istanbul to play football regardless of their language, religion, race, or gender.⁵ In addition to playing sports, refugee children and local children get together to socialize and integrate through this event.

Football-related activities play a very important role in building social peace and making it possible for friendships to spread beyond football fields. This type of integration tool is becoming increasingly important for countries like Turkey. Due to the fact that Turkey has the world's largest refugee population, including approximately 3.6 million Syrians under temporary protection and nearly 370,000 refugees and asylum seekers from other countries.⁶ Using a sports field such as football so that local people and refugees can get to know and understand each other and develop friendships can have very positive effects on society. For refugees, football is more than just a sport. The game of football is an important survival strategy for many refugees. By examining the life stories of Syrians in Turkey, we can gain a better understanding of this. Despite many deprivations and deficiencies, Syrian football players playing in different football teams in Syria escaped the war and fled to Turkey, where they formed a football team called Syrian Immigrants. Buca Municipality supported Syrian refugees and opened the fields for them to train. The following is the explanation of a Syrian refugee who played professional football while in Syria:

I have 30 friends who play football very well. They played for the national team and various leagues. Because we were against Assad, they did not give us ID to play football outside. We want help. We came here because we had a very difficult time in Syria. We lead a difficult life here, but we continue to play football to forget our troubles. I hope our voices will be heard.⁷

Football stands can also be a part of the peace and inclusivity that starts on the pitches with the slogan they chant. They can bring this to the streets. Members of the Konak Refugee Council and Syrian refugees, who attended the Konak Women's Football Team game in Izmir in 2017 as spectators, gave a message of peace and sisterhood-brotherhood against racist rhetoric. Before the game, the City Council Refugee Council hung a banner on the field with the words "No to Wars, Long Live Sports Sisterhood-Brotherhood".⁸ The solidarity match with refugees was held again in Izmir in 2015. Halil Ibrahim Dincdag, who was previously prohibited from refereeing matches due to his sexuality, moderated the game. It was unfurled and photos were taken before the match with banners in Arabic such as "Peace Is Now", "Football For All", "Red Card to Racism

⁴ https://editorial.uefa.com/resources/0269-12524301d5dc-9a72f50d26bc-1000/cooperation_protocol.pdf

⁵ <https://multeciler.org.tr/uefa-ve-fifanin-destekledigi-futbol-kardesligi-projesi-sultanbeylide/>

⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/overview-2#:~:text=Türkiye is home to the,asylum-seekers of other nationalities.>

⁷ <http://www.igamder.org/MYTD/haberarsivi/suriyeli-futbolcularin-hayali-turkiyedeki-takimlarda-oyynamak/>

⁸ <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/307956/konak-tribunlerinde-kardeslik-mesajlari>

and Nationalism", and "Football for a World Without Borders and Cruelty". After the match, a group meal was eaten to mingle.⁹

In the fight against violence experienced by refugees on a daily basis, football has played and continues to play an important role. 'Welcome' messages were sent from the stands in the leading football countries of Europe during the period called the 'refugee crisis' by European countries in 2015. While waiting to cross the border in Hungary, Syrian Osama Abdulmuhsin and his son Zaid, who were tripped by a cameraman, were Real Madrid guests. Zaid took the field with his idol, Ronaldo.¹⁰ Not only do big institutions strive to make solutions to structural violence, exclusion, and problems for refugees, but individuals also demonstrate that they can live better through sports. Alp Mizrakli, who was a high school student in Istanbul in 2017 and believed in the unifying power of football, implemented the 'Football Unifies' project for a more livable world. Within the scope of this project, he provided football training and matches with refugee children between the ages of 9-12, helping them gain athletic discipline and self-confidence.¹¹

There is an unfortunate possibility that football fields can also be a place where racism, discrimination, and violence is produced and even experienced badly. The football field is still not an area where women can enter and run the ball as freely as men in many regions. There are still many barriers preventing women from playing football. Due to this, women face a greater number of obstacles than men. The situation can be much more difficult if you are a refugee and also a woman. There are, however, many refugee women who have overcome all these challenges and achieved incredible success. One of these women is Nadia Nadim, whose life story continues to give hope to other refugee women. In 2016, Amal Hosham, a Syrian single mother living in Zaatari Camp with her 5 children, was the protagonist of another uplifting story, defying opposition to start a women's soccer team. Hosham, who says that the young girls' soccer team receives threats, does not give in to them and wants the girls to be happy and play ball.¹²

Women are taking part in football despite all the limitations in Turkey. According to research on gender equality in football, Turkey is among the countries that allocate the least budget to women's football.¹³ Although this is the case, women remain determined not to leave football fields and oppose the idea of football being a male-dominated sport. In Turkey, if football teams were penalized, they could only attend matches with women and children as spectators. Thus, the male spectators were forbidden from watching the match and the female spectators were allowed to fill the seats in the audience. In 2014, a change was made in this area and it was decided to play the matches without spectators as a penalty. Until very recently, female spectators were regarded as punishments in Turkey, showing the association between patriarchy and football quite clearly. Despite all these barriers, both local women and refugee women

⁹ <https://kaosgl.org/haber/izmirrsquode-multecilerle-dayanisma-maci>

¹⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/futbol-multecilerin-yaninda>

¹¹ <https://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber/102995/multeci-cocuklar-ve-futbol>

¹² <https://www.ntv.com.tr/dunya/5-cocuk-annesi-kadin-multeci-kampinda-futbol-takimi-kurdu,6JTQ8XdXU2wqUw3FI1mw#>

¹³ <https://www.gazetekadikoy.com.tr/spor/sahalari-da-meydanlari-da-geceleleri-de-terk-etmiyoruz>

continue to play football and resist restrictions. In addition to integrating into society, Syrian refugee women play football in order to realize their potential. Four Syrian sisters, Avin (24), Sözdar (15), Ronas (23) and Pervin (19), both feel more free with the football team they founded in Turkey.¹⁴ While they are on the football field, they forget the troubles of being a refugee and a woman, even for a short time. Football provides a tremendous opportunity for women, especially refugee women, to feel solidarity, integrate into society, and feel better psychologically. Scoring Girls¹⁵ is one of the best examples of this. One of Turkey's football teams, Fenerbahçe, joined the HeForShe movement to make gender equality a visible force.¹⁶ In Turkey, both the obstinacy of women to exist as active subjects in every field and the desire to oppose individual and institutional gender inequality enable women to increase and maintain their presence on football fields despite all difficulties.

Since football is accepted as an integration tool, it has become much more than just a sport. Soccer clubs in Europe and organizations such as UNHCR, UNICEF and the International Red Cross have been supporting refugees through sustainable football-based social inclusion programs in recent years. Through sports activities, the European Football For Development Network (EFDN) works with its five members to improve the lives of refugees. In Turkey, as in Europe, football continues to be an area where refugees and women mingle with local people and overcome limitations despite all barriers. All these factors indicate that football is more than just a sport, and it plays an important role in fostering peace in society.

[Fatmanur Delioglu](#) is a PhD student at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University. Her interests are centre around integration policies, refugee solidarity networks, gender, border policies, and social cohesion.



¹⁴ <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/05/15/suriyeli-multeci-kadinlar-yildizlar-futbol-takiminda-hayata-calim-atiyor>

¹⁵ <https://www.hawar.help/en/project/scoring-girls/>

¹⁶ <https://www.fenerbahce.org/taraftar/heforshe>