**Finland reaping HatTrick benefits**

In the week that it hosts the UEFA Congress, we hear how UEFA HatTrick funding has enabled football to flourish all year round in Finland.

Because of Finland's harsh winters, artificial pitches and indoor facilities are vital to ensuring football is possible all year round and UEFA's HatTrick assistance programme has played a big role in making this a reality.

"Of our more than 300 artificial pitches scattered around the country, probably half were built through HatTrick funding," Football Association of Finland (SPL-FBF) President Pertti Alaja told UEFA.org. "Through this funding the clubs have been able to take control of their own indoor and ground projects, partner with the state, municipalities and other parties, and launch some simply unbelievable projects. HatTrick funding is behind all of that."

Head of Player Development, Hannu Tihinen, added: "It's not the optimal place to play football because we have a lot of snow and very cold temperatures, so it’s really important for our grassroots and player development to have these kind of facilities. We have 140,000 players of whom about half, 65,000-67,000, are under 12 years of age and they need good facilities."

Now in its 13th year, HatTrick funding has also helped with the construction of two brand new stadiums, in Vaasa and Seinäjoki, which will be used at next summer's UEFA European Under-19 Championship in Finland.

"It's a big thing for the whole of Finland and we're going to have games in two pretty new stadiums and the facilities that were built by UEFA HatTrick helped a lot. Of course it is a big chance for us, the FA and the kids also to follow the best Under-19 teams in Europe that are coming here to Finland to play in quality games. I’m sure that it will boost us not only regionally, but also the whole of Finnish football," says Tihinen.

This week the SPL-FBF welcomes the 41st UEFA Congress to its shores, an event that the association’s president is excited to be hosting.

He said: "To get the European football family in Helsinki is a big deal. It hasn't happened since 1997. This congress will be very important for European football. We want to channel the 'Helsinki spirit' for the occasion and to inspire the European football family. This congress is something we have really longed and waited for, so we will offer a very warm welcome."