

Impact report

Open Fun Football Schools + SSP in Moldova

Cross Cultures Project Association

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Photo: Anna Rotary, Lessons Learned Seminar Moldova, December 2023

Abstract

The "Open Fun Football Schools + SSP" project in Moldova, implemented by Cross Cultures Project Association in collaboration with the Football Federation of Moldova (FMF), aimed to foster peaceful coexistence, gender equality, and child protection through fun sports, community engagement and cross-sector collaboration. Since its inception in 2006, the initiative has reached over 98,000 children, including 53% girls, and involved more than 2,900 volunteer leaders, coaches, and 12,000 parents. This report evaluates the project's impact from 2021 to 2023.

The impact evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, including workshops, interviews, and questionnaires with 64 participants. The evaluation was guided by Actor-Network Theory, Social Learning Theory and the Value Creation framework. Data collection involved a two-day "lessons learned" seminar, 106 responses to online questionnaires, and group discussions and interviews, focusing on 64 participants' experiences, learning outcomes, and the project's overall impact on their communities.

Findings

The transformative value of the Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS) + SSP initiative is highlighted by its ability to effect changes in both individuals and communities. This project's approach, rooted in social learning and cross-sector collaboration, has **facilitated broader cultural shifts and strengthened societal bonds**. Participants have reported significant personal growth, increased empathy, and a deeper understanding of community dynamics, which collectively contribute to a more peaceful and cohesive society. Cross-sector and cross-cultural practitioners, along with young volunteers, have developed robust capabilities in volunteerism, fostering enhanced interaction and mutual understanding among children and adults from diverse backgrounds, professions, and genders and have established platforms to articulate their societal visions. Operating within comprehensive sports and cross-sectoral networks, these volunteers demonstrate the capacity to collaborate with local authorities and other relevant stakeholders, raise funds and **improve child protection efforts, strengthening good governance** practices through enhanced dialogue between citizens, civil society and national authorities.

Many participants noted that their involvement **positively impacted their personal and professional lives**. For instance, involvement in OFFS activities fostered a sense of responsibility and leadership among volunteers, leading to improved practices in their professional roles. This is evident in the reflections of social workers and leaders who now perceive themselves as change-makers, positively influencing the development of children.

The integration of local police officers into the project has notably **enhanced community trust and safety**. The increased visibility and positive interactions between police officers and community members, particularly children, have contributed to a safer and more trusting environment. This has led to a broader acceptance and respect for authority figures.

The initiative has **contributed to long-term community resilience** by fostering robust, supportive cross-sector and cross-cultural networks that extend beyond the project's immediate scope. These networks have enabled continuous collaboration and problem-solving, ensuring that the project's benefits are sustained over time. Participants have highlighted how the project has united different sectors, leading to more trusting relationships and dialogue between public authorities, civil society and citizens, as well as enhanced child protection initiatives.

Furthermore, the project has had a profound **cultural impact**, promoting values such as teamwork, respect, and a healthy lifestyle. Participants observed that these values have permeated through their communities, encouraging healthier lives and fostering a sense of solidarity and unity. This cultural shift is particularly evident in the increased participation of girls in football, **challenging traditional gender roles and promoting gender equality**.

Challenges and lessons learned

One notable challenge was the necessity of sustaining partnerships beyond the football sphere and integrating them more deeply into civil society. Ensuring sustainable governance structures and empowering local SSP teams to develop independent action plans tailored to community needs are essential for long-term sustainability.

Despite promoting equality, the project faced challenges in addressing broader structural issues, particularly concerning gender equality. The engagement of fewer girls in football clubs in Moldovan society underscores the need for a strengthened approach to support sustained participation and development opportunities.

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Introduction

Since 2006, the Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS) initiative has made a significant impact in Moldova. Originating from the collaboration between Cross Cultures and the Football Federation of Moldova (FMF), the initiative has reached over 98,000 children, 53% of whom are girls. Additionally, more than 2,900 volunteer leaders and coaches and 12,000 parents have participated, fostering community engagement and cooperation across 703 kindergartens, schools, and sports schools in 13 districts of Moldova.

Initially, the project aimed to promote social cohesion among various ethnic groups, including Transnistrians and Gagauzians, and support the FMF in its grassroots football development. By 2010, the initiative expanded its focus to include gender equality. Following the police reforms in 2015/16, the initiative successfully integrated 521 local community police officers into its platform, fostering cross-sector-collaboration to develop relevant child protection measures within the activities.

While the numerical achievements are impressive, questions remain: What do these numbers signify? What value do they represent? What are the experiences and lessons learned from the participants? How have the children's and volunteers' perceptions and attitudes changed as a result of their participation? To what extent has the involvement of local police influenced community trust and safety? How do participants and stakeholders perceive the overall impact of the initiative on their communities? And finally: In what ways has the initiative contributed to long-term community resilience and sustainability?

Therefore, this report examines the impact of the Open Fun Football Schools + SSP project from 2021 to 2023, based on various workshops, interviews and questionnaires with 64 participants. The focus is on the development of various forms of capital—human, cultural, democratic, and social—fostered through volunteer engagement and cross-sectoral, social networks. It explores participants' learning experiences, the methods of learning, and the significance and value these experiences have created for both the participants and their communities.

Thus, following this introduction, the project and its objectives will be outlined. Subsequently, the methodologies and theoretical frameworks employed will be detailed and finally, the report will present the findings on the project's impact.

Objectives of the intervention

The project *Open Fun Football Schools + SSP 2021-2023* aimed to address several critical issues in Moldovan society, including the need for peaceful relations with the Transnistria and Gagauzian regions, increasing women's representation and empowerment, and strengthening child protection and improving governance effectiveness at the local level.

Thus, the overall objective was to foster inter- and intra-community relations, promoting peaceful coexistence, social inclusion, gender equality, child protection, good governance, democratic values, and human rights.

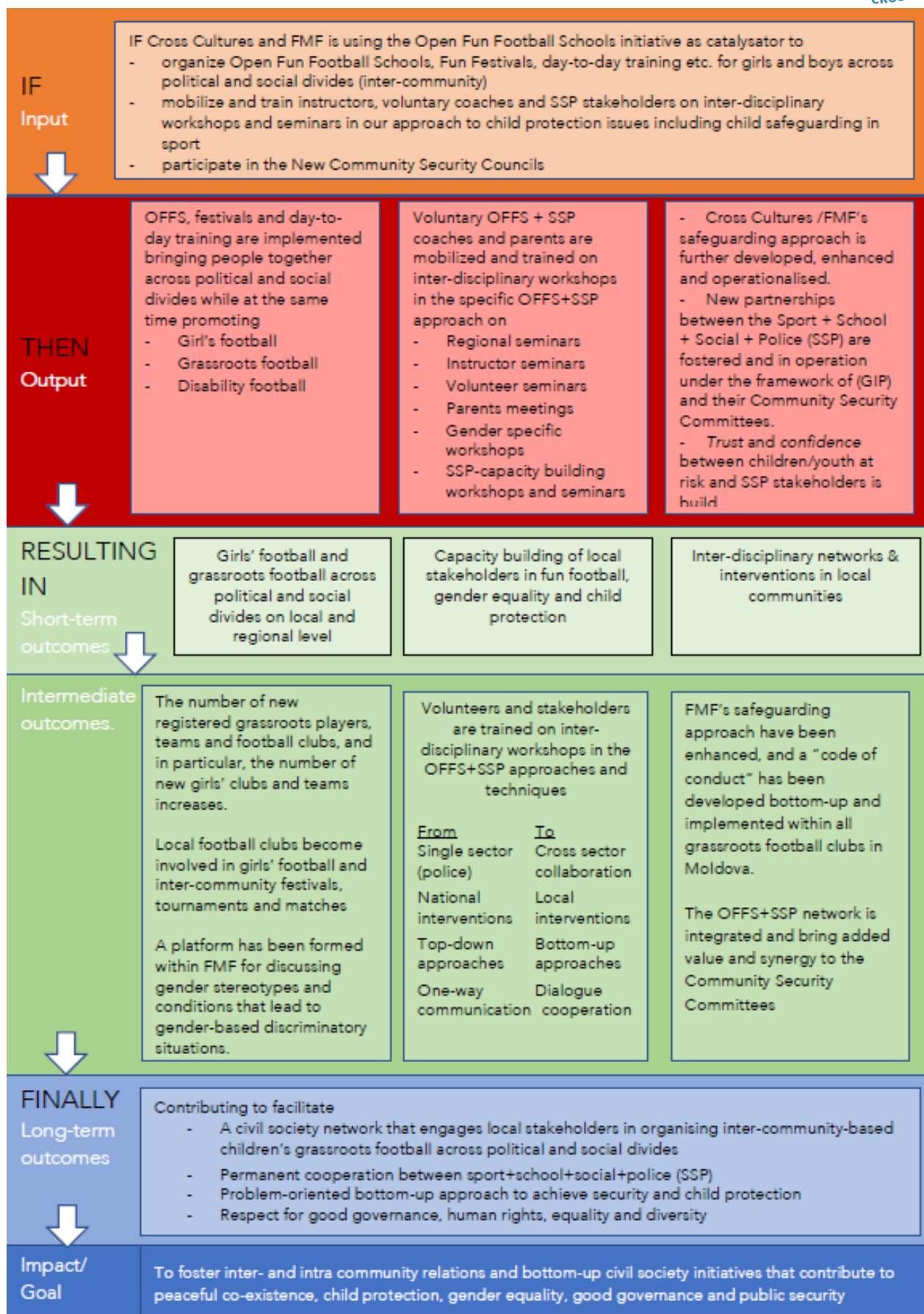
The specific objectives of the project were to use the Open Fun Football School initiative as catalysator to contribute to promote:

- (1) **peaceful co-existence** by bringing people of different backgrounds to interact together, thereby facilitate interaction, dialogue, trust and cooperation between local communities across Moldova, including Transnistria and Gagauzia;
- (2) **gender equality**, combat gender-based stereotypes, and foster female well-being and community participation by increasing and consolidating girls' and women's active participation in grassroots football and civil society at large;
- (3) **child protection** through **cross sector collaboration**
 - through further development and implementation of FMF's approach to Safe Guarding Children in football
 - by providing active participation in as well as synergy and added value to the new Community Security Committees across Moldova

Target groups encompassed children aged 6-11, with a focus on socially vulnerable groups, volunteer leaders and coaches from community police, P.E. schoolteachers, and volunteers from the sports sector and social services, youth aged 16-18 as assistant coaches, parents and other civil society actors.

The project aimed to confront these challenges by employing the Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS) initiative as a central component to act as a catalyst for promoting peaceful coexistence, gender equality, and child protection and to provide a platform for inter-ethnic cooperation, encourage female participation in football, and facilitate cross-sector collaboration. By engaging stakeholders from different sectors, including sports, education, law enforcement, and social services, the project aimed to create a network of support for vulnerable and at-risk children and families. The project aimed to achieve its objectives through the following theory of change.

The theory of change has functioned as a foundation for the impact indicators and proxies developed in this impact evaluation report. For further analysis of the identified problems, selected approaches, and description of activities, please see the project application annexed. For further information of the social concepts preceding the TOC below, please also see annexes



Methodology

This impact evaluation is based on a two-day "lessons learned" seminar held in Moldova, involving 42 volunteer leaders from the police, education, sports, and social sectors. During these two days, participants engaged in workshops to evaluate their participation in the program, assess their results, and brainstorm ideas for future projects, including semi-structured and group interviews. Additionally, the report incorporates data from 106 responses to online quantitative and qualitative questionnaires. In total 64 pax have participated in the impact evaluation, some twice in different formats (online questionnaires and workshops)¹.

The methodologies and theories employed provide a framework for the impact evaluation. The assessment utilizes the internal CCPA OFFS impact assessment tool developed by the American University, Intercultural Management Institute by Justin M. Papka and Yelena Osipova (2013) (annex 3), along with the accompanying manual "How to Track Community Changes Effected by OFFS" by Inka Krueger (2013). This approach involves developing impact indicators and proxies measured through various quantitative and qualitative methods. Furthermore, the evaluation draws inspiration from Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (2002) to understand the value generated through cross-sector social and cultural networks and the types of capital built by volunteer leaders and coaches through their social and civic engagement. Finally, Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner's social learning theory and framework in "Learning to Make a Difference: Value Creation in Social Learning Spaces" (2020) guides the exploration of participants' learning outcomes and the value the project has created for them and their communities.

At the lessons learned seminar, the value creation framework and actor-network theory were utilized, while the online questionnaires were designed around the impact assessment tool and included relevant impact indicators and proxies.

Below, we will briefly outline the different methods and theories informing the assessed impact in this report.

How to track community changes effected by OFFS

The tool provides a general framework for the monitoring and evaluation: (a) In cooperation with Cross Cultures local partners, we adjust and design the assessment tool to suit the purpose of the program, i.e. define the program's 'proxies' - what we want to achieve and how we measure each proxy. (b) Based on this, our local partner organisations draw up a baseline.

¹ Analysed data can be provided upon request

(c) At the end of each project phase, we conduct a follow-up survey that takes stock of the project's progress, and on this background lesson-learned workshops are organised for the voluntary leaders, where we discuss how we can best adjust and focus our efforts. (d) Lastly, we will carry out an evaluation report based on our assessment tool.

The developed impact indicators and proxies are presented in the sections detailing impact in this report.

Actor-Network Theory

In developing the lessons learned workshops in December 2023, Cross Cultures and FMF incorporated Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to provide a structured framework for our analysis.

Bruno Latour's ANT emphasizes the importance of networks as dynamic assemblages of heterogeneous elements that come together to form stable configurations. Thus, social networks are not perceived as classic organizations, rather they are perceived as “an organic slippery bar of soap” in constant flux, reflecting ongoing negotiations and translations between actants, which can be human beings, objects, technologies, texts, and other non-human elements (Latour, 2002).

Latour's ANT is particularly insightful in conceptualizing actors as integral components of consolidated, cross-sectoral networks and recognizing the network itself as an influential actor in individuals' lives. Within these organic networks, various forms of capital and exchanges emerge, benefiting both the individual and the network. The human, political, cultural, social, and economic capital of the individual enriches the network, while the network, in turn, supports the individual's development. Thus, according to ANT, social networks effectively create diverse forms of capital when (a) individuals become active participants in heterogeneous, cross-cultural social networks, and (b) these networks reciprocally influence the individuals' lives (Latour, 2002).

To explore these dynamics, 42 OFFS volunteer leaders were asked to map all the actors they interact and collaborate with - I.e. Who are the actors that have been directly involved in their network activities? Which actors have been indirectly involved? What do they cooperate about? These considerations have brought about numerous discussions on what makes a good and well-consolidated network, as opposed to a stagnating and less productive network. These reflections have been incorporated in the impact evaluation's findings.



Photo: Anna Rotary, Open Fun Football Schools September 2023

Social Learning Spaces and Value Creation

In contemporary society, the use of indicators to evaluate the performance of civil society initiatives is not only highly recognised but also preferred. Indicators are quantifiable measures or metrics used to assess and compare various aspects of social, political, and economic phenomena. They are designed to provide information about specific conditions or outcomes and are therefore not neutral or objective tools. They reflect decisions about what is considered important to measure and how it should be measured. Consequently, indicators can prioritize certain dimensions and overlook others, thereby producing specific knowledge. The way indicators are formulated holds power because they can shape perceptions, influence behaviour, and contribute to the construction of social realities. This often involves attempting to measure contextual or particular phenomena that are not easily quantifiable. They represent a technology for producing easily accessible and standardized forms of knowledge, even though none of these categories are self-evident and are often formulated based on the desired change. The predefined nature of indicators can therefore create the phenomenon they measure, rather than the other way around (Merry, 2011).

In light of this observed tendency, Cross Cultures decided to incorporate Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner's social learning theory and value creation framework from "Learning to Make a Difference" (2020). This means that the two-day lessons learned seminar in December 2023 was structured around facilitating 'Social Learning Spaces' asking openly, "What have you learned? Why? And how?". By employing this dimension in the impact evaluation, Cross Cultures aims to present a more open-ended, qualitative, and accurate account of the project's

social impact, bottom-up. An impact evaluation combining quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as the use of indicators and the value creation framework, Cross Cultures argues, is more likely to provide a realistic and productive understanding of the project's outcomes. Thus, below, we will briefly outline the social learning theory and value creation framework used.

Learning to make a difference

Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner define social learning spaces as environments where individuals engage in learning through shared practices, discussions, and mutual support. The concept is grounded in the notion that learning is fundamentally a social process, where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and participation in a community of practice. In contrast to cognitive theories that focus on the internalization and acquisition of knowledge within the individual, the Wenger-Trayner's emphasize the situated, shared and relational aspects of learning activity. The learner is both defined by and defines social learning spaces, making learning a process of constructing identities within the systems of relationships in which the individual participates (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2020).

Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework extends the analysis of social learning by identifying and categorizing the various dimensions of value generated through learning activities. This framework provides a structured approach to understanding how social learning contributes to both immediate and long-term outcomes, recognizing that the benefits of learning activities are not transient but are sustained over time and extends its impact beyond knowledge acquisition to broader organizational and societal benefits.

Value creation is understood as the process of engaged negotiation of meaning in social practice, which provides agency to the learner in developing ambitions and abilities. Social learning creates value for participants to the extent that their participation is experienced as leading to a meaningful difference, regardless of the scope. They theorize value creation through various frameworks for different types of value, which we will present below. Viewing learning as a social process of value creation focuses on human experience, emphasizing a sense of meaning and agency as an integral part of life (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2020).

The Value Creation Framework

The value creation framework is structured around eight distinct value categories, each representing a different dimension of value generated through social learning activities. The following table has been made by the author to summarise Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework:

Value Category	Description	Sample of questions
Immediate Value	Direct benefits experienced during or shortly after learning activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What was your experience of the OFFS+SSP project?</i> - <i>How does your participation feel to you?</i> - <i>What sticks out when you think of participating in the project?</i>
Potential Value	Latent benefits that may materialize over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What did you get out of this experience? What did you learn?</i> - <i>What ideas, insights, solutions, or methods came out of it?</i> - <i>Why do you think these were important? And did it change over time?</i>
Applied Value	Practical application of new knowledge and skills in relevant contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What did you do with this project?</i> - <i>How did it change your practice?</i> - <i>If you came up with a solution, what were you trying to do?</i> - <i>Did you share your solution with others?</i>
Realized Value	Concrete outcomes and improvements from applied knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What was the effect of your participation?</i> - <i>was your contribution recognized?</i> - <i>what other improvements would not have happened if it weren't for your participation?</i>
Enabling Value	Conditions that facilitate effective social learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>How did you get the resources to do this?</i> - <i>was someone helping facilitate the activity?</i> - <i>did the groups reflect on how this activity worked?</i>
Strategic Value	Alignment and engagement with strategic stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>How did your relationship change with some stakeholders?</i> - <i>Did you ask the stakeholders weather they thought it would help them?</i>
Orienting Value	Direction and purpose enriched by interaction with broader landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Did you find out af anyone else is doing something similar?</i> - <i>What else have you learned about resources or the broader landscape?</i> - <i>Has this changes your view of what you are trying to do?</i>
Transformative Value	Deep, systemic, broader changes/effects resulting from social learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Did this experience affect other aspects of your life?</i> - <i>Do you think it has an effect on the culture of the broader society?</i> - <i>What else in the environment has helped make this transformation?</i>

Impact

The following sections present the analyses and findings of the impact evaluation. First, the findings related to specific objective 1: peaceful coexistence, are presented. Next, the findings related to specific objective 2 are examined. Then, the findings related to specific objective 3: child protection and cross-sector collaboration, are discussed. Finally, these findings are reflected upon in relation to the overall development objective, as well as the challenges and lessons learned. The various forms of value will be highlighted where relevant and evident, rather than being confined to each thematic analysis section.



Photo: Anna Rotary, Lessons Learned Seminar Moldova, December 2023

Impact Indicator 1: Enhanced social cohesion and peaceful co-existence

Indicator #1 measures change in social cohesion and peaceful co-existence as experienced by the participants in Cross Cultures.

Objective 1 seeks to enhance **peaceful co-existence** by bringing people of different backgrounds to interact together, thereby facilitate interaction, dialogue, trust and cooperation between local communities across Moldova, including Transnistria and Gagauzia.

Thus, part of impact indicator #1 measures the participants perception of people belonging to different cultural/social/ethnic groups, their willingness to collaborate on a shared goal with them. Cross Cultures assumes that if groups of conflicting societies participate together in social, civic, and cultural activities of mutual interest, then understanding will increase, prejudice will be reduced, and a safe space will be created within the area of conflict for healthy relationships to develop. This, in turn, will lead to new relations, increased trust and understanding of "the other", and participants will ultimately prefer and be able to reduce conflict, hostility and tension between groups.

Consequently, part of impact indicator #1 measures changes in the activity level of the Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS) volunteers in civil society, inter-community collaboration and civil society initiatives outside the OFFS environment. By civil society we are referring to all the formal and informal activity an individual could engage in, in public life. These activities can vary from advocating values, opinions or special interests to friendship relations and involvement in civil society organisations, which are beneficial for the community.

Proxies	Sample of questions
1. Perceived separation between the group and the individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do other ethnic/cultural groups (or communities) have certain ways of behaviour different to your own group/community? - Are OFFS program peers different from others in their community who are not participating in OFFS (Why/why not?) - Would you feel comfortable with your child having friends from other ethnic/cultural backgrounds who are not OFFS participants? - Following the OFFS program, in your view, has the significance of ethnic/social/cultural issues facing your community changed? (reinforced, diminished, or remained same?)
2. Enhanced civil dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Since the OFFS program has completed, has it changed your (or your parents') view of the community you live in, and the view of the communities you live around? - Does civil dialogue play a role in the resolution of the conflict? - Has your sense of awareness of issues within your community risen since the OFFS program? - Have you discussed these issues with other community members more frequently since the end of OFFS?
3. Improved friendships and associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has OFFS strengthened your bonds with friends you made either within, or outside of the OFFS program? - Do you re-value any personal associations you have in your community (or across communities)? - Do you think there any barriers for friendship or collaboration between people from different social/ethnic/cultural groups? - What kind of barriers against or assets for cooperation, exist?
4. Awareness and participation in civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you volunteering in any community activities? - Have you increased your awareness of participation in, or joined any local, community or regional civic (religious, political, social, business) group since the completion of OFFS? - What are barriers or benefits to such participation? - What issues related to civil society do you see within your community? - Have you discussed these issues more frequently with other community members?

<p>5. Attitudes, perspectives, desires about inter-community collaboration (desire for change)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Would you consider collaborating on a similar community project with - a volunteer from a different ethnic/cultural/social group?</i> - <i>Do you believe youth programs can improve inter-cultural relations in your community?</i> - <i>Is it important for you to engage in relations and friendships with people from a different social/cultural/ethnic group? Is yes, how do you engage?</i> - <i>Is it important for you to work with people from a different social/cultural/ethnic group?</i> - <i>Has the OFFS program changed your attitude or decision-making process when confronted with tense or difficult situations with parents or community members from a different ethic/social/cultural group?</i>
<p>6. Change in life-skills: tolerance/respect and conflict management/transformation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Are the participants tolerant towards others respecting the differences between people, their beliefs, opinions and behaviours without prejudices?</i> - <i>Do the participants respect and cherish and value themselves and the people around them?</i> - <i>Do the participants assess that they have improved their handling of personal/social conflicts during/after the OFFS?</i>

Immediate value: What was the experience of the project?

When participants were asked about their immediate experiences with the Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS) + SSP project, how it felt, and what stood out about their participation, the responses were overwhelmingly focused on the impact on the children. Among the 64 questionnaire respondents and 42 workshop participants, the majority highlighted the joy of being with children and witnessing their happiness as the most significant aspect of their involvement, noting that the enthusiasm and energy of children are invigorating and uplifting. Aliona Terzi, a social worker and OFFS leader, expressed that when reflecting on the project, the first thing that comes to mind is "The children, their big eyes, and desire to be active. In the project, every child feels important, contributing to a healthy society." Afterwards she added: "I became closer to the children - I go crazy with them! I forget that I am an adult and enter into their world - but with my knowledge of course."

In this way, the majority of coaches and leaders reflected that they experienced profound satisfaction from observing children's growth, improvement, and increased confidence. They described how "many children lack parental attention and warmth, but through the activities in the project, you discover children from a different point of view" (anonymous, OFFS-coach). Tatiana Panuta, an OFFS leader, stated, "Every experience is a lesson. Within the project, I learned to be more empathetic and patient with children. I learned to understand them."

Thus, engaging in fun activities with the children allowed them to communicate and interact in active and positive environments. Here, they learned to be more empathetic, patient, imaginative, and understanding, developing meaningful relationships with the children, which provided a sense of connection and community.

Furthermore, almost all respondents emphasized a range of emotions as their immediate experience and memory of participating in the project. A closer analysis of the data reveals a pattern: participants frequently described feelings of importance and usefulness. Many reported that the project gave them a “desire to prove oneself” and a newfound self-worth, enhancing their motivation and engagement. Additionally, emotions such as surprise and curiosity were commonly reported.

However, the most frequently expressed emotion was a sense of positive responsibility and leadership created by a newfound sense of duty and accountability towards the children and the community. One coach, involved for three years, stated, “I feel younger now.” Another participant, Ilona Dubrovina, a police officer and OFFS leader, remarked, “The experience was positive. There were a lot of new and different emotions working with children that motivated me and brightened up the gray days.”

These responses reflect the immediate value of the leaders' and coaches' participation. The strong emphasis on the joy of coaching children illustrates how this emotional connection fosters a sense of fulfillment and purpose for the coaches. It's the feeling of being brought back to an immediate sense of being together with other people, here and now. Engaging with children in a playful and supportive environment allowed coaches to create a mutual exchange of energy and happiness: “It was beneficial for me and the kids” (Veronica Rotari, OFFS-coach). Thus, it is through the two-way transformations of the coach and the child that immediate value is generated. These emotions are both boundary-breaking and heart-warming, creating a momentary sense of understanding and community, making the experience profoundly meaningful for the participants.

Potential value: What came out of their participation?

When participants were asked about their gains and learnings from the OFFS + SSP project, numerous participants emphasized acquiring new knowledge and skills in interacting with children and organizing small and large-scale events. Specifically, 71.4% of questionnaire respondents mentioned gaining new skills and knowledge in working with children, while 63.6% highlighted learning improvements in teamwork and 57.1% in personal development. Moreover, 72.2% noted an increased awareness of community issues since their involvement in OFFS, and 86.4% reported discussing these issues more frequently with other community members after participation. Julia, an OFFS coach, underscored, “This is crucial for my training; nowhere else will they teach me what they teach me in this project.” Elena Buga, a social worker and OFFS leader, added, “It was an unforgettable experience; I accumulated various knowledge, developed capabilities and skills, and interacted with specialists in the field.”

Overall, the participants emphasized dual learning experiences in the OFFS + SSP project. They learned practical skills in organizing and engaging children and fellow coaches and community members in both small and large-scale fun sport activities. Additionally, they report learning and practicing fundamental values such as fair play, teamwork, and mutual respect, realizing that “everyone's involvement matters” (anonymous, OFFS-coach). A significant number of participants told of their newfound understanding that “all children are equal, and sports should be inclusive regardless of gender, physical ability, or mental development,” (anonymous OFFS-leader). This aspect will be further explored in the subsequent section.

Secondly, a majority of respondents emphasized the meaningful relationships and friendships fostered with fellow leaders and coaches as significant outcomes of their participation. Notably, 100% of questionnaire respondents indicated that their involvement in OFFS + SSP had strengthened their bonds with friends they had made either within or outside the program. They further elaborated on how these connections evolved into productive collaborations, forming the basis for the detailed exploration in section three.

These learning outcomes highlights the potential value of participants' experiences, extending beyond the immediate value to encompass enduring relationships and insights gained from their engagement in a social learning environment, even if not immediately applied in practical terms. Beyond immediate emotional fulfilment, the potential value of the OFFS+SSP project extends to lasting impacts on participants' personal and professional lives. It includes the acquisition of new knowledge and skills in organizing activities, teamwork, and community engagement, increasing human capital for participants. Moreover, participants develop a heightened awareness of social issues and forge meaningful relationships with fellow leaders and coaches, which often evolve into collaborations that extend beyond the project itself. These connections and insights demonstrate an increase of social and cultural capital among the participants and contribute to a broader sense of personal development and community involvement among the participants.

Applied value: What did you do with the project?

In the OFFS+ SSP project, participants engage in educational seminars and subsequently undertake responsibilities to train OFFS-coaches and OFFS-coach assistants. Additionally, they organize, practice, and implement weekly fun sports activities, including six-day Open Fun Football Schools in their local communities. Consequently, it is unsurprising that when asked about their actions with the project (what did you do with the project?), 100% of participants reported that ‘they implemented it’ in their local communities. However, when questioned about changes in their practices and how these evolved over time, the majority of

participants reflected on different ideas, methods, or solutions, they developed during the implementation.

Some of the ideas, methods, and solutions mentioned by participants included the creation of sports teams for children with disabilities, which led to increased attention from stakeholders towards children with special needs. In fact, 21 leaders also focused on developing inclusive methods for children irrespective of their physical or mental development. For instance, Ilona Dubrovina, a police officer and OFFS-leader, reflected “By joint efforts, many ideas were implemented, for example: children from different categories were involved! There were children with disabilities, and there were also children from socially vulnerable families [where one or both parents are abroad]”.

Furthermore, several leaders reported developing and introducing new and engaging games and methods for working with children, collaborating with local coaches. They also devised strategies to organize more football events by mobilizing additional volunteers and securing access to sports fields and equipment through local stakeholders, details of which will be expanded upon in section three. Following these initiatives, OFFS coach Andrey noted an increase in participants signing up for local football clubs after their involvement in these events.

In terms of how their practice in sports, personal, and professional aspects evolved over time, participants noted substantial development. Petru Langa, an OFFS leader, remarked, "It has evolved enormously. I changed my attitude, I apply new methods in working with children." Veronica, an OFFS-leader, supported this by saying “I make it interesting and high quality. Today I develop children’s attention in lessons and hold competitions during breaks.” The participants reported becoming more confident and skilled over time, with several highlighting their ongoing commitment to implementing fun sport activities even after the project concluded.

This represents the applied value generated from the project, underscoring how leaders and coaches have continuously applied, practiced, adjusted, and integrated their learnings from the OFFS+SSP project into their practices.

Realized value: What difference does it make?

Realized value is achieved when the intended positive changes by the participants become a reality, even if not entirely, but in any significant improvement or outcome. Thus, when asked about the effects of their participation and what changes wouldn't have occurred without it, the majority of participants expressed a common theme. The realized value of their participation can be encapsulated in Elena Buga’s words: “In the future in professional practice, I will be a maker of change, I will have a positive and beneficial impact on children's

development, both physically and emotionally,” as she reflects as a social worker and leader. Denis, an OFFS leader, added “From the first days until the end, I did not realize the full depth and scale of this project. After several events, seeing the fire in the eyes of the children, I realized that all participants in the project were doing a great job - giving the children a lot of positive emotions. After all, it is by participating in the development of children that we can count on a kind younger generation. Even if few of the children won’t connect their lives with football, I can say with confidence that they will be people with a capital letter P.”

Their reflections underscore the profound impact the project had on Ilona and Denis, revealing a journey from initial scepticism to a deep appreciation for the transformative experiences shared with the children. It emphasizes that beyond the immediate skills or sports-related outcomes, the project fostered a sense of community, empathy, and the importance of nurturing the younger generation.

Surprisingly, a significant number of participants especially emphasized their personal responsibility in reshaping societal attitudes towards the inclusion of at-risk and vulnerable children in sports as a key effect of their participation. Reflecting this sentiment, Calion Ghenadie, a social worker and OFFS leader, remarked, “Children from socially vulnerable families would not have gotten involved in activities in the community if I didn’t make it happen.” Tatiana Panuta, an OFFS coach, added, “Comparing the first days of the project with the last, I can say that the children have changed radically in terms of acceptance, confidence, and the courage to be themselves.”

In addition, 95.5% of questionnaire participants stated that those involved in OFFS now respect, cherish, and value themselves and others, with only one person responding ‘to some extent’. Furthermore, 59.1% felt that the OFFS program contributed to fostering peaceful co-existence within their community, with 36.4% responding ‘to some extent’. Tatiana, an OFFS trainer, observed, “There is excitement in the city and the desire of children to study.”

In summary, the realized value for the participants was the creation of a positive environment for children that impacted the surrounding communities. This setting enabled children and coaches from diverse professions and backgrounds to develop both physically and emotionally. By learning to facilitate fun activities that enabled interaction and dialogue among coaches, children, and stakeholders, participants fostered a greater sense of understanding and community, making the experience profoundly meaningful for the involved: “We got new emotions and behaviour change in some children. I learned teamwork, respect for each other and that everyone's involvement matters!” (Alina, OFFS-coach).

Impact Indicator 2: Change in gender relations and gender perceptions

Indicator #2 measures change in gender relations and gender perceptions as experienced by the participants in Cross Cultures.

Objective 2 seeks to enhance **gender equality**, combat gender-based stereotypes, and foster female well-being and community participation by increasing and consolidating girls’ and women’s active participation in grassroots football and civil society at large.

Cross Cultures’ approach to gender equality builds on the premise that including girls and women in community level grassroots football can be a valuable tool in combatting gender-based stereotypes as well as fostering female well-being and community participation.

By prioritizing female participation in our activities, we thus enable girls and women with access to a domain that is still, by many, seen as a male domain. When we make girls and boys play football together, establish girl’s football teams, and recruit female coaches and volunteers in local communities, we do not only enhance the wellbeing and active community engagement of the participants, but also provide other girls and women (as well as boys and men) with alternative role models and opportunities.

Thus, part of impact indicator #2 measures the change in the perception of gender roles and equality, defined broadly as the perception of girls and women in the society. The current role of girls and women in the society as well as what the participants think the role of the girls and women should be in the future indicate the state of gender relations and gender equality in the community.

*NB: Part of objective 2 focus on women and girls active participation in grassroots football and civil society at large which is measured as part on Impact Indicator 1 and 3.

Proxies	Sample of questions
1. Current role and status of women in the community (what it is)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>How are the gender roles in your community? What should change?</i> - <i>Do women help solving community problems?</i> - <i>Do women have outlets for expressing needs and participating in decision making?</i> - <i>Does the current role of women cause conflict?</i> - <i>Since the OFFS program has completed, has it changed your (or the community you live in) view of gender-based stereotypes?</i>
2. Future role and status of women in the community (what is should be)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Should women be doing sports (professional or amateur)? Should women be playing football? Why/why not?</i> - <i>Should women help solve community problems?</i> - <i>What assets or barriers for advocating gender equality exist in your community?</i> - <i>Has the OFFS program changed your attitude towards gender equality?</i>

Immediate and potential value

Reviewing the data, the findings related to specific objective 2 were initially challenging to interpret. The value creation approach involves asking open-ended questions, such as “What did you get out of this experience?”, rather than focusing on specific outcomes related to specific thematical areas. Consequently, only 5 out of 42 participants commented directly on the project’s impact on enhancing gender equality. However, approximately 26 workshop participants (approx. 60%) described that their participation in the project involved learning and practicing equality more broadly. This included equality and inclusion across mental and physical capabilities, ethnic, social origin, religion or political beliefs, age, and gender. These

aspects were often discussed in connection to leading a "healthy life" or providing "the opportunity to express yourself" (anonymous OFFS-Leader).

Importantly, these responses emerged not from direct questions about equality, but from general discussions about their learning experiences. For example, an anonymous OFFS coach reflected, "Over time, everything evolved, increasing my experience and motivation to get involved in the promotion of equality." Tatiana Panuta, an OFFS leader, added, "I view my participation as a unique experience that brought happiness to children and promoted integration, acceptance, equality, and love among their peers."

Thus, the immediate value of the project in relation to specific objective 2 manifested in feelings of equality, inclusion, being understood, heard, and respected among leaders and coaches: "Everyone became equal during the activities." (anonymous OFFS-coach), underscoring the increase of social and cultural capital between the participants. Whereas the potential value was largely related to an intellectual learning about equality, as another anonymous participant highlighted, "I learned teamwork and respect for each other, and that everyone's involvement matters." Andrei Breguta, an OFFS leader, emphasized, "All children have equal rights, and sports have no gender or age." This demonstrates an increase in human and democratic capital for the participants.

Furthermore, participants described generating solutions, methods, or ideas as a result of their learning experiences, also generating potential value. Notably, several leaders and coaches have proposed initiatives such as the "inclusion of children with special needs and socially vulnerable families in outdoor activities organized locally," as highlighted by Calion Ghenadie, a social worker and OFFS coach and echoed by Andrei Breguta, an OFFS leader, "interacting with children and coaches, protecting children through gender equality, and including children with special educational needs in recreational and sports activities." Several OFFS-leaders also highlighted involving Ukrainian refugee children in the activities for the first time. When asked about the significance of these initiatives, an anonymous coach commented "By involving children with health or other problems, we had the goal that we were equal".

Interestingly, when specifically asked about their learning regarding gender equality, questionnaire participants' responses focused more directly on issues such as women's and girls' equal access to sport: "Girls are not worse than boys at handling the ball"², "Just like boys, girls have opportunities to develop in sports, especially football.", "women can be even better coaches.", and "We need to be equal. Everyone is equal regardless of gender to develop

² All questionnaire participants are anonymous OFFS-leaders or coaches

physical qualities. Both boys and girls should have their opinions and ideas equally respected, and their participation should be equal.”

Thus, the concept of equality operated on two distinct levels within the project. When directly questioned, participants reflect on equality in terms of representation within the realm of football. They emphasize the importance of equal opportunities for girls and boys, asserting that both genders should have their voices respected and their participation valued equally.

Conversely, when approached more broadly, participants delve into the internalized values of equality that they and the children have developed through their involvement in the project. Beyond fun sport, they discuss how the experience has nurtured a culture of equality across various dimensions, including mental and physical capabilities, ethnicity, social background, religion, and gender. In academia, this distinction is often framed as the difference between equality and equity.

Applied and realized value:

Because of these realizations, several OFFS leaders have described efforts to improve their practice based on what they had learned. Specifically, this involved focusing on including girls and children with special needs in activities or, in some cases, creating activities exclusively for these groups. One anonymous OFFS leader shared, “This project is currently one of the most requested to continue in our high school. We promoted this project with all possible forces in the community, and it is now known as a successful and expected one among the girls.”

Interestingly, when discussing these additional initiatives, OFFS leaders mentioned other efforts, such as teaching children about environmental conservation, sorting garbage, and planting trees around the football pitch, and they expressed a desire to expand such activities. One leader noted, “Children learned to work in teams, to be responsible for the waste they produce, and how they can contribute to the ecology of the environment and take care of their health!” Another added, “Both children, along with their teachers and parents, planted trees together, and children were encouraged to practice sports and lead a healthy lifestyle.”

Applied value is generated through these practices and evolvments because the leaders and coaches actively practice the values of equality and equity both through securing representation at their activities and organizing special activities for certain categories of children but also by creating an equal and inclusive environment at the activities. This is underscored by the fact that the value of equality extended beyond human-to-human interaction, by promoting treating the environment with equal respect and protection. This was, again, promoted by the volunteers as part of what it means to lead a healthy life.

Thus, when asked about the effects of their participation in relation to specific objective 2, several OFFS-leaders and coaches highlighted the impact of their focus on equality. Some examples are:

“I am looked at differently among my colleagues. I am an authority among the kids because we form teams for a common goal: I have met wonderful people who, regardless of age and gender, want a change for the younger generation. I have become much more interested in such projects because I see that children enjoy playing football, especially little girls for whom the subject of football was previously a taboo,” shared an anonymous coach.

“Yes, over time we have changed the attitudes and opinions of society towards the involvement of (vulnerable) children in sport,” remarked Ivanna Cafes, a social worker and OFFS-leader.

“I see children with disabilities differently now,” mentioned an anonymous OFFS-coach.

This is further supported by questionnaire participants, where 67% answered that since the OFFS program, their own or their community's view of gender-based stereotypes had changed.

While Cross Cultures and FMF have played a significant role in emphasizing the importance of equality and contributing to the creation of ideas and methods for inclusion and initiatives for minority groups, the pivotal aspect lies in the participants' perception that it is their own initiatives and leadership that have driven these changes. This self-perceived agency and ownership represent the significant realized value of their participation.

Impact Indicator 3: Change in level of child protection and cross-sector collaboration

Indicator #3 measures change in level of child protection as an outcome of the OFFS volunteers creating a safe and child friendly space that builds on a common value and rights-based strategy (“safeguarding code of conducts”), that has been developed and operationalised bottom up by the volunteers in the programme.

To enhance child protection for the most vulnerable groups of children, the programme puts children’s rights, development and joy at the forefront starting from the Open Fun Football Schools to life-skill schemes and the empowerment of the young voluntary leaders and coaches. Technically, indicator #3 measures change in the perception and awareness of, and activity level on, child protection from the OFFS volunteers’ point of view.

Cross Cultures assumes that efficient child protection measures are not a matter for the police, the schoolteachers or the football coach alone. The earlier risk behaviour is spotted and addressed, the better the chances are to prevent the situation from taking a wrong turn. In order to do this, Cross Cultures believe that a cross-sectorial network is needed. Such a network includes cooperation between amongst other public schools, police, social services, and sports clubs. SSP is thus about building a governance structure in local communities that allows the relevant stakeholders to meet and share perspectives and to agree on joint actions, coordinated cross sector efforts and solutions. It requires coordinated and joint efforts by key personnel from the public sectors and the civil society, i.e. from the stakeholders who are in daily contact with children, youth, and their families.

Furthermore, Cross Cultures assumes that co-creating a common value- and right-based approach together with the young volunteer leaders and coaches based on a common view on the terms "Child view", "Child Rights" and "Child pledges" (codes of conducts), the leaders and coaches take personal ownership of the terms and has an ethical duty to

advocate and adhere to them in all their communication and interaction with the children on-side and out-side the football pitch as well as in their interaction with all stakeholders (parents, schools, municipal authorities etc.).

Proxies	Sample of questions
1. Presence of child protection initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you currently engaged in child protection activities outside of OFFS? - Are you satisfied with the level of child protection currently undertaken by other members in your community?
2. Engagement in productive child protection activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are some of the productive behaviours undertaken? Examples? Why would you engage? - Cost/benefit to the individual and the community when engaging in the activities? - Do you think it is important to work with child protection within your community? - Do you think there are any barriers for child protection within your community?
3. Cross-sector collaboration: teamwork/responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are the SSP participants good at working in teams, and is it their general perception that they will achieve their objectives better through everyone's collaboration and involvement? - Do the participants take responsibility to make the group function? - Do the participants listen and care for their team mates? - Since OFFS, has your view on productive child protection activities changed?

Following section one, which highlighted how the majority of participants emphasized creating meaningful relationships and friendships that evolved into productive collaborations, this section delves into the networks of these relationships and collaborations established during the project. The networks were systematically mapped out during an extensive workshop at the lessons learned seminar in December by 42 OFFS-leaders from 13 districts, effectively forming 13 activity clusters.

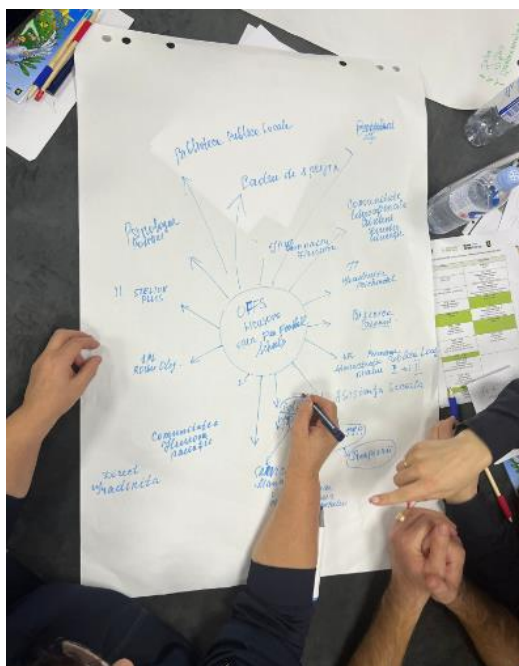
The table below illustrates the diverse community actors who helped facilitate the activities by providing resources, outside of Cross Cultures, FMF, OFFS-leaders, coaches, and participating children. It's worth noting again that OFFS-leaders and coaches encompass volunteers from the sports and education sectors, social workers, and community police. The list of actors and their roles were quite extensive and as such they have been summarized in overall categories:

Actor	Type of support
Local council	Financed the procurement and installation of container-type changing rooms for local teams at the football field.

Local sponsors; a bakery, supermarkets, business enterprises etc. (all regions)	Water, pastries and buns, juice, fruit, souvenirs, keychains etc.
Local Public Authority (38 LPA's incl. city halls, local councils, mayors office)	Access to facilities, transport, equipment, small funds
Local City Hall	Access to facilities, transport, equipment, small funds
The Mayors office	Prizes and musical acts for final OFFS
Economic agents (3 regions)	Smaller financial contributions
Colleagues from other police departments	Knowledge and help
Gymnasium, kindergartens, sport schools, lyceums (minimum 170 institutions)	Equipment and participants
Local organisations and NGO's	Funds, knowledge, Children with disabilities, children from vulnerable families
Parents and grandparents	Transport, snacks, help at activities
Directorate of social assistance and family protection	Materials and leaflets
Probation office	Children registered with the police, Probation officers and district inspectors.
UE ATU mobile center, chief engineer	brushes, keychains, equipment etc.
Department of sport and culture	Access to facilities

When asked how they came to interact with these community actors, participants described a range of methods: written requests, arranged meetings, sending applications, direct calls, and receiving invitations from the actors themselves. These initiatives were prompted by post-activity discussions among OFFS leaders, coaches, and assistants, where they assessed each session's outcomes and identified areas for improvement. Reflecting on this process, participants noted how the activities evolved to become more effective and accessible over time. For instance, Julia, an OFFS coach, remarked, "Over time, the activity has become not only effective but also accessible to many; it became more fun." Similarly, Calion Ghenadie, a social worker and OFFS leader, observed, "During this period, each member came up with ideas to improve the activity, and the young people from the locality also intervened.". These methods of implementation and reflection signify an increase in economic and social capital not just between the coaches but throughout the networks.

Pictures from the workshop:



Photos: Patrick Gbouable, Lessons Learned seminar 2023

The value of networks:

When reflecting on what they gained from the experience and what they learned, several leaders emphasized how collaboration made the activities possible, often expressing surprise at how easy implementing the activities then became. Tatiana Panuta, an OFFS-coach, remarked, “I learned how partnerships work together, and how they can work together to make something beautiful. Participation in this project is entirely due to collaboration, everyone with what they can, from small snacks to equipment and money, all and all contributed to achieving the goal.” Petru Langa, an OFFS-leader, shared, “I learned that resources can be easily accessed if they are directed in the best interests of the child. In this context, I became more insistent and eager to implement projects for children.” Alina Ciornii, a senior police officer and OFFS-leader, added, “I learned that it is easier to carry out an activity where several partners, sponsors, and employees from different fields are involved.”

One reason the volunteers express surprise and delight at how 'easy' obtaining support and implementing activities became after they started collaborating with different actors can be explained through actor-network theory (ANT). Within these organic networks, various forms of capital and exchanges emerge, benefiting both the individual and the network. The human, democratic, cultural, social, and economic capital of the individual enriches the network, while the network, in turn, supports the individual's development. Thus, according to ANT, social networks effectively create diverse forms of capital when (a) individuals become active

participants in heterogeneous, cross-cultural social networks, and (b) these networks reciprocally influence the individuals' lives. This sentiment is well captured in the following quote:

“Of course, initially, when I just started participating in the project, I didn’t think about such a scale... and then, seeing the interest of all the instructors, leaders, sports, police, the readiness of other departments and organizations to provide assistance and cooperation in the necessary assistance or in conducting lectures on their lines of work for children, my motivation increased, I wanted to spend more time on the field with children, realizing that by doing so we bring them joy, and also instil a love for sports! We are all doing a common good thing for our future youth! ” Ilona Dubrovina, police and OFFS-leader.

In addition, several other police officers emphasized how they learned to interact with children. One noted, "I learned how to behave correctly with a child, how to capture his attention, how to convey certain information to him, in general, how to interact with a child correctly." Ilona Dubrovina, Police officer, further added: "For me, the most important thing is contact with the child, a cheerful atmosphere is created which the child is relaxed, happy and can share or talk about his difficulties at school, family etc. this project shows children that the police are always there, always ready to listen, help and come to the rescue. I am also pleased to know that perhaps some child was able to be warned or saved from harm by telling him the basic rules of personal safety and traffic rules." Following this, they suggested adding topics like personal safety in recreation areas (swimming pools, seas, lakes) to the main subjects of traffic rules, bullying, and domestic violence. These valuable ideas emerged as a part of the community police participation in the project and are a testament to their evolving practices as a result of their engagement. These learnings and ideas furthermore reflect the intersecting immediate, potential, and orienting values generated through the project in relation to specific objective 3.

Applied, strategic and realized value:

When asked how they applied their learning in the project and their networks, participants shared several impactful outcomes. Mikhail Tingul, School President and OFFS leader stated, "The cooperation turned out to be fruitful; the number of teams and projects in which we were able to take part increased." Ilona Dubrovina, a police OFFS-leader, highlighted "The prospect of preventing safety with children immediately stands out. It is possible to convey more information to them, emphasize certain topics, and, if necessary, identify a socially vulnerable child and provide necessary assistance accordingly."

One leader highlighted a notable aspect of their involvement, stating, "I liked that coaches were involved in writing notification acts in cases of neglect, violence, etc." . This refers to how, at the OFFS educational seminars, leaders and coaches are tasked to collaboratively define and develop a child view, child rights, and child pledges to function as codes of conduct for their OFFS. They are thought in the UN convention of child rights and subsequently are tested in UEFA's child safeguarding. The participant reflects in the quote how this practice became especially useful during activities when coaches assisted social workers in writing notification acts. These actions demonstrate how the immediate and potential value generated at seminars can be transformed into practical value through the efforts of leaders and coaches. This transformation is driven by Cross Cultures' child-centered approach, emphasis on bottom-up child safeguarding measures in sports, and initiatives to extend these protections beyond the football field in collaboration with social services.

When asked how their relationships with stakeholders evolved, most participants reflected on how their connections became closer and more productive. Veronica Rotari, an OFFS leader, noted, "We gained an exchange of experience; we started to collaborate more intensively with children and their parents. I started to involve them in other activities related to educating them for the benefit of the community and themselves." This applied value was echoed by others, with some even becoming "very close and good friends."

Diving deeper, some leaders elaborated that 'closer collaboration' meant more than just material support; it also involved enhanced problem-solving relationships. Alexander, an OFFS leader, said, "Since all parties were willing to meet each other halfway and helped to solve any problems, relations between the state authorities have improved." Andrey, another OFFS leader, added, "We began to share knowledge with each other." And Veronica Rotari mentioned, "We have drawn up cooperation agreements." These reflections emphasise the substantial strategic value generated through the dynamic networks formed through the project.

The effect of these closer collaborations was the establishment of "more open, trusting relationships" and increased dialogue. Smirnova Olga, a social worker and OFFS leader, shared, "Communication has increased and so has discussions of new projects." Several regions reported continuing collaboration after the project's conclusion, maintaining the school-sport-police structure. For example, Mikhail Tingul, school president and OFFS-leader said that "“We are introducing this project and methods of implementation into every educational institution in the region”.

As a result, several police officers and OFFS leaders described how their credibility and trust within the local community increased. Alina, a police officer, noted, "Yes, of course, many

more children recognize me on the street and cheerfully greet me!" They also described how local leadership became more attentive, thereby strengthening good governance practices and enhancing dialogue between civil society, citizens and national authorities. These reflections significantly demonstrate that promoting a conducive environment for good governance, democratic institutions, and social cohesion and stability is not something that can be achieved by states and authorities alone, top-down. It is something that civil society practices through dialogue and interaction with each other and the public sector, creating significant, realized value, bottom-up.

Concluding remarks: From individual stories of change to societal transformation

In the beginning of this report, we asked: How have the children's and volunteers' perceptions and attitudes changed as a result of their participation? To what extent has the involvement of local police influenced community trust and safety? How do participants and stakeholders perceive the overall impact of the initiative on their communities? And finally: In what ways has the initiative contributed to long-term community resilience and sustainability?

As we have explored these questions, it has become clear that the most significant impacts of the OFFS initiative extend far beyond the playing fields, reaching into the fabric of community life. Until now, we've heard many stories of how the project has impacted the participants' lives. Thus, this section aims to summarize the findings from the report and analyse what these individual stories of transformation and change collectively mean for the initiative's broader impact.

In exploring whether the project has impacted the broader society, participants' responses revealed two overarching themes of change:

1. The effects of Open Fun Football

Following the findings presented in impact sections 1 and 2, a majority of OFFS leaders and coaches emphasized how the project has influenced broader society. One key impact has been promoting the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle, particularly among girls, women, and minority children. Veronica Rotari, an OFFS leader, highlighted this by saying, "Definitely yes [it has affected the culture of broader society]. They have become more aware of the role of a healthy lifestyle, understanding that football is not about kicking the ball, but about collaborating, cooperating, observing, thinking, being aware." Another OFFS coach, also named Veronica, agreed, "Yes, because the cultural life has become brighter and richer. Parents began to respect and involve their children in sports."

Others noted the project's role in changing societal views on girls' football and the abilities of children with disabilities. Ivanna Cafeji, a social worker and OFFS-leader, shared, "Yes. Since children with disabilities were included in the project, people saw what these children can do, that they also have talents and abilities, and it is important to pay attention to them and support them." Andriana Cojocar, OFFS-coach, added, "Yes, it had a positive impact, and we changed the gender stereotypes!"

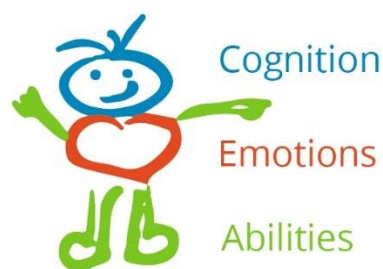
Participants also emphasized the project's ability to promote teamwork, unity, and collaboration. Some examples include: "This project cultivated team spirit and organization in society." (anonymous, OFFS-coach), "Yes, society has become more united." (Diana Punga, OFFS-leader), "We have become more solidary." (Tamera Punga, OFFS-coach), and "I strongly believe that yes, because people have begun to understand that in their locality, work is done, and what is done, is done for the people. Citizens and authorities became more attentive to the activities and managed to understand the message during the events. I understood this after seeing how many friendships were created between children, despite gender, social status, or even health." (Panuta Tatiana, OFFS-coach).

Understanding why these leaders and coaches have reported gaining new insights from Open Fun Football Schools and believe it has influenced broader culture, requires a look at Cross Cultures' approach to children's football. Cross Cultures moves beyond traditional "performance-focused" football, which emphasizes skill development, power, and competitiveness. Instead, our approach centres on "fun football" and employs a specific learning method known as "head-heart-legs" This approach aims to cultivate a unique sense of rhythm, wholeness, and togetherness among participants.

At its core, our method empowers children, OFFS leaders, and coaches through passion, enjoyment, and playfulness. It provides a safe space for children to engage in what they do best: play, form friendships, and learn. Importantly, it ensures that every activity is meaningful, engaging, and motivating for both children and adults alike.

Furthermore, our "Head-Heart-Action" approach, inspired by protreptical (philosophical) coaching methods, takes a comprehensive view of motivation. It integrates knowledge, passion, and desire into practical tools for fostering positive change and action within the community. In our fun football sessions, we strive to challenge participants' cognition (head), emotions (heart), and physical abilities (legs) concurrently. This three-dimensional approach aims to stimulate multiple brain centres, enriching the learning experience of Open Fun Football.

Thus, the fun football philosophy of Cross Cultures is distinctively centred on creating a nurturing, safe, and enjoyable environment for children. It emphasizes the role of sports as a fundamental component of life, contributing to personal growth and community cohesion.



Furthermore, all Open Fun Football Schools are based on a “twin city approach,” ensuring that children and youths participate in fun football activities in mixed groups. These groups include peers from diverse social backgrounds and communities, promoting integration and understanding. For a more detailed description of our fun football philosophy, please refer to the annex.

This approach represents a fundamentally different perspective on sports compared to traditional models in Moldova, positioning it as integral to leading a healthy lifestyle. Thus, participants have not only experienced personal and emotional growth but have also witnessed broader societal change through the active involvement of parents, municipalities, stakeholders, and organizations. This collective engagement has shifted societal norms, as a result of the specific fun football philosophy. It promotes a culture where mutual respect, collaboration, and community well-being take precedence over competition, marking a significant cultural shift towards collective community engagement and social unity.

The importance of these effects cannot be understated, particularly in the current context of Moldova. Amidst aspirations to join the EU and protests by Russian minorities opposing this move, Moldova's security situation remains tense due to Russia's involvement in Eastern Ukraine and its interests in Transnistria and Gagauzia. Preventing the spread of conflict from Ukraine to Moldova is crucial. Supporting initiatives that promotes peace, stability, social integration, cohesion, and coexistence becomes essential in this context. These initiatives, like the Open Fun Football Schools, not only contribute to physical and emotional well-being but also foster a unified community ethos that transcends ethnic and geopolitical divisions, promoting a shared vision of a peaceful and inclusive future for Moldova.

2. The effects of cross-sector collaboration

Another significant theme in the participants' responses regarding the project's impact on broader societal culture relates to the effects of cross-sector collaboration. The involvement of police officers as OFFS leaders and coaches has been particularly highlighted:

Tarakiiva, a police officer and OFFS leader, emphasized, “Yes, more children and parents recognize the role of police officers.” An anonymous police officer and OFFS coach noted,

“Very much, increasing credibility and trust levels.” Alina, another police officer, shared, "Yes, of course, many more children recognize me on the street and cheerfully greet me!"

Thus, integrating local police officers into the project has significantly bolstered community trust and safety. The increased visibility and positive interactions between police officers and community members, especially children, have contributed to a safer and more trusting environment. This shift has led to a broader societal change, transforming perceptions of police from enforcers to protectors and allies in the community.

Additionally, participants highlighted that the project’s impact on broader society stems from its inclusive nature, involving diverse sectors of the community: “it was an activity that involved the entire community” (anonymous, OFFS-coach) and “involved [people] from practically all spheres of citizens” (Alina Ciornîi, Senior Police officer and OFFS-coach).

Thus, the belief among OFFS leaders and coaches that the project has influenced broader society through cross-sector collaboration is grounded in Cross Cultures' concept of "The Children's Grassroots Football Universe." Within this framework, stakeholders function like planets revolving around children, each fulfilling specific roles within a larger system:



In Cross Cultures activities, the child is always at the centre, with a deliberate effort to involve all stakeholders in the Children’s Grassroots Football Universe. Our approach ensures that every stakeholder plays a crucial role, akin to planets orbiting around the sun. This civil society model is underscored by strategies and workshops developed for each stakeholder group, establishing a sustainable platform where everyone contributes meaningfully.

As detailed in impact section 3, the 13 activity clusters in Moldova have formed extensive networks involving diverse stakeholders. Thus, through local community-based grassroots football initiatives, the project has engaged and build the capacity of children, women, youth, parents and practitioners from the sports, schools, social service, and police sectors around the shared interest of children's wellbeing. In doing so, the action facilitates a SSP network that initiates dialogue where practitioners from different disciplines share their experiences, concerns and diverse perspectives and jointly determine the best approaches to tackle specific social issues and on building more resilient, fair, and inclusive societies on all levels,

Consequently, the initiative has contributed to long-term community resilience and sustainability by fostering robust, supportive networks that transcend the project's immediate scope. These networks facilitate ongoing collaboration and problem-solving, ensuring that the project's benefits are sustained over time. Participants consistently emphasize how the project unites diverse sectors, promoting inclusive child protection measures, and nurturing open, trusting relationships. Such collaboration is crucial for collectively addressing future challenges, safeguarding children's well-being, and upholding principles of good governance, human rights, equality, and diversity in Moldova.

Challenges and learnings

While the project has achieved significant impact and fostered positive change, it has also encountered various challenges and provided invaluable lessons.

Following the discussion above regarding the impact of cross-sector collaboration, one notable challenge is the necessity of sustaining partnerships beyond the football sphere and integrating them more deeply into civil society. Local SSP-teams, trained in the Open Fun Football Philosophy, have successfully organized activities uniting children and youth across societal divides the last three years. This has strengthened collaboration among sports clubs, CSOs, municipal authorities, schools, social services, and police, establishing a grassroots framework understood and valued by all participants.

Thus, to ensure a sustainable governance structures and broaden the impact further beyond sports, it is essential to empower local SSP teams to develop independent action plans tailored to community needs. Regular meetings at local, regional, and national levels are critical to increasing awareness and commitment to network-based SSP initiatives among public authorities, CSOs, and citizens, laying the foundation for long-term project success outside the sports sphere.

Secondly, despite successfully promoting equality across various categories, as showed in impact section 2, the project has revealed challenges in addressing broader societal issues, particularly concerning gender equality. While the project has engaged a significant number of girls under 12, fewer than 2,000 girls are currently members of football clubs or schools. This underscores the need for a strengthened approach to support sustained participation and development opportunities for girls in football.

Additionally, participants emphasize the importance of increasing parental involvement and are advocating for the inclusion of psychologists in the project, particularly in supporting (Ukrainian) refugee children. Some stakeholders also highlight the need for expanded environmental education activities and improvements in facilities, such as better equipment for music and the provision of incentives and prizes for participating children.

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Annexes

- Annex 1: SIDA project application 2021
- Annex 2: Social concepts
- Annex 3: How to track community changes effected by OFFS
- Annex 4: Cross Cultures Fun Football Philosophy