

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) continues to incorporate sport-for development strategies to achieve results for children across the spectrum of its advocacy, programmatic, and policy areas at the country level, while fostering global partnerships that can maximize transformative change for children and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. Hundreds of initiatives led by UNICEF country offices use sport to advance the SDGs and targets, including on health, nutrition, education, gender equality, protection, HIV/AIDS, inclusion of children with disabilities, and water, sanitation and hygiene. UNICEF continues to support sport programmes as an important contribution to providing psycho-social support for children in humanitarian contexts and emergencies, including refugee settings.

Major global partnerships include Special Olympics, the International Cricket Council, Futbol Club Barcelona, Manchester United, Olympiacos Football Club, the Oceania Football Confederation, as well as with a host of NGO actors at the local level. UNICEF is galvanizing its strong network of sport partnerships and athlete goodwill ambassadors to support our major integrated global campaign work in areas such as migration and positive parenting.

In partnership with FC Barcelona, Barça Foundation and UNICEF’s Office of Research – Innocenti released the report “Getting into the Game: Understanding the evidence for child-focused sport for development” in 2019. The report reviewed over 100 different articles on child-focused S4D and found that education, social inclusion, child protection and empowerment are key outcomes of well-designed S4D programming and are pertinent to the realization of several SDGs, including 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 16. However, the report also highlights the need to address the risks and limitations of sport, such as by ensuring S4D initiatives do not reinforce negative attitudes, behaviours and norms which harm children. To continue building the evidence base on S4D for children and empowering policymakers and practitioners, the second phase of this project will further explore and identify the contribution of sport in delivering outcomes, in particularly in access and learning outcomes (education) and life skills outcomes (social inclusion, child protection and empowerment) through high-quality evidence from field research which establishes the key characteristics of child-focused S4D programming.