

## FAI Briefing for the Oireachtas Committee on Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht on Inclusion in Sport

May 19<sup>th</sup> 2023

### Introduction

The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) welcomes this opportunity to brief the Joint Oireachtas Committee on our work on diversity and inclusion. We believe football is the most inclusive and accessible of all sports and diversity and inclusion are at the heart of much of our work. This is demonstrated through our involvement in a wide variety of programmes and initiatives in a number of areas:

1. Increasing Female Participation and Driving Gender Equality and Representation Throughout our Sport
2. Linking Sport and Disability
3. Addressing and Supporting Mental Health Issues via Football
4. Working With and Integrating the LGBTQIA+ Community
5. Embracing People and Communities from Diverse Ethnic, Cultural, Religious or National Backgrounds
6. Grassroots Sport and Socioeconomic Diversity
7. Encouraging Older People to Stay Involved with Football

The FAI's strategic vision is to "use football to inspire the nation and connect communities". Our mission is "to grow participants to our game and deliver the best footballing experience for all". Today, over 450,000 people in Ireland participate in football as players, coaches, officials, and volunteers, making football the biggest single participation sport in the country. We strongly believe that football belongs to everyone, its joyful simplicity transcends borders and cultures, and we want to ensure everyone has the opportunity to play the 'beautiful game'.

Finally, the FAI works closely with all key stakeholders in relation to our approach to inclusion, including UEFA and FIFA, as well as central and local government in Ireland and of course Sport Ireland and many other dedicated and specialist organisations.

## Executive Summary

The FAI's mission is "to grow participants to our game and deliver the best footballing experience for all". Diversity and inclusion are at the heart of that mission. We are delighted to be able to share the wide variety of initiatives we are running across seven key areas:

### Increasing Female Participation and Driving Gender Equality and Representation Throughout our Sport

The FAI is driving a strategic agenda aimed at increasing female participation and promoting gender equality in football. With an overarching goal to establish football as the number one sport of choice for women and girls in Ireland, the FAI has instituted several programmes and initiatives.

The Women's National Team achieved a historic milestone by qualifying for their first-ever tournament, the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023. In alignment with this success, the FAI has committed to promoting equal pay for women's and men's teams and to ensure that every new and upgraded FAI infrastructure is women-friendly.

*The Soccer Sisters Programme* has seen more than 30,000 girls participate since its inception, leading to the formation of new clubs and teams across Ireland. The programme emphasizes increasing girls' retention in football by enhancing coach and parent awareness about unique issues facing girls in sport.

The *UEFA Disney Playmakers* programme has seen a 400% increase in participating clubs in the last two years, inspiring young girls through Disney movie characters to learn football skills and life lessons.

### Linking Sport and Disability

The FAI's *Football for All (FFA)* programme helps those with physical disabilities to get involved and play football. It is made up of players from all groups and sporting bodies that cater for people with a disability who want to play football. Approximately 3,800 players participate in the FFA programme.

The FFA programme at grassroots and international level falls under several formats from people who are amputees to Special Olympics football to football for people who are deaf. Right now, there are 71 grassroots football clubs delivering FFA club programmes.

Female participation is strongly encouraged across all the FFA programmes with female international teams participating in Deaf Games, Powerchair, Homeless Street Leagues and Cerebral Palsy football.

FFA also has a strong presence within our mainstream programmes. *Primary 5's FFA and Special Schools Provincial* Additionally, FAI Football Camps will support the inclusion of children with additional needs in mainstream camps.

## Addressing and Supporting Mental Health Issues via Football

The FAI is committed to promoting mental health and well-being in football with a number of initiatives in place to achieve this goal:

- *Kickstart to Recovery*: Run by the FAI and the HSE, the aim of the programme is to provide mental health service users with an opportunity to engage in therapeutic activities in community-based groups. There are over 20 active programmes nationwide.
- *#FlagYourFeelings*: Launched by the LOI and the HSE in 2022, this initiative involves free online suicide prevention skills courses for all players, coaches and officials. Specific support programmes are in place for players who are suffering with mental health difficulties. The initial programme was focused on the Women's Premier Division but plans are to expand this programme across the LOI.
- Support from *Head in the Game*: Mental health advocacy group, Head in the Game, are working with the LOI on a campaigns which aim to raise awareness of mental health issues and encourage those who need help to seek it. Initiatives include encouraging captains of all men's and women's senior teams to wear specially designed captain's armbands.

## Working With and Integrating the LGBTQIA+ Community

The FAI believes that football is a sport for everyone and that everyone should feel welcome and respected on the pitch and in the stands, no matter how they identify. As part of its commitment to LGBTQIA+ inclusion, the FAI has launched several initiatives including:

- *Wearing rainbow numbers on jerseys during Pride month*: The FAI's women's national team will wear rainbow numbers on their jerseys during Pride month (June) for a scheduled fixture against Zambia. This is a visible symbol of the FAI's support for the LGBTQIA+ community and its commitment to creating an inclusive environment for all.
- *Launching an LGBTQIA+ awareness campaign*: Partnering with SSE Airtricity, the FAI has launched a specific and extensive LGBTQIA+ campaign in May 2023. SSE Airtricity has handed over their designated sponsorship space in all League of Ireland grounds to promote the LGBT Helpline charity. This awareness campaign will see sponsorship boards, interview boards, centre circle flags, pre-match arch and ball plinths branded with the LGBT Helpline branding. Furthermore, all clubs have been provided with Pride captains' armbands and Pride corner flags. Men's and women's Premier Division players will act as ambassadors for this important campaign.
- *Supporting League of Ireland clubs' LGBTQIA+ initiatives*: The FAI has also supported a number of LGBTQIA+ initiatives launched by League of Ireland clubs. For example, Galway

United wore rainbow numbers during a recent match and Bohemians created an LGBTQIA+ supporters club.

- **Commencing a policy development engagement with TENI:** The FAI has also commenced a policy development engagement with the Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) to ensure that its policies and procedures are inclusive of transgender people.
- **Establishing an internal working group looking at transgender persons participation in football:** The FAI has also established an internal working group looking at transgender persons participation in football. The members of this group have expertise in DEI, football legislation, medicine and youth safeguarding. It has sought inputs from national stakeholders as well as international football bodies (FIFA).

### Embracing People and Communities from Diverse Ethnic, Cultural, Religious or National Backgrounds

The FAI is committed to creating an inclusive environment for all people, regardless of their race, ethnicity, national or cultural origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. As part of its commitment to inclusivity, the FAI has launched a number of initiatives, including:

- **Providing free access to live sporting events for refugees:** LOI have led the way in providing free access to live sporting events for refugees with clubs across the country offering free tickets to Ukrainian refugees and those living in direct provision. The FAI also offered free tickets to over 3,000 people from the new Ukrainian community to support their national team in a very emotional game at the Aviva Stadium in June 2022 and €100,000 from gate receipts was donated to the Red Cross after the game.
- **Pro-actively encouraging refugees and members of ethnic minority groups to get involved with the game in Ireland:** The FAI has also pro-actively encouraged refugees and members of ethnic minority groups to get involved with the game in Ireland, filling 90 volunteering places in football programmes nationwide. In addition to 87 after-school programmes, 35 clubs provided open training programmes to engage children from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds in football alongside their peers. The programme also includes anti-racism education for players, coaches, referees and staff.
- **Providing anti-racism and anti-discrimination education:** The FAI is also supporting all clubs with anti-racism and anti-discrimination education. The FAI has a zero tolerance approach to racism. Since 2007, sanctions have been in place for incidents of racism and discrimination. More recently the minimum sanction has increase to a 10 match ban.
- **Summer Camps:** Each year, the FAI offers subsidised places on our Summer FAI Football Camps to facilitate participation by children living in direct provision or who are living in Ireland as refugees. In 2022, over 200 places were provided in summer camps across Ireland with a camp also held at the Mosney Direct Provision Centre.

## Grassroots Sport and Socioeconomic Diversity

As Ireland's demographics continue to evolve, the FAI recognizes unique opportunities to promote inclusion and make football accessible to all communities, regardless of socio-economic backgrounds.

The FAI Volunteer Campaign, '*Give a Little, Get a Lot*,' was launched to highlight the role and importance of volunteers in the game of football. The campaign, which had an investment of €120,000, was designed to bring visibility to current volunteer roles, emphasize the presence of female volunteers, challenge existing stereotypes, and inspire more people to volunteer. The campaign was well-received, with 1.2 million video views, 8 million impressions, and 2.5 million reached digitally, and it successfully garnered over 100 valid volunteer submissions.

The FAI also initiated *Late Night Leagues (LNL)* in 2023, a pilot programme aimed at reducing offending and anti-social behaviour among young people through football. This initiative, conducted in partnership with Youth Diversion Projects, An Garda Síochána, and other relevant services, offers a structured platform for positively engaging young people and preventing further involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour.

## Encouraging Older People to Stay Involved In Football

The FAI is committed to keeping more people involved in the sport of football longer into their lives, and to encouraging participation in football for people of all ages. To achieve this, we run a number of initiatives:

- *Walking Football*: This is a low-impact sport designed for people over 50 that is safe and enjoyable for people of all fitness levels.
- *Football Memories Programme*: This is a dementia-friendly programme that uses materials such as photos, newspaper articles, videos and music of the era to spark fond memories and conversation for those interested in the 'beautiful game'.

Further details on all of these programmes are available below.

## 1. Increasing Female Participation and Driving Gender Equality and Representation Throughout our Sport

There has been exponential growth in women's football over the last number of years. One of the FAI's strategic pillars is 'Developing the full potential of football for women and girls' and we are committed to driving female participation in football over the coming years. We believe this growth will increase significantly on the back of the upcoming 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

Participation at all ages has substantially increased and the FAI runs a number of programmes designed to enhance this growth:

### *Soccer Sisters Programme*

- The Soccer Sisters Programme was created under the 'Introduction to Football' banner with its aim being to increase the number of girls playing football while utilising facilities countrywide. Since its inception over a decade ago, more than 30,000 participants have taken part in the programme. This has led to the formation of new clubs and new girls' teams within existing clubs throughout the country.
- The objective of the programme, supported by one of the FAI's most important sponsor partners, Aviva, and tailored for girls aged 7-14 is to retain girls in the sport through upskilling and awareness building amongst both coaches and parents. To support this, the FAI has developed coaching programmes that increase coaches' awareness of specific topics that may impact on the girl's game, e.g., menstrual cycle, and provide parents with necessary supports and information leading to a better environment for young girls.
- The FAI, with Government support, has offered subsidised places on the programme for girls living within the direct provision system.
- A new format in 2023 saw Development Officers deliver sessions on girls' development (Coaching Young Female Players Workshop, Parent Awareness Workshop, Practical Demonstration), which dealt with topics including how to create an environment where female players can be comfortable. As part of the programme, blitzes were held around the country with the Finals Day taking place in the Aviva Stadium itself on April 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- Soccer Sisters participation numbers in 2023:

|                            |      |
|----------------------------|------|
| ○ Coaches                  | 880  |
| ○ Parents                  | 520  |
| ○ Blitzes                  | 850  |
| ○ Practical Demonstrations | 770  |
| ○ Total                    | 3020 |



### *UEFA Disney Playmakers*

- UEFA Disney Playmakers is a new programme that the FAI is running alongside UEFA and Disney in grassroots clubs across Ireland. The programme is for 5-8 year old girls who have yet to take up football. The hugely popular programme started two years ago with 30 clubs participating in the pilot roll-out. It has grown four-fold with 120 clubs taking part in the 2023 programme.
- The programme channels the power of Disney movie characters to inspire young girls to become more confident, lighting a fire within them to take part and play football. The sessions are based around some of Disney's most famous films, where girls play out their favourite films and take on the roles of some of their best-loved characters. The goals are to develop movement and football skills alongside more general "life lessons".
- This is a club-led programme run by coaches who prioritise girls' needs. It aims to position football as an activity for life with girls improving their health and developing their overall talents.

#### UEFA Disney Playmakers participant numbers:

- 2021: 30 clubs involved, 820 girls playing
- 2022: 52 clubs involved, 2,016 girls playing
- 2023: 120 clubs expected, over 4,000 girls expected to take part

### *League of Ireland Women's Football*

- 'Framing the future of our League of Ireland' is another strategic pillar for the FAI and a key part of this has been the rebranding of the League of Ireland (LOI). All men's and women's Leagues now sit under one banner and are given equal billing. The LOI is the first and only league in Europe to call out the word "Men's" and "Women's" specifically in the formal title of the two Leagues in the league title and so place our men's and women's league under the same branding.
- The introduction of club licensing in the Women's Premier Division means there are also identical standards in both men's and women's clubs. All Women's Premier Division teams play in the same stadiums as their male club counterparts. Crowds have continued to increase as a result.
- Professional contracts have been introduced for the first time in women's football in 2023. This introduction also included the same minimum wage regulations and standard players contract for female players as their male counterparts. Once again, this is unique to Ireland, and we are proud to have led the way for more women to choose the career path of a professional footballer within a proper football industry moving forward.

- In 2020, the FAI announced the first-ever live broadcast of a Women's Premier Division game and there are now 12 games per season broadcast live free-to-air on TG4. All other games in the Women's Premier Division are available on LOITV.
- The first ever Women's Presidents Cup took place earlier this year. Supported by President Michael D. Higgins, the launch was held in Áras an Uachtaráin. The competition provides parity of esteem between men's and women's LOI clubs with the opening games taking place on the same day.
- The first ever Women's All-Island Cup competition between the LOI and the NIFL was recently launched with 16 teams from both sides of the border competing in this unique competition. It promotes cross-border relations and provides competitive games for the best players on the island.
- The LOI Women's Academy continues to thrive with all clubs now having U17 and U19 Academy teams providing a pathway from grassroots football to national league and into international football.

#### *Women's National Football Team*

- The Women's National Team (WNT) not only qualified for the first time ever for any tournament, but namely for the FIFA Women's World Cup taking place this summer in Australia and New Zealand. Concurrently, the team has reached its highest-ever FIFA ranking of 22<sup>nd</sup> in the world.
- Not only do we have a realistic chance of progressing out of a tough Group stage, but hopes are also high for winning our 2023 Nations League group and for qualification for the 2025 European Championship Finals in Switzerland. We believe this will continue to underpin the inexorable rise of football as the number one sport of choice for women and girls in Ireland for the foreseeable future.
- The promotion of the Women's World Cup in the lead-up to Ireland's participation in the tournament. Post-World Cup, the FAI will implement a 'World Cup' legacy plan which includes female-only coaching education.
- As such the FAI is committed to doing everything it can to make the sport as accessible, inclusive and as equal with the boy's and men's game as it can be. In September 2021, the FAI took the landmark decision to introduce equal pay for the WNT alongside the Senior Men's team and this has characterised our very real drive for inclusion for women and girls from that point.
- Our stated strategic aim is to have all of our international teams qualifying for international competitions on as regular a basis as possible and we will also work hard to look to host some of those events in Ireland.



- To that point, the upcoming FAI Facility Infrastructure Vision and Plan commits the Association to ensuring every new and upgraded building project is women and girl friendly and to have the needs of both built into every design.

#### *FAI Women and Girls Leadership Academy*

- The FAI has a vision to develop “an inspiring sustainable female leadership development system”, which will streamline leadership development pathways for all aspiring female leaders within Irish football.
- We are currently establishing the FAI Women and Girls Leadership Academy to grow future leaders through early intervention with schools and youth programmes, build capacity of existing females in Irish football to step up and progress in leadership roles and accelerate the progression of high potential females in Irish football to senior leadership roles.
- We want to increase the percentage of females in international and club head coaching and management roles, along with the percentage of females on organisational, club and affiliates senior leadership teams and executive governance positions.
- The academy will be made up of a suite of accredited and non-accredited personal development, educational and career development programmes, with a pilot development programme underway including:
  - *Girls Transition Year*: This as a full-time programme for 20 girls under the age of 15, that will develop leaders both on and off the pitch by combining a playing programme with integrated leadership and personal development modules
  - *Youth Council*: This programme targets girls from primary and secondary schools, offering support in developing skills relevant to representing at committees and decision-making
  - *STEP UP*: A full-time one year programme for 20 participants consisting of blended learning, personal development modules, leadership and customised technical modules depending on their role within football
  - *Stay in the Game*: A 12 month part time programme for 20 participants including players, referees and coaches that is aimed at retaining women in the game and providing pathways towards leadership positions
  - *Student Leadership Programme*: This will be a part-time programme for eight participants aimed at developing leaders within third level football by integrating football with education and will include a combination of leadership development modules and customised football modules dependent on their role in football
  - *Play It Forward*: This programme will target six high potential females for a two year Masters programme in Football Leadership and High Performance, accredited through Dublin City University

### *Supplementary Initiatives*

- **Future Stars (9-12 years) and Girls in Green (13-16 years):** Both programmes will kick off in mid-May with 40 camps running in each programme. The Aviva Future Stars participation programme is the second point of engagement for girls into the sport. The key central theme to this programme will be to further develop the agility, balance, and coordination of each participant. This will be aligned with the fundamentals of the game in the form of fun, dynamic coaching sessions across eight weeks. The Aviva Girls in Green programme is the next phase on the pathway and an increasingly important one. The methodology and support are the same as the Future Stars programme but aimed at a higher age group, with the programme designed for clubs to grow participation or to retain current players.
- **Women's KickFit:** This is aimed at women over the age of 18, promoting non-football socially-focused activity in the football club that can be attended by all female members of the community. Due to begin at the end of May. The KickFit programme is a fun and non-competitive recreational eight week social programme for women. While the primary aim of this programme is to keep fit and create a social group, most clubs who have run this programme have benefited from recruitment of additional female coaches, female committee members and the formation of a women's team. The FAI is in proactive discussions with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to secure more funding for this programme.

## **2. Linking Sport and Disability**

One of the central aims of the FAI is the delivery of football opportunities to people who may not ordinarily get a chance to play our game. The FAI now has five full-time staff (Paddy O'Reilly, FFA programme coordinator & 4 FFA DO's full-time staff, with all of our grassroots workforce having responsibility for the development of the FFA programme and have been trained accordingly) with responsibility for facilitating a clear pathway to cater for players with various disabilities from club to country, where abilities allow, through a variety of programmes.

### *Football for All Programme*

- The Football for All (FFA) programme helps those with physical disabilities to get involved and play football. It is made up of players from all groups and sporting bodies that cater for people with a disability who want to play football. Approximately 3,800 players participate in the FFA programme.
- Over the past four years, the FAI has established a number of specific associations to govern particular programmes within FFA, these are Blind Football Ireland (BFI), Association of Irish Powerchair Football (AIPF) and Irish Amputee Football Association (IAFA). All three independently govern their specific football game across Ireland providing the pathway for their members from grassroots to international where possible.

- FFA programmes at grassroot and international level fall under some of the following formats: Amputee, Blind/ Vision Impaired, Cerebral Palsy, Deaf, Down Syndrome, Frame Football, Homeless Street Leagues, Powerchair, and Special Olympics Football. Recent achievements by Irish teams include:
  - Winning both the Men's and Women's Eight Nations Cup in 2022 (Homeless teams)
  - Reaching the IFCPF Cerebral Palsy Football World Championships Quarter-Finals in 2022
  - Reaching European Amputee Football Championship Semi-Finals in 2021
  - Achieving 8<sup>th</sup> place in the EAFF European Championship (Amputee Football) in 2021
  - Securing third place in the 2019 EPFA Nations Cup (Powerchair)
  - Winning the 2019 Glyndwr Cup at the Homeless World Cup
- Female participation is strongly encouraged across all the FFA programmes with female international teams participating in Deaf Games, Powerchair, Homeless Street Leagues and Cerebral Palsy football.
- 71 grassroot football clubs are delivering FFA club programmes.

#### *Supplementary Initiatives*

- **FFA presence within our mainstream programmes:** Primary 5's FFA/ Special Schools Provincial Qualifiers will be included for the first time in 2023. Additionally, FAI Football Camps will support the inclusion of children with additional needs in mainstream camps.

### **3. Addressing and Supporting Mental Health Issues via Football**

- **Kickstart to Recovery:** A multi-agency partnership run by the FAI and the HSE. The aim of the programme is to provide mental health service users with an opportunity to engage in therapeutic activities in community-based groups. Kickstart to Recovery is run through mental health services across Ireland and there are over 20 active programmes nationwide.
- In conjunction with the HSE, the League of Ireland launched a [#FlagYourFeelings](#) campaign in 2022. The programme involves free online suicide prevention skills courses for all players, coaches and officials. Specific support programmes are in place for players who are suffering with mental health difficulties. The initial programme was focused on the Women's Premier Division but plans are to expand this programme across the League of Ireland.
- The FAI's League of Ireland department has supported several initiatives promoting the work of mental health advocacy group, Head in the Game. These include encouraging captains of all men's and women's senior teams to wear specially designed captain's armbands, with the campaigns designed to raise awareness amongst players and fans involved in the league,

encouraging them to seek help if necessary and signposting them to relevant professional services.

- Participation in football has a significant benefit for mental health, with a recent UEFA and FAI Social Return on Investment Report finding that football participation results in an annual saving of just under €14 million for the State's mental health services.

#### 4. Working With and Integrating the LGBTQIA+ Community

- Widening LGBTQIA+ participation in our game is an essential element of the FAI's broader mission in promoting the game of football. An individual's sexual orientation or gender identity should never be a barrier to participating in and enjoying the game.
- As part of our continued support for LGBTQIA+ participation, the women's national team will wear rainbow numbers on their jerseys during Pride month (June) for a scheduled fixture against Zambia.
- In conjunction with our League of Ireland partners SSE Airtricity, we have launched a specific and extensive LGBTQIA+ campaign in May 2023. SSE Airtricity has handed over their designated sponsorship space in all League of Ireland grounds to promote the LGBT Helpline charity. This awareness campaign will see sponsorship boards, interview boards, centre circle flags, pre-match arch and ball plinths branded with the LGBT Helpline branding. Furthermore, all clubs have been provided with Pride captains' armbands and Pride corner flags. Men's and women's Premier Division players will act as ambassadors for this important campaign.
- League of Ireland clubs have launched numerous initiatives to support the LGBTQIA+ community. Examples include Galway United wearing rainbow numbers and Bohemians creating an LGBTQIA+ supporters club.
- The FAI has also commenced a policy development engagement with the Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) and has established an internal working group looking at transgender persons participation in football. The members of this group have expertise in DEI, football legislation, medicine and youth safeguarding. It has sought inputs from national stakeholders as well as international football bodies (FIFA).

#### 5. Embracing People and Communities from Diverse Ethnic, Cultural, Religious or National Backgrounds

- The FAI has identified 'Developing collaborative and inclusive culture' as a key enabler for success over the coming years. The FAI strongly promotes the 'integration' of minority communities. To that end, we run a number of initiatives, which are anchored by our Intercultural, and Football and Social Responsibility (FSR) officers. In the League of Ireland,

eight clubs have recently appointed FSR officers with an accredited education course provided by the FAI to support their community-based work.

- As part of FAI Club Licensing, all League of Ireland clubs are required to develop an FSR Strategy. This is the first year of the requirement but there have already been excellent results with Bohemians becoming the first club to employ a full-time FSR Manager and launch their FSR plan: <https://bohemianfc.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Bohemian-FC-FSR-Strategy.pdf>
- We now have eight full-time FSR Officers/Managers working in League of Ireland clubs and recently delivered our first accredited training course in conjunction with UEFA and the Football Business Academy. Our aim is to have full-time FSR Managers in every League of Ireland club within five years.
- The FAI's League of Ireland department employs a dedicated full time Football & Social Responsibility Manager with the remit to assist League of Ireland clubs to develop and increase their community engagement capacity. This includes assistance with training and education, programme development, provision of programme resources, providing networking opportunities and identifying and pursuing funding sources to develop the capacity of LOI clubs to embrace Football & Social Responsibility for the benefit of local communities countrywide.
- League of Ireland clubs have led the way in providing free access to live sporting events for refugees with clubs across the country offering free tickets to Ukrainian refugees and those living in direct provision. The FAI also offered free tickets to over 3,000 people from the new Ukrainian community to support their national team in a very emotional game at the Aviva Stadium in June 2022.
- The FAI has also pro-actively encouraged refugees and members of ethnic minority groups to get involved with the game in Ireland, filling 90 volunteering places in football programmes nationwide. In addition to 87 after-school programmes, 35 clubs provided open training programmes to engage children from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds in football alongside their peers. The programme also includes anti-racism education for players, coaches, referees and staff.
- The FAI is working hard to support people from diverse ethnic, national or cultural minorities, with initiatives including a national refugee engagement in football and support programme. In addition, the FAI is supporting EU projects including 'Football Including Refugees in Europe (FIRE)' and the 'Sport Inclusion Network' (SPIN).
- The FAI is also supporting all clubs with anti-racism and anti-discrimination education. The FAI has a zero tolerance approach to racism across the whole of the game and our wider football community. Since 2007, sanctions have been in place for incidents of racism and discrimination. More recently the minimum sanction has increase to a 10 match ban.

- Should incidents occur, the FAI provides education initiatives in addition to sanctions and will communicate a strong message of zero tolerance via all media and social media platforms. We partner closely with UEFA in this critical space and have worked with “Show Racism the Red Card” over the years to deliver education to staff (all development officers), clubs and leagues.
- We have previously produced an educational video resource to support this work (view [here](#)). UEFA has produced its “Outraged” campaign toolkit resource for National Associations, which was developed to provide NAs, leagues, clubs, and schools with materials to lead educational sessions on issues relating to discrimination in football. The toolkit provides suggested outlines for the sessions, introductions, and discussion points. We have been working to complement the use of this alongside our existing non-discrimination resources and approach to education.
- Clubs that qualify for UEFA competitions are required to undergo anti-racism education. This is provided for coaching, playing and other staff.

#### *Case Study: Offaly Traveller Men’s Programme*

- The Traveller community often experiences high levels of discrimination, racism and social exclusion from sports. The Offaly Traveller Men’s Programme encourages men in the Traveller Community to take part in a physical activity, particularly football.
- This initiative has grown to have 26 men training twice a week. These men play competitive games every week in the CCFL football league.
- Annually, we have engaged with Pavee Point around their annual Men's Health Day event in the Phoenix Park. This activity was severely constrained by Covid-19 and we are currently looking at ways to re-establish the programme.

#### *Summer Camps*

- Each year, the FAI offers subsidised places on our Summer FAI Football Camps to facilitate participation by children living in direct provision or who are living in Ireland as refugees. In 2022, over 200 places were provided in summer camps across Ireland with a camp also held at the Mosney Direct Provision Centre.

#### *Cross-community*

- The FAI has engaged in a number of EU Erasmus+ Sport co-funded programmes. These include the “Sport Together” project which has the overall objective of strengthening social inclusion in divided communities. It does this through increasing participation in football by disadvantaged groups. There is a particular focus on young people and on girls.



- A key emphasis is on increased participation in grass-roots football by refugees and newly arrived migrants. This is done through training, education, awareness-raising and capacity-building of sport stakeholders and cross-community youth sport interventions. In one project, the FAI partnered with the Donegal Local Sports Partnership and colleagues in the IFA. Internationally other project partners include the Western Balkans project.

## 6. Grassroots Sport and Socioeconomic Diversity

Changing demographics in Ireland provide unique opportunities to support inclusion and reach out to new people. Regardless of socio-economic background, the FAI is committed to ensuring that football has a presence in all communities across the country.

In this regard, the FAI keenly promotes access to camp programmes and local camps in disadvantaged areas, as well as through outreach initiatives with local authorities.

### *FAI Volunteer Campaign*

- FAI launched its Volunteer Campaign to bring the story of volunteers to life, by producing something that resonated with volunteers new and old, to give them a sense of all that they can get back from being part of the game of football. We invested €120,000 across a four week period in January/February 2023 utilising both TV and digital mediums to share our message.
- The campaign 'Give a Little, Get a Lot' was designed to showcase the many different roles volunteers can do in their local club the campaign aimed to:
  - Create awareness of current volunteer roles
  - Showcase female volunteers
  - Challenge existing stereotypes
  - Drive and encourage new volunteers to get involved and register at their local club
- The campaign resonated well with both male and female audiences, with strong reach and video results. With 1.2 million video views, 8 million impressions and 2.5 million reached with the digital campaign alone. Our reach was strongest among the age demographics of 18-54, with a strong click through rate observed among the 65+ category, indicating a high level of intent which was positive.
- With over 100 valid submissions to our online form, we then mapped the volunteer to the respective Development Officers in their area, to ensure as many as possible will follow through and volunteer.

### *Supplementary Initiatives*

- **Late Night Leagues (LNL):** The aim of the LNL Youth Diversion and Engagement Pilot (2023) is to provide a focused and effective intervention for young people through the use of football, to divert young people away from offending and anti-social behaviour.
- Additionally, working in partnership with Youth Diversion Projects and other relevant services, the FAI and An Garda Síochána run “Street Leagues”, a programme where members of An Garda Síochána play football with young people from disadvantaged areas. These games offer a unique forum to engage with young people and thus prevent further involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour.

## 7. Encouraging Older People to Stay Involved with Football

The FAI is committed, as part of its strategy, to keep more people involved in the sport of football longer into their lives and we want to encourage participation in football for people of all ages. This ranges from persuading those at the end of their football careers (e.g., 35-40+) to continue to be involved in the game either as a volunteer, coach, referee, administrator or indeed to encourage more elderly people to either come back to the game or to have a vehicle to keep them playing it.

### *Walking Football*

- This initiative is designed to engage older men and women in recreational exercise by adopting the game of football to meet their needs. Walking Football encourages people aged 50+ to come together and play the game with like-minded people.
- The social element of this programme is as important as the game itself with groups enjoying a cup of tea and a chat afterwards. We are currently working with “Men's Sheds”, Local Sports Partnerships, and local clubs to promote the game. We will be publishing a support document in May 2023 which aims to grow this programme.

### *Supplementary Initiatives*

- **Football Memories Programme:** The Football Memories programme uses the theme of football to engage older members of the community in a comfortable social setting by reminiscing about the ‘by-gone glory days of football’. The programme uses materials such as photos, newspaper articles, videos and music of the era to spark fond memories and conversation for those interested in the ‘beautiful game’. The programme is also dementia friendly and has been found to provide great benefits in terms of maintaining social connections and combatting social isolation among this demographic.

ENDS