Armenian coach recognised with UEFA award

## Senik Arakelyan has been named as the winner of the gold award in the category of Best Leader in the 2017 UEFA Grassroots Awards.

Senik Arakelyan has been recognised for his work with children in the Shirak region of Armenia with first prize in the category of Best Leader in the 2017 UEFA Grassroots Awards.

Arakelyan is a coach at the 'Tribune' grassroots club in the city of Gyumri where almost 1,000 children, teachers and coaches are involved in events and sessions each year. There is a particular focus on girls and women’s football, an area in which he has helped break down barriers.

"I started to develop women's football in 2013," explained Arakelyan. "It was hard to assemble a team in Gyumri because parents did not allow their daughters to join football clubs. This was the reason I decided to start with orphanage girls. I started training with ten girls on a sand pitch. Gradually the amount of participants increased and then we succeeded in the 2015-2016 season and became winners of the A and B groups in the Armenian Women's Championship.

"To spread awareness, we organise activities in schools and hold tournaments for girls during the whole year. We make it possible for several hundreds of girls to play football and we choose players from among these girls."

Arakelyan also organises activities for disabled children and, as the representative of the Football Federation of Armenia (FFA) in Gyumri, visits schools to review their football lessons and offer advice to tutors, while also cooperating closely with local municipalities to organise local tournaments, street events and school competitions.

"Playing football is a pleasure," he says. "Every person regardless of age, sex, ethnicity or disability has the right to be happy and enjoy this pleasure. In my opinion playing football is about enjoyment, people get a sense of equality and respect playing football."

FFA grassroots specialist, Lala Yeritsyan, said: "People like Senik are very important in football's development. People like him live for football, they are part of football. They are able to grab children's attention in their provinces, to make them believe how interesting playing football can be, how important it is as a way of staying healthy.

"He was also able to change the attitudes towards women's football in the province, which is not traditionally very well developed in our country."