

UEFA President Čeferin inaugurates pitch at Jordanian refugee camp

UEFA President Aleksander Čeferin has helped to officially open a new football pitch at the Za'atari Refugee Camp in Jordan, which will give thousands of children the opportunity to play the game they love, with the best facilities possible.

Over 200 boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 13 took part in the opening ceremony, and were joined by Mr. Čeferin for a football match on the new playing surface.

“It’s a wonderful feeling to see how something as simple as a football pitch can bring so much joy and happiness. Football has the ability to inspire, unite and also teach children important life skills and values, such as teamwork and respect,” the UEFA president said.

The building of the full-sized artificial pitch was backed by the UEFA Foundation for Children, the Asian Football Development Project (AFDP), the Jordanian Football Association, the Norwegian Football Federation and Lay’s, who are also a sponsor of the UEFA Champions League.

Two containers filled with artificial turf, construction materials, maintenance support equipment (including a tractor), and pitch equipment such as goals and corner flags were sent from the Netherlands. The construction of the pitch took two months and was completed in late May.

During his visit to Za'atari, which houses just over 80,000 refugees, Mr. Čeferin visited the ‘House of Sport,’ which was opened in September 2016 by the UEFA Foundation for Children and the AFDP.

“It is genuinely a humbling experience to be able to interact with children from this camp. Despite the situations they find themselves in, they are able still to smile and enjoy life as much as possible,” said Mr. Čeferin. “I am glad that the work carried out by the UEFA Foundation for Children, the Asian Football Development Project, the Norwegian Football Federation and Lays is giving these children opportunities that they otherwise would not have had.”

The centre has become the hub of sporting life in the camp and allows children to play in a safe environment as well as giving them the chance to engage in sport and football in particular with others.

This is the latest in a long line of projects that the UEFA Foundation for Children has undertaken at the Za'atari Refugee Camp, which is located in the north of Jordan, not far from the southern Syrian border.

The UEFA Foundation for Children, alongside the AFDP and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has been looking to help refugees who were displaced by the conflict in Syria and especially children and youngsters who were living in the camp, since its creation in April 2015.

Prince Ali Bin Al Hussein, who is the President of the Jordanian Football Association, mentioned, "powerful mediums such as sport and education have the ability to plant seeds of hope and potentiality even under the most difficult circumstances."

"Thanks to my friend Aleksander Čeferin, my colleagues at the UEFA Foundation for Children and Lay's for supporting the Asian Football Development Project's projects at the camp and for providing the refugee boys and girls with a healthy, quality space that they can use not only to train, but also to build friendships and learn skills that are beneficial on and off the pitch," Prince Ali added.

A total of 4,480 children and youngsters, including 3,185 boys and 1,295 girls aged between 8 and 20, regularly take part in weekly sports activities, which are supervised by qualified male and female coaches.

In order to organise sports activities and football tournaments, it is essential to have local teachers who can keep the project going. This is why the UEFA Foundation for Children has embarked on a training programme to give coaches the necessary skills to supervise and lead football activities. Since July 2017, 250 adult refugees, including 163 men and 87 women, have benefited from the coaching education that has been available.

In order to give the young inhabitants as much stimulation as possible, monthly football tournaments are organized in the camp. In total, 30 girls' teams (U13, U15 and U20) and 60 boys' teams (U13, U15 and U24) have been created, with an average of 20 players per team.

The UEFA Foundation for Children and the AFDP have tried to offer as much expertise as possible and have run workshops on refereeing and how to recover from injury. These sessions have proved to be a success, with 54 referees qualifying to officiate in matches, 21 of whom are women.

Furthermore, experts have been enlisted to touch on social fields, such as how sport can be used as a tool for social cohesion, while advice has also been given on early marriages and conflict resolution. Almost 60 percent of the camp's inhabitants are under the age of 24, while a fifth are under five.

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