

**EEA AND NORWAY GRANTS
FUND FOR BILATERAL RELATIONS**

INITIATIVE PROPOSAL

Title of the initiative: Grassroots Football Coaching Course Estonia (GFCC): Advancing Gender Equality through Inclusive Grassroots Football

Implementing entity (beneficiary or donor state entity):
The Football Association of Norway

Partner(s) (minimum one donor state entity):
Estonian Football Association

Allocation (total sum):
9 6626 EUR (2026/2027)

Short description of the initiative:
(background, aim, participants, activity plan, budget outline, communication and dissemination)

Background / Rationale

The Football Association of Norway (NFF) is Norway's largest children and youth organisation (400,000 members) and a pioneer in grassroots and women's football. NFF's work is complemented by the Estonian Football Association (EJL), the governing body for football in Estonia, founded in 1921 and headquartered in Tallinn. EJL has adopted a strategic action plan aimed at strengthening women's football and increasing girls' participation, supported by improved coordination, guidance, and collaboration with clubs nationwide. However, the availability of qualified female coaches remains a critical prerequisite for achieving these ambitions. Together, NFF and EJL are broad-based, membership-driven sports organisations with deep local reach, and important civil society actors in their respective countries, well-positioned to advance inclusion, participation, trust, and rights-based community engagement through football.

NFF has more than 20 years of international experience delivering structured grassroots programs and women-only coaching education in multiple regions, with a clear focus on inclusion, safe sport, and sustainable local structures for girls' participation. NFF's international women-focused grassroots coaching program (Grassroots Football Coaching Course - GFCC) has a central place in this work. The program is built on principles aligned with the grassroots/UEFA C pathway and is delivered by highly qualified instructors. Over the last six years it has been implemented in more than 15 countries with strong results in growing the number of women coaches and strengthening local girls' football activity.

Gender equality and equal access to participation in civil society remain key priorities under the Bilateral Fund. In football, structural gender imbalances persist, particularly at grassroots level, where girls' access to organised activity is often limited by a lack of female role models, qualified coaches, and inclusive local structures.

This initiative responds to the following challenge: **unequal opportunities for girls and women to participate and take leadership roles in grassroots football.**

By increasing the number of qualified female coaches and strengthening inclusive local activity structures, the project contributes directly to gender equality, in line with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, which emphasises equal participation, leadership opportunities, and the removal of structural barriers for women and girls across all areas of society, including sport ([European Commission](#)). Participation in team sports is consistently associated with positive social outcomes, including a sense of belonging, social support, and resilience, as highlighted in EU research on sport and social inclusion, which recognises organised sport as an important arena for building social capital, well-being, and community cohesion ([European Commission](#))

Improved physical and mental health outcomes for girls are recognised as important secondary effects of increased participation in safe, regular football activity. EU indicators shows that girls across Europe are on average less physically active than boys, reflecting structural barriers and unequal access to attractive activity arenas ([Eurostat](#), [PLOS+1](#)). Increasing girls' participation in football therefore supports both equal opportunities and improved physical and mental health.

NFF's experience shows that female coaches are a key enabler for recruiting and retaining girls in football, particularly where football is perceived as male-dominated. More women in coaching and leadership strengthens trust among families, supports safeguarding culture, and helps create safer and more welcoming environments for girls. **Safeguarding** is also directly linked to equal opportunities for girls in football: safe, respectful sport settings reduce risks of harm and bullying, and are widely recognised as central to girl's positive sport experiences and well-being ([European Commission](#)). By integrating safeguarding competence into coach education, the project strengthens both the protective environment around children and the conditions needed for sustained participation, thereby supporting gender-equal access to sport.

In addition, the course includes a dedicated **Football Fitness & Health module** (youth football). The module equips the course participants with practical knowledge on age-appropriate training, injury prevention, basic nutrition, and how regular, enjoyable activity can promote long-term movement habits, resilience, and positive mental health—particularly for girls who are at risk of lower activity levels. This is especially important from a gender equality perspective, as European evidence shows that girls face structural barriers to sustained participation in physical activity, and that early access to safe, supportive, and well-adapted sport environments is critical for reducing gender gaps in physical activity ([EIGE](#) ; [WHO](#)).

Finally, football is the world's largest sport and has exceptional reach and cultural relevance, also in Norway and Estonia. Beyond football's direct contribution on gender equality, the sport is a powerful platform for communicating evidence-based messages on equal opportunities and rights-based participation ([Council of the European Union](#) - EU Work Plan for Sport 2024–2027). This communication potential will be actively used throughout the project to raise public awareness and strengthen broader societal support for girls' participation and safe grassroots sport.

Overall aim

To advance **gender equality** by strengthening women's access to education, leadership, and participation in grassroots football, through the implementation of a women-focused coaching course program that increases girls' (aged 6–16) opportunities to participate in safe, inclusive local football activity in Estonia.

Specific objectives

1. **Increase women's participation and leadership in grassroots football** by training and certifying female coaches through NFF's internationally tested GFCC program (aligned with grassroots/UEFA C principles).
2. **Strengthen inclusive and safe grassroots environments** by integrating safeguarding principles and rights-based coaching practices into coach education.
3. **Expand girls' access to organised football activity** by using practical course elements, including Girls' Football Festivals and a structured practice period, as recruitment and activation arenas.
4. **Promote gender equality and equal opportunities** through visibility, communication, and role modelling, using football's strong societal platform.
5. **Lay the foundation for a long-term partnership** between NFF and EJL, positioning the course program as the first step in a broader cooperation on women's coaching, leadership pathways, and grassroots development.

The Coaching Course program/ Participants / Target groups / Beneficiaries

The coaching course is structured as a blended, step-by-step learning pathway combining digital learning, practical application, and follow-up. It begins with ***an e-learning module*** introducing the principles of children's football. This is followed by ***Course Part 1 on children's football***, delivered as an in-person program combining theory and practical sessions, and including a Girls' Football Festival for approximately 240 girls, which serves as a supervised learning and recruitment arena. Each newly qualified female coach will receive an equipment package—including balls, cones, bibs, a pump, and basic training equipment—designed to enable the immediate start-up and sustainable delivery of local girls' football activities.

In the **mid-phase period**, participants establish local training groups and conduct regular training sessions, supported by two mandatory ***e-learning modules on Safeguarding and Football Fitness & Health***. The program concludes with ***Course Part 2 on youth football***, delivered as an in-person course combining theory and practice, followed by structured follow-up of the trained coaches to support retention, quality, and continued activity over time.



The courses are delivered by instructors from NFF's international instructor pool, all with extensive experience from implementing NFF's international grassroots coaching program for women in multiple countries and with strong competence in grassroots development, safeguarding, and women-focused coach education.

Throughout the course program, all participants are registered and followed up through NFF's dedicated ***international digital learning platform***, which provides access to the mandatory e-learning modules and course materials, and enables participants to register and document their practical coaching activities during the practice period through structured reporting, including photos and videos.

The direct participants are female coaching candidates (aspiring grassroots coaches) recruited by EJL with technical support from NFF. The direct beneficiaries are girls aged 6–16 who participate in the festival and subsequent local training groups, as well as families and local communities who benefit from increased access to safe, positive physical activity opportunities and improved community cohesion. Indirect beneficiaries include local clubs/academies and EJL structures that will be strengthened through a larger pool of qualified female coaches and improved safeguarding competence, supporting sustainable girls' football activity and safer grassroots environments over time. Furthermore, the broader population benefits from heightened public awareness of football's role in gender equality and equal access to participation in civil society and public health, supported by the strong outreach and visibility of the national football associations.

Communication and dissemination

The project will use football's broad reach and strong public interest to disseminate key messages on equal opportunities in sport. Planned measures include:

- Joint communication by NFF and EJL (web, social media, photo/video storytelling) around the course milestones and festival.
- A high-level visibility moment in Tallinn linked to one of the in-person course blocks, where the Presidents from the two football associations meet to highlight gender equality and equal opportunities.
- Proactive media outreach to national media in Estonia and Norway, and invitations to relevant public stakeholders to emphasise sport as an inclusive civic arena for girls.
- Dissemination of learnings and results within EJL's club network to encourage replication.

Long-term partnership between NFF and EJL

NFF and EJL have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding expressing their mutual intention to cooperate on the development of girls' and women's football. This application concerns the initial phase of a broader, long-term partnership between NFF and EJL. While the present project focuses specifically on gender equality through two coaching course cycle, it is designed as a strategic entry point to a multi-year cooperation encompassing additional female coaching courses and leadership programs, as well as organisational development initiatives. NFF and EJL share a clear intention to build a value-based partnership grounded in democratic values, human rights and non-discrimination, health, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, safeguarding, and inclusion of vulnerable groups. As such, the project

forms an integral part of a coherent, long-term approach to strengthening gender equality through grassroots football in Estonia.

Budget outline

The budget is structured by course program and aligned with a lump sum approach, where payments are linked to the implementation of each coaching course program. The budget covers two course programs to be implemented in 2026 and 2027 respectively.

Course Program 1 (2026) includes all core costs related to course delivery, including international instructor travel and fees, accommodation and full board for participants, instructors and staff, venue and pitch rental, course materials, translation of manuals, access to NFF's digital learning platform, delivery of a Girls' Football Festival, local transport of participants, and direct project administration and coordination by NFF and the Estonian Football Association (EJL).

Course Program 2 (2027) follows the same structure and objectives but is budgeted at a lower level. This reflects reuse of course manuals and learning materials, established delivery systems, and reduced coordination workload. No translation or development costs are included in the second year, and administrative costs are reduced accordingly.

The digital learning platform is owned by NFF, which pays an annual license fee to the company that developed the platform in order to use this technical solution. In this project, NFF fully covers the license granting participants access to the system. The platform supports a blended learning model combining e-learning, on-site practical training, and continuous individual follow-up of each coach throughout the course. In addition, participant-related operational costs arise, including technical support, follow-up and storage of reports (videos, photos, etc.), and the preparation of statistics covering more than eight months of activity, including the practical period. NFF covers more than 50% of these operational costs, while EEA and Norway Grants co-funds the remaining share.

All budget lines represent direct, eligible costs necessary for implementation of the coaching course programs. External audit costs are excluded, as proof of condition will be used. The budget ensures cost efficiency, clarity, and full consistency with the planned results and activity plan.

Activity plan 2026

Activity	Time	Location	Cost	Participants
Project kick-off & detailed planning (logistics, recruitment plan, safeguarding plan, comms plan)	March	Online + Estonia (clubs/regions)	Covered by NFF/EJL	NFF project team, EJL coordinator
E-learning: Introduction to Children's Football (mandatory - completion tracked in learning platform)	April	Online	NFF fully covers the annual digital learning platform license granting participant access, and also covers more than 50% of participant-related operational costs, while EEA and Norway Grants co-funds the remaining share of these operational costs, including technical support, report follow-up/storage, statistics etc.	24 Female coaches
Coaching Course Part 1: Children's football (including Girls' Football Festival and visit by the NFF and EJL presidents.)	April	Tallinn	EEA and Norway Grants (accommodation, pitch, equipment to participants, event logistics, safeguarding measures)	1 NFF representative, 2 Norwegian instructors; 24 female coaches; 1 EJL support staff, 240 girls (8-12 years), 2 football presidents
E-learning: Safeguarding (mandatory - completion tracked in learning platform)	May-June	Online	NFF fully covers the annual digital learning platform license granting participant access, and also covers more than 50% of participant-related operational costs, while EEA and Norway Grants co-funds the remaining share of these operational costs, including technical support, report follow-up/storage, statistics etc.	Coaches
Mid-phase coaching period: coaches deliver local training for girls (supported monitoring/mentoring through the)	May-October	Coaches' local communities	On-site follow-up of coaches covered by NFF/EJL. Digital follow-up: NFF fully covers the annual digital learning platform license granting participant access, and also covers more than 50% of participant-related operational costs, while EEA and Norway Grants co-funds the remaining share of these	Coaches + local girls' groups + clubs

			operational costs, including technical support, report follow-up/storage, statistics in the mid-phase coaching period.	
E-learning: Football Fitness & Health – linking activity to physical & mental health and healthy habits (mandatory - completion tracked in learning platform)	September–October	Online	NFF fully covers the annual platform license granting participant access, and also covers more than 50% of participant-related operational costs, while EEA and Norway Grants co-funds the remaining share of these operational costs, including technical support, report follow-up/storage, statistics etc.	All female coaches
Coaching Course Part 2: Youth Football (consolidation, youth football principles, assessment, next-step planning)	November–December	Tallinn	EEA and Norway Grants (accommodation, pitch, equipment to participants, event logistics, safeguarding measures)	1 NFF representative, 2 Norwegian instructors; 24 female coaches; 1 EJL support staff, 40 girls/players for the practical sessions (13–16 years)
Communication & dissemination package: media outreach, social media storytelling, stakeholder engagement event in Tallinn	April - December	Tallinn, Oslo, Social Media	Covered by NFF/EJL communications department	NFF/EJL comms; media; invited stakeholders
Administration, financial management, reporting	March - December		EEA and Norway Grants	NFF/EJL

Activity plan 2027

Activity	Time	Location	Cost	Participants
Project kick-off & detailed planning (logistics, recruitment plan, safeguarding plan, comms plan)	March	Online + Estonia (clubs/regions)	Covered by NFF/EJL	NFF project team, EJL coordinator
E-learning: Introduction to Children's Football (mandatory - completion tracked in learning platform)	April	Online	NFF fully covers the annual digital learning platform license granting participant access, and also covers more than 50% of participant-related operational costs, while EEA and Norway Grants co-funds the remaining share of these operational costs, including technical support, report follow-up/storage, statistics etc.	24 Female coaches
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Administration, financial management, reporting	March - December		EEA and Norway Grants	NFF/EJL

Planned results 2026/2027

OUTPUT	INDICATOR	TARGET	COMMENTS	PROOF OF CONDITION
Coaching course program 1 2026	First coaching course program implemented	1	<p><u>Foreseen:</u></p> <p>24 women enrolled;</p> <p>22 women certified/qualified (after course part 2);</p> <p>240 girls participate in Girls' Football Festival</p> <p>264+ girls reached through regular local training groups during the practical period;</p> <p>22 women completing the Safeguarding module</p> <p>22 women completing the Football Fitness & Health module</p> <p>8 communication and visibility activities implemented;</p> <p>6 coordination and follow-up sessions conducted.</p>	Report describing what has been implemented; agendas for Course Part 1 and Course Part 2; registration sheets / participants lists; confirmation of completed e-learning modules from the digital learning platform; basic photo documentation and communication outputs.
Coaching course program 2 2027	Second coaching course program implemented	1	<p><u>Foreseen:</u></p> <p>24 women enrolled;</p> <p>22 women certified/qualified (after course part 2);</p> <p>240 girls participate in Girls' Football Festival</p> <p>264+ girls reached through regular local training groups during the practical period;</p> <p>22 women completing the Safeguarding module</p> <p>22 women completing the Football Fitness & Health module</p> <p>8 communication and visibility activities implemented;</p> <p>6 coordination and follow-up sessions conducted.</p>	Report describing what has been implemented; agendas for Course Part 1 and Course Part 2; registration sheets/ participants lists; confirmation of completed e-learning modules from the digital learning platform; basic photo documentation and communication outputs.

Karl-Petter Løken

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General secretary
The Norwegian Football Association