



Annual report 2024
Spirit of Football e.V.



Spirit of Football: Our year in 2024

2024 was a year marked by both challenge and inspiration. As political winds across Thuringia, Germany, and beyond shifted further to the right, and as discrimination, racism, and social division became more visible - on streets, in schools, and even on football pitches - the work of Spirit of Football felt more vital than ever.

In the face of these developments, I am deeply convinced of the power and importance of our work. What gives me hope is the remarkable team I have the privilege to work with - creative, compassionate, and committed individuals who, through 19 diverse projects, reached more than 6,000 people in 2024. From children as young as 4 to seniors over 70, across genders, backgrounds, and abilities, we brought people together through the unifying languages of sport and the arts. Our impact in 2024 was also made possible thanks to the incredible support of our funders and partners - from local to national government institutions, foundations, companies, and private donors. We're also deeply grateful for the collaboration with teachers, social workers, university academics and students, volunteers in football clubs, and dedicated individuals from football associations, social organizations, and NGOs. Together, they form the backbone of a growing community of changemakers working for a more inclusive, resilient, and fair society.

Through formal and non-formal education, we addressed crucial topics like democracy, FairPlay, inclusion, gender equity, anti-discrimination, integration, and sustainability. Our workshops, trainings, cultural activities, and football sessions became safe spaces of learning and shared humanity. Now, more than ever, our society needs stories of cooperation, empathy, and joy. And that's what our projects did in 2024 - building bonds, sparking dialogue, and spreading a little more love in a world that too often leans toward fear and hate. This report celebrates those moments, the people who made them possible, and the impact we created together.

Andrew Aris
President, Spirit of Football e.V.



Overview:

In 2024, Spirit of Football (SoF) successfully implemented 19 diverse social-impact projects in Germany, reaching over 6,000 people, including children, youth, adults, families, people with disabilities, migrants, refugees, and people in rural areas.

At a Glance:

- 19 Projects focused on inclusion, integration, education, empowerment, and sustainability.
- 6,000+ people reached across various ages (children to seniors), genders, and backgrounds.
- Included participants from countries throughout the world, including many with refugee or migration experiences.
- Focused on other vulnerable and underrepresented groups: people with intellectual disabilities, girls and women, first-time voters, schoolchildren, and residents of high-rise social housing areas.

Impact:

- Strengthened democratic awareness, mental well-being, and resilience through creative, cultural, and sport-based education.
- Created safe, inclusive spaces that inspired cross-cultural exchange, reduced stigma, and encouraged active participation in society.
- Developed strong local and international partnerships and networks, including with schools, football clubs, government ministries, foundations and other NGOs.
- Innovative formats combined sport, art, environment, and civic engagement (e.g. "Future Ball" sustainability tour, shadow theatre, inclusive EURO 2024 events).

Contents:

1. FairPlay, Fair Vote: Democracy education through workshops, political engagement, and FairPlay football for first-time voters.
2. Football for Good in Berlin: International networking and workshop delivery on sustainability and inclusion during EURO 2024 with Common Goal.
3. Sport for Women: Free weekly sports activities (e.g., yoga, pilates) for women with childcare, supporting integration and mental well-being.
4. Futsal on Wednesday's: Weekly inclusive football sessions bringing together people of all backgrounds in Erfurt.
5. Future Ball – Football and Education for Sustainability Nationwide sustainability tour during EURO 2024 combining football, education, and environmental action.
6. GPS – Girls Power Sustainability Workshops empowering girls and women through football, leadership, and social inclusion.
7. Cossack Fun: A day of sport and cultural activities for Ukrainian children to reconnect with their heritage and identity.
8. Low-Threshold Leisure Activities for Children in KoWo Social Housing Estates: Creative and sports-based activities in KoWo social housing areas of Erfurt.
9. Art Course for Ukrainian Children: Weekly art workshops for Ukrainian refugee children focused on emotional expression and trauma recovery.
10. Melexis vs. XFAB Charity Match: Corporate charity football match raising funds and awareness for inclusive football
11. S.U.N. – Sport Unites Neighbourhoods: Art, sport, and dance projects with schools and youth centers in Southeast Erfurt, promoting FairPlay and creativity
12. Shadow Theatre: Inclusive creative project for adults with and without disabilities using light, storytelling, and performance
13. University of Erfurt Seminars: Hands-on civic engagement opportunities for university students through SoF-led projects.
14. Unified Football: Regular football training and tournaments for people with and without intellectual disabilities across multiple cities in Thuringia.
15. Unified Viewing: Inclusive EURO 2024 public viewing events combining football, food, and community-building.
16. VAR (Value-Based Anti-Discrimination Referees): Workshops for referees focused on anti-discrimination and handling racism in football.
17. World Children's Day: Street soccer, balloon art, and teamwork activities as part of the "Fête du Papillon" in celebration of World Children's Day.
18. WSD – School Projects in Rural Thuringia: Education for sustainable development, democracy, and social cohesion in rural schools across the region.
19. Southeast Erfurt Cultural Projects: Nature-based creative holiday programs for children connecting art, environment, and self-awareness.

1. Fair Play, Fair Vote

Project lead:

Iris Albulet, Benny Linse, Jakob Grünewald

Funders:

- Self-funded, supported by the WSD Program of the Nord-Süd-Brücken Foundation

Partners:

- Thuringian State Parliament,
- Bodo Ramelow - Prime Minister of Thüringia / Thuringian State Chancellery,
- Carsten Schneider, Members of the German Parliament,
- MEKS School,
- Lindenberg High School,
- Emil-Petri School

Project description:

"Fair Play, Fair Vote" is an educational initiative launched in the lead-up to the 2024 Thuringian state elections. The aim was to introduce young people - particularly students of voting age - to democratic processes through interactive and hands-on methods. Participants learned about the diversity of the political landscape in Thuringia and Germany through workshops and a visit to the state parliament. They developed an understanding of the importance of democracy and were encouraged to inform themselves about politics and to actively participate in elections. University students were involved in developing the methods to ensure the project's approach was youth-appropriate and impactful. On the first workshop day, the political party landscape of Thuringia was explored at school. Students examined the parties' platforms and presented them to each other. On the second day, students visited the Thuringian Parliament, where they had the opportunity to personally engage with politicians and share what matters to young people in Thuringia. Later, they participated in role-play simulations in the plenary hall, stepping into the shoes of elected representatives.

The program also included a Fair Play football match.

Feedback from both the students and the politicians showed great appreciation for the exchange and the innovative nature of the project. Many students came away with a deeper understanding of democracy and the importance of voting.

Facts:

In 2024, about 150 people took part, including three school classes, teachers, politicians, media representatives, and Spirit of Football team members. Approximately 70% of the participants were female.

Impact:

"Fair Play, Fair Vote" had a lasting impact on the political awareness and democratic participation of young people. Through interactive workshops and practical methods - such as direct dialogue with politicians and the parliamentary role-play simulation - their understanding of democratic processes was strengthened.

Students actively engaged with political topics, developed a deeper appreciation for the diversity of political parties, and experienced how decisions are made in parliament. The blend of education and sport (Fair Play football) also encouraged teamwork and respect. Many participants reported an increased motivation to stay politically informed and to participate in elections.

Highlight:

A key highlight was the involvement of Thuringia's then Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow, who supported the project and joined the third session with a class from the MEKS School. He participated in an exclusive Q&A session and even shared lunch with the students. Many of the young people were thrilled and eagerly engaged in conversations with him.

2. Football for Good in Berlin

Project lead:

Andrew Aris & Joaquin Nanez

Partner:

- Common Goal Network

Project description:

During the EURO 2024 tournament, there was an opportunity in Berlin to connect with both new and long-time partners from around the world to discuss the current state and future of the Football for Good (FfG) movement. Common Goal co-hosted two key events:

- The Berlin Forum (July 8–10)
- The Football for Sustainability Summit (July 11–12)

These events offered excellent opportunities for networking, project development, and the delivery of two parallel workshops. One of the workshops - co-hosted by Spirit of Football and our partner Football Ecology France (FEF) - focused on engaging Football for Good partners in meaningful conversations about climate change, with the shared vision of developing and distributing climate protection resources across the entire Common Goal football community. The second workshop, held in collaboration with Special Olympics Germany, showcased best-practice examples from Spirit of Football's Unified Football project (which brings together people with and without intellectual disabilities). The workshop concluded with powerful discussions - one participant from Ghana spoke movingly about the social stigma faced by children with intellectual disabilities in parts of Africa and shared a desire to bring Unified Football to Ghana in the future.

Facts:

- Over 100 Football for Good practitioners from around the world attended
- 2 Spirit of Football-led workshops, each with 20 participants
- Over 100 signatures collected on the Future Ball by members of the Common Goal and Football for Good community

Impact:

The Football for Good sector is increasingly affected by social and political upheavals and resource limitations. This gathering brought the global community together, highlighted best practices, and inspired forward-looking collaboration.

A direct impact for Spirit of Football was the creation and testing of two new workshops:

1. *On climate action*
2. *On inclusion*

In the inclusion-focused workshop, two Unified Football participants with intellectual disabilities - Nico and Omar. They shared their experiences and helped inspire others in the FfG community to engage with Unified Football.

Highlight:

Nico (highlight19) and Omar (20) have been part of Spirit's Unified Football group for over two years. Both have intellectual disabilities. They gained confidence and independence by traveling for the first time on their own from Erfurt to Berlin to take part. They took part in the workshop and were met with curiosity and warmth. SoF felt it was essential that these two young men - the very people at the heart of inclusion work - were present, in person, and fully involved. It was a huge step forward for both of them, and we are incredibly proud.

3. Sport for Women

Project lead:

Oksana Rak

Funder:

- Thuringian State Sports Association (LSB) through the Integration through Sport (IdS) program: €920.00

Partner:

- Erfurt Sports Administration

Project description:

An open, free offer by women (including female students from the University of Erfurt) for women. The program includes Pilates classes, yoga, fitness, stretching, and more. Importantly, childcare is provided, so that mothers can take time for themselves while knowing their children are being looked after.

Facts:

- 12–15 women regularly participate
- 6–8 children, aged between 5 and 45 years

Impact:

The project supports: Communication development, integration, stress reduction & physical activity leading to good health and well being. It provides a safe space for women to connect, relax, and take care of their health and well-being while building a sense of community.

Highlight:

The Svyatik family - a mother and her two daughters - came to Germany from Ukraine two and a half years ago and regularly attended the training sessions. Due to health reasons, the mother is no longer able to participate in the sessions herself - but her daughters, Mascha and Alina, continue to attend. They feel at home and come to take part in familiar routines in a trusted & safe environment.

4. Futsal on Wednesdays

Project lead:

Oksana Rak, Mohamed Othman, Benny Linse, Iris Albulet, Joaquin Nanez

Funder:

- Thuringian Sports Federation (Integration Through Sport)

Partners:

- Erfurt Sports Administration

Project description:

The integration football project “Futsal on Wednesdays” is an ongoing initiative by SoF since 2017 in Erfurt. It brings together people from different cultures, life situations, and age groups through the universal language of football.

The aim of the project is to create opportunities for encounters, break down barriers, and promote integration through sport. Every Wednesday, football enthusiasts meet on a public pitch in Erfurt to play together in a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere. Participants make up a diverse group: migrants, refugees, locals, students, and other interested individuals aged 12 to 50. The project deliberately emphasizes mixed teams, regardless of gender, background, or skill level. This approach strengthens team spirit, promotes intercultural exchange, and helps overcome prejudices.

For many participants, the project is more than just an opportunity to play sports—it becomes a bridge into everyday life: Friendships are formed, networks grow, and integration becomes tangible. The project shows how a simple ball can connect a diverse community.

Facts:

- Total group: 150 people, with around 30 new participants joining in 2024
- Each session includes 30 to 50 participants
- Participants: men and women aged 12 to 50

Impact:

The project offers participants a chance to be active, relieve stress, and experience joy through sport. It provides a safe and inclusive space where people - whether newly arrived or long-settled in Germany - feel accepted, regardless of nationality.

With a focus on Fair Play and team spirit, the project fosters not only physical fitness, but also self-confidence and social skills. It helps build friendships and support networks that extend far beyond the football pitch, making day-to-day integration easier.

Highlight:

The SoF team is especially happy to witness how players support each other and self-regulate games, resolving fouls and similar situations with fairness and respect. The most touching moments are when participants thank the SoF Team after training and express genuine appreciation. We often run into players later in town and can see how well they have integrated into the local community. These positive changes confirm the project’s success and the powerful role of football as a bridge to integration.

5. Future Ball – Football and Education for Sustainability

Project lead:

Ulrike Enders, Benni Grünewald, Andrew Aris

Funders:

• Football & Culture Foundation / UEFA Children's Foundation

Project description:

Future Ball is a project that raised awareness about sustainability opportunities in sports, particularly in the lead-up to and during EURO 2024.

Key components of the project included:

Module Development: A 4-day workshop and transcription of the educational module "Journey of a Ball".

Trainings of Trainers (ToTs): Four days of workshops for educators and facilitators held in Schierke, Freiburg im Breisgau, and Frankfurt/Main to teach methods that connect football and sustainability education.

19 workshop days in schools and educational centers, hosted in stadiums in:

Hamburg, Wolfsburg, Bremen, Leipzig, Saarbrücken, Frankfurt, Gießen, Berlin (75th Anniversary of the German Constitution), and Steigerwaldstadion (Erfurt), including two graffiti workshops.

Future Ball Tour through Germany during the EURO 2024: A 30-day journey by train and bicycle across EURO 2024 host cities and rural areas to reach people with the message of football and sustainability, engaging them in conversations and action.

Facts:

- Target group: People of all ages and genders
- Trainings of Trainers participants: 31
- Workshop participants: approx. 700
- Future Ball Tour participants and audience: approx. 2,880 people

Impact:

From 2023 to 2024, the Future Ball traveled through all 16 federal states of Germany, reaching a wide and enthusiastic audience. A documentary film by Kai Eisentraut beautifully captured the atmosphere, sharing compelling quotes from people who encountered the ball. We consistently received very positive feedback from schools, learning venues, and participants in the Trainings of Trainers. Details and stories from our activities can be found on the Spirit of Football website.

Highlight:

The highlight of the 1.5-year project was undoubtedly the journey through Germany during EURO 2024. Unforgettable were the diverse places, people, and stories that emerged. One memorable stop was in Rottenburg am Neckar, the hometown of our team member Iris Albulet. There, in a community garden, we met people with intellectual disabilities and individuals with migration backgrounds. We grilled, played, danced, headed footballs, and exchanged many hugs. Beyond the big fan festivals, stadium experiences, and school workshops, these kinds of heartfelt encounters deeply moved us - reminding us of the importance of connection between different people to foster mutual understanding.

6. GPS – Girls Power Sustainability

Project lead:

Iris Albulet, Francesca Sander, Milena Kneip & Lara Wohlrabe

Funder:

- FIFA Foundation

Partners:

- Thuringian Football Association,
- Thuringian State Association for Cultural Youth Education (LKJ),
- Thuringian Ministry for Education, Youth and Sport,
- Thuringian Youth Sports Association

Project description:

In 2023, the GPS Project (Girls Power Sustainability) by Spirit of Football e.V. ran numerous workshops and events across Thuringia to empower girls and women through football. GPS uses football as a tool to strengthen self-confidence, social skills, and social participation. The workshops provide a safe space for young female participants to develop athletic abilities and overcome social barriers.

Through targeted activities in schools, setting-up extracurricular clubs in schools, collaboration with the TSV and other sports associations at events and on special action days such as the "Leadership Workshop," girls aged 6 to women up to 56 were encouraged to discover their individual strengths and grow their skills in a supportive environment. Additionally, the SoF GPS team is part of a network of meetings for adults with a vested interest in developing girls' football. These gatherings aim to deepen the understanding of girls' specific needs in sports and to foster exchange between coaches, schools, and clubs. In this way, the GPS Project contributes to building an inclusive sports culture, where girls & women are empowered and appreciated regardless of their background or social status.

Facts:

- Approx. 400 participants
- Age range: 6–56 years, with the majority between 6–18 years
- Gender: Female

Impact:

The GPS Project reached approximately 400 girls and women, providing them with opportunities to develop both athletic and social competencies. The positive feedback shows that GPS not only strengthens self-confidence and teamwork, but also promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance of diversity. Through its collaboration with schools, clubs, and networks, the project built a strong support system for girls' development through football. GPS helps raise awareness about gender equality in sports and supports the emergence of a sports culture where diversity is valued and girls are empowered.

Highlight:

"My name is Flora and I'm 14 years old. I really enjoyed my time in the GPS workshop. When I first heard the title of the program, I wasn't exactly excited. I had only ever played football in P.E. class - where the boys played, and we girls just stood around. And if we joined in, we did it wrong. The workshop showed me that girls can play football just as well as boys. It was amazing to see how the team worked together and had a positive influence on everything. It was wonderful to be part of the team for a short time and to show younger pupils how it works."

7. Cossack Fun

Project lead:

Alina Onyshchuk, Viktoriia Bybyk, with support from Oksana Rak & Andrii Bybyk

Funders:

- NEBENAN ANGEKOMMEN – “Committed Neighborhoods for a Strong Welcome Culture in Thuringia”

Partner:

- Ziele der Zukunft e.V.,
- Ukrainian volunteers

Project description:

The project “Kosakenspaß” (“Cossack Fun”) was created to give Ukrainian children a piece of “home.” Many of the children and young people who fled to Germany to escape the war long to stay connected to their roots and deeply miss their homeland and its traditions. To address this, a “Cossack Fun” education and sports day for Ukrainian children was organized in Erfurt in September 2024.

The aim of the event was to reconnect the children with their culture and language, deepen their knowledge of Ukrainian Cossacks, help build connections between children and their families, and foster a respectful attitude toward their people’s traditions and customs. This was done by creating an atmosphere of joy and fun, while highlighting the interplay between emotional and mental intelligence, skill, and sport. The project was implemented as a holiday program for children and youth aged approximately 10–15, some of whom had experienced forced displacement from Ukraine.

Facts:

- One 4-hour event full of laughter, joy, and positive emotions
- 32 participants (4 teams of 8 children each)
- Participants came from 7 cities in Thuringia, originally from around 13 cities in Ukraine
- Around 100 guests attended

Impact:

The “Cossack Fun” project had a profound effect on the participating children and youth. It gave them the opportunity to experience and strengthen their Ukrainian cultural identity in a safe environment, helping them preserve their heritage and sense of belonging. The interactive format, combining education and sport, fostered not only knowledge about Cossack history, but also encouraged teamwork, dexterity, and respectful interaction. The children built valuable connections and learned to express their emotions in healthy ways, which significantly supported their integration and personal development.

Highlight:

Viktoriia Bybyk: “‘Kosakenspaß’ was an unforgettable day full of emotions for me. Watching the children’s eyes light up as they discovered their Ukrainian culture and made new friendships was truly magical. One particularly touching moment was when the children eagerly participated in both athletic and intellectual competitions, proudly showcasing their talents and their love for their homeland. It was a day full of joy and togetherness that we celebrated alongside our guests. Their enthusiastic applause motivated the kids to engage with even more excitement – we witnessed how powerful solidarity and joy can be when living out one’s own traditions.”

8. Low-Threshold Leisure Activities for Children in KoWo Social Housing Estates

Project lead:

Sulaiman Almahmoud & Mohammed Othman supported by Milena Kneip

Funder:

- This project is funded by Kommunale Wohnungsgesellschaft mbH Erfurt (Municipal Housing Company of Erfurt)

Partners:

- Spirit of Football Team / Students from the University of Erfurt

Project description:

This is a leisure project (running since 2017) for children that took place from late spring to early autumn of 2024 at two locations in Erfurt: Juri-Gagarin-Ring and Dortmunder Straße 6, every Monday and Friday. Around 30 sessions were held in front of high rise low-income housing estates during the summer supported by students from the University of Erfurt. This year, the number of children participating increased, with some workshops seeing over 30 children at once.

Facts:

- More than 30 children aged 5 to 14 participated (60% girls) regularly attended
- 5 University of Erfurt students supported the activities

Impact:

There was lots of play and fun, and many new creative ideas were developed and implemented together with the children. Activities included football, chalk drawing on pavements, painting, hockey, making friendship bracelets, and more. The year 2024 seemed to be an especially joyful and engaging time for the kids.

Highlight:

"When the little children heard the music we were playing, they started to dance – these were particularly beautiful and heartwarming moments for us."

9. Art Course for Ukrainian Children

Project lead:

Steve Seeger, Elena Chuchmar with support from Viktoriia Bybyk

Funder:

- German Children's Fund (Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk - DKHW)

Partners:

- Catholic Parish of St. Laurentius Erfurt & Heiko Schröter

Project description:

This project offers weekly art sessions for Ukrainian children to teach them the fundamentals of painting and drawing techniques. These children, who fled the war in Ukraine, greatly value the opportunity for creative expression. The main goal is to nurture their creative potential. Through the course, war-traumatized children not only learn artistic techniques and methods but also find a way to express their inner world, thoughts, and feelings through art. They learn to cope with negative emotions, improve their psycho-emotional well-being, and develop their personalities.

In 2024, the project expanded significantly, dividing participants into two age-appropriate groups to better meet their needs. Additionally, new techniques and forms of creative expression were introduced, encouraging the children to experiment and express themselves in diverse ways.

Facts:

- 22 children in total, approx. 8 new participants joined in 2024. Age range: 4 to 18 years old
- 50 workshops held in 2024 - starting in September 2024, sessions took place twice per week

Impact:

The project has made a significant contribution to helping participating children:

- Overcome fears and feel safer in their new environment
- Facilitate integration into German society
- Discover and further develop their creative abilities

The regular gatherings created a sense of community, where children and parents feel safe, supported, and connected.

Highlight:

Elena Chuchmar, art teacher:

"Many children come to us carrying deep psychological wounds - caused by losing their home, being separated from loved ones, and struggling with fear and uncertainty. One five-year-old boy, for example, was initially very withdrawn, only observing the others and drawing only when his parents were present. Over time, he began to interact with the other children and even suggested an idea for a group drawing. His enthusiasm was contagious - his face lit up as he explained the idea to the others. Today, he is a confident, active participant, easily connects with new people, and has even made friends during the course."

10. Melexis vs X-FAB Charity Match

Project lead:

Sven Söderberg & Andrew Aris

Funders:

- Melexis GmbH & X-FAB Semiconductor Foundries GmbH

Project description:

The two Erfurt-based companies Melexis GmbH and X-FAB GmbH approached Spirit of Football with the idea of organizing and benefiting from a charity football match in Erfurt. After several productive meetings at Melexis GmbH, it was agreed that the two companies would form football teams to play against each other — with colleagues and families as spectators — and that donations would be collected to support Spirit of Football's Unified Football project in Erfurt.

Before and after the match, employees from both companies enjoyed food and drinks from food and beverage trucks set up in the parking lot of the Steigerwald Stadium (home of Rot-Weiß Erfurt). Spirit of Football's intercultural team hosted a goal wall shooting contest, along with other games and activities at the entrance and sidelines of the pitch. SoF also organized a halftime FairPlay football game for children.

At the end of the match, the managing directors of both companies signed the Future Ball, committed to sustainability, and presented a donation of €1,000 each to support the Unified Football project. Additionally, €950 was raised on the day, bringing the total donation to €2,950 for Spirit of Football.

Facts:

- 150 participants from 2 companies
- 2 football teams
- Company executives signed the Future Ball

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Highlight:

It was the first time that two Erfurt-based companies came together to compete in a charity match for Spirit of Football. Fittingly, the match took place on the former training grounds of Rot-Weiß Erfurt in the Steigerwald Stadium.

11. S.U.N – Sport Unites Neighbourhoods

Project lead:

Sara Fabbri & Robert Meyer

Funders:

- Youth Welfare Department of the City of Erfurt (Jugendamt Erfurt)

Partners:

- STZ Herrenberg,
- Youth Centre Musikfabrik,
- Primary Schools (Nos. 34, 3, 25),
- Integrated Comprehensive School 4,
- Youth Centre Wiesenhügel,
- AWO District Association,
- TVSD,
- KoWo

Project description:

In school-based and out-of-school projects in Southeast Erfurt, children and young people learn to practically apply and implement techniques from the fields of art, dance, and sport. In doing so, they develop as individuals - setting goals, collaborating in teams, and giving and receiving valuable feedback. The Fair Play activities are recurring and established educational components that reach into the everyday lives of the participants and are sustainably anchored there. Fair Play is present both during school hours and in the afternoon, demonstrating to the participants how to embrace and stand up for diversity and respect as democratic values.

Facts:

- 454 children and young people, aged 8 to 16 + 80 adults are also involved

Impact:

As part of the project - and beyond - and young people demonstrated that they:

- were interested in creative techniques such as stop-motion film, collage design, audio drama, and graffiti, learning to apply and share them with others
- felt empowered through sport and dance, drawing strength for challenges in their daily lives
- showed appreciation for their own achievements and those of others
- felt valued, having experienced themselves as creative and social individuals
- became motivated, as their strengths and weaknesses became visible
- grew in teamwork, understanding the benefits of cooperation
- acted with self-efficacy, setting and reaching their own goals
- developed resilience, learning to deal with challenges productively
- felt optimistic, as their experiences created lasting emotional memories

Highlight:

Robert shares: "Amina's collage on the theme of teamwork and trust was a small masterpiece and was especially admired by fellow students during the exhibition. Since Amina is usually very reserved, her achievement came as a big surprise to many. But the real highlight was her presentation. Amina dared to speak about the meaning of her artwork and her personal connection to it. Her courage moved her to tears. Amina, who is normally too shy to speak in front of a group, showed everyone what she is capable of. Her friends comforted her afterward, and her teachers congratulated her once more in front of the whole class."

12. Shadow Theatre

Project lead:

- Sara Fabbri & Milena Kneip

Funders:

- City of Erfurt – Department of Culture

Partner:

- Vsbi e.V.

Project Description:

We launched the Shadow Theatre Project to create an inclusive space for creative engagement. The target group was adults with and without disabilities. The project took place over a period of three months at Café B on Johannesstraße 141 in Erfurt. In a total of ten sessions, participants explored various shadow theatre techniques, including writing storyboards, using props, and working with light sources, particularly overhead projectors.

To support the creative process, we provided structured workshops while also allowing participants the freedom to choose from different project ideas. Together with the group, we agreed on the date for the final exhibition. On October 18, 2024, we rented the POP UP STORE in Erfurt to present our results. A special highlight: the participants themselves led a workshop during the event.

Facts:

- 5 regular participants + 120 guests at the final exhibition

Impact:

There is a strong demand for inclusive cultural work, which was clearly reflected in the high level of interest. It is essential to break down barriers and build trust, as many potential participants are initially hesitant to get actively involved. This is where the peer-to-peer approach proves highly effective - engaging participants at eye level and making them feel that their contributions are valued and that their ideas influence decisions. For example, they were able to help shape the themes of the shadow theatre performances and the structure of the workshops. This made them feel safe and increasingly empowered. The project demonstrated that a blend of structured formats and creative freedom makes art more accessible.

On a personal note, I (Sara Fabbri) was once again reminded of the importance of patience and empathy in inclusive work. Patience was particularly needed when participants required time to gain trust or open up. Inclusive work often involves people with different backgrounds and abilities. Some are shy, others carry inhibitions or even fears from past experiences that make group activities difficult. It takes time until they feel safe enough to become active. In these situations, I had to learn to put aside my own expectations and accept each person's individual pace.

Highlight:

"Wow, I never thought I could take part in shadow theatre. This is my first time and it's so beautiful." [She rolls her wheelchair up to the screen and plays with her shadow.] – Workshop participant

13. University of Erfurt Seminars

Project lead:

Francesca Sander & Benny Linse

Funder:

University of Erfurt

Partner:

• Dr. phil. Nancy Quittenbaum, University of Erfurt

Project description:

The seminars "Spirit of Community" and "Spirit of Awareness", offered in cooperation with the University of Erfurt, provided students the opportunity to actively participate in a wide range of community-oriented projects organized by SoF. Students were integrated into project groups such as S.U.N, GPS, Social Media, KoWo, Unified Football, Futsal on Wednesday's, Women's Sports, FairPlay Football, and the Art Course for Ukrainian Children. They were actively engaged on-site each week.

The accompanying seminar at the University of Erfurt served as a platform for exchange and networking. Students regularly gave updates on their projects, shared experiences, and developed joint solutions for challenges. In addition, they learned about methods and approaches used by Spirit of Football in its work. Through the close collaboration with SoF, students expanded their knowledge of social engagement and discovered how they can contribute to a more inclusive and diverse society.

Facts:

- Total participants: 34
 - Summer semester 2024: 17 (3 male, 14 female)
 - Winter semester 2024: 17 (6 male, 11 female)
- Age range: 18–32 years

Impact:

The seminars and projects fostered a strong sense of social responsibility and community values among participants. Through their active involvement in volunteer projects in Erfurt, students learned how they can directly contribute to the well-being of the community. They not only developed personal skills, but also experienced the value of teamwork and social engagement. The positive impact was visible on both an individual level - through increased self-confidence and skills - and on a societal level, as the projects brought about sustainable changes in the local community.

Stories:

Aljdin, 32 years old, participated in the Unified Football Project during the summer semester, where he played football with children with intellectual disabilities. He personally flourished in this work and discovered a new passion. His commitment extended well beyond the seminar: Aljdin became a permanent member of Spirit of Football and later took on his own Unified Project at the Zoopark School. With great enthusiasm, he now leads weekly training sessions and is also responsible for introducing new students to the project during the winter semester, inspiring them to engage in work with the children. Today, Aljdin is a shining example of the potential that lies in integrating students into social projects.

14. Unified Football

Project lead:

Annica Duft, Mohamad Othman, Sven Söderberg, Joaquin Nanez, Aldin Vovodia, David Schnell, Andrii Bybyk

Funders:

- *Aktion Mensch, Beisheim Foundation*

Partners:

- Special Olympics Thuringia,
- Thuringian Football Association,
- University of Erfurt

Project description:

The Unified Football Project aims to provide football training and participation opportunities for people with and without intellectual and multiple disabilities in Thuringia. Since the launch of the pilot phase, training sessions have been regularly held in the cities of Erfurt, Weimar, Apolda, Gera, Schleusingen, and Ilmenau.

Facts:

- Participants per session: 6–20
- Age range: 8–42 years
- Gender distribution: 80% male, 20% female
- Training sessions per year at each location: 30–40 units of 90 minutes each

Impact:

People with intellectual disabilities benefit from active participation in football, leading to improved fitness, body awareness, and a sense of belonging within a group where they learn to deal with both success and failure. Their confidence and self-esteem have grown through the regular training and participation tournaments and other events.

People without disabilities gain regular insight into a social world that is often isolated. They experience the value of inclusion and receive heartfelt gratitude from the other participants, deepening their awareness of the importance of social engagement. Spirit of Football is becoming a trusted provider of Unified Football activities within the organized football network and the disability support sector in Thuringia.

Highlight:

In September, the first SoF Unified Cup took place with 10 teams from Thuringia and one guest team from Franconia. Each team was mixed with footballers from the Spirit of Football network.

A rich supporting program created space for connection and exchange. The highlight of the day was a scene in the penalty area: The referee awarded a penalty kick—but instead of taking the advantage, the fouled player approached the referee and said it wasn't really a foul. The referee reversed the decision. At the award ceremony, the player received the FairPlay Award and was cheered loudly by all participants.

15. Unified Viewing

Project lead:

Mohamad Othman, Iris Albulet, Joaquin Nanez,
Sven Söderberg & Annica Duft

Funder:

- German Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung),
- Beisheim Foundation

Partners/Network:

- TSV Gera Leumnitz,
- SG An der Lache,
- KoWo,
- City of Erfurt,
- Empor Weimar,
- SC Schleusingen 07

Project description:

“Everyone is welcome to play” – this is the starting point for every Spirit of Football project, and it was also the guiding principle for the Unified Viewing pilot project during the UEFA EURO 2024 football tournament. The widespread public attention around the tournament made the “United in Football – Fair Play and Inclusion at EURO 2024” model project possible: a joyful triad of connection, observation, and enrichment.

Everyone who experienced and embodied true inclusion was deeply moved by the impact and energy of the project. The format: train together, play together, watch matches together, and reflect over a shared meal – this is the unifying power and potential of football.

Facts:

- 5 Unified Viewing events with approx. 650 participants, with and without intellectual disabilities
- Age range: from elementary school children to retirees
- Gender ratio: approx. 60% men, 40% women

Impact:

The various activities before, during, and after UEFA EURO 2024 created spaces for people with intellectual disabilities to engage in meaningful interaction with the broader society. Football for people with disabilities – often still isolated within institutions – received increased public visibility through the project’s inclusive approach. This helped open doors to mainstream football clubs for people with intellectual and multiple disabilities. By aligning with football – the most widely accepted and loved sport in society – the project helped recognize and celebrate the individual talents of people with intellectual disabilities.

Highlight:

When a house wall becomes a big screen: The SoF caravan stopped for a day in the Erfurt neighborhood of Wiesenhügel. A backyard was transformed into a football arena, where the third group match between Switzerland and Germany was screened live. Around 150 football fans came together for this event. Before the match, kids and families played on a street-soccer pitch, and a food truck provided tasty refreshments. The vibrant atmosphere was brought by the people themselves. It was a magical summer evening – unforgettable not just for the football or festivities right outside the apartment doors, but especially for the joyful community spirit that echoed through the neighborhood.

16. VAR (Value-Based Anti-Discrimination Referees)

Project lead:

Jakob Grünewald, Francesca Sander, Michelle Cellner

Funder:

- Konrad Adenauer Foundation

Partners:

- Thuringian Football Association (Thüringer Fußballverband)

Project description:

We conducted two 2.5-hour workshops for more than 40 referees from the Erfurt-Sömmerda district in Thuringia. The workshops stood out due to the strong synergy between the facilitators – combining the technical expertise of professional referees, methodological preparation by Spirit of Football, and the organizational experience of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Together, this created a highly effective and participatory setting for addressing the topic of discrimination on the football pitch.

In intensive small group sessions, participants explored various forms of discrimination, presented their findings in a plenary session, and discussed them using real-life examples. The dialogue that emerged, especially with input from top-level referees and administration representatives from the Thuringian Football Association, was extremely valuable to the referees.

Due to the success of this format, the workshop is now planned to be expanded to other football districts in Thuringia in 2025 and 2026.

Facts:

- Participants: 40 referees from the Erfurt-Sömmerda district
- Approx. 90% male, 10% female
- Age breakdown: 12–25: approx. 30%, 25–40: approx. 35%, 40–55: approx. 35%

Impact:

The workshop proved to be a highly practical tool for raising awareness among referees about discrimination. Before attending, most participants had little to no training or practical strategies for dealing with discrimination – which was evident in the high level of discussion and curiosity during the sessions.

Notably, some younger referees were unfamiliar with the concept of discrimination, highlighting the urgent need for early sensitization. The workshop helped foster a more informed, confident, and proactive approach to tackling discrimination on and off the pitch.

Highlight:

During the group work debrief, one participant voluntarily shared an incident in which he himself experienced racism while officiating a match. The rest of the group reacted with surprise – many had previously assumed such incidents didn't happen in their context. This sparked deep interest and questions from fellow referees. The situation showed that the workshop provided a safe and respectful space to share sensitive and painful experiences, helping to kick-start a powerful process of awareness and reflection.

17. World Children's Day

Project lead:

Iris Albulet supported by Viktoriia Bybyk & Sara Fabbri

Funder:

- Donations were collected during the event.

Partners:

- ISA Kompass,
- WAID Basketball Lionss

Project description:

On September 20, 2024, we were part of the Fête du Papillon celebrating World Children's Day in Erfurt. ISA Kompass, along with many other partners, organized a large festival for children at the Zughafen venue. SoF's Mo, Oksana, Viktoria, and Andrii played FairPlay football with the children on a street-soccer pitch, Sara created balloon animals, and Iris presented SoF and our Future Ball during the opening ceremony.

To kick off the event, there was a friendly tug-of-war competition between teams from ISA Kompass, SoF, and our colleagues from the WAID Lions - the inclusive team of the Erfurt Basketball Lions. Former professional footballer and Erfurt native Clemens Fritz, who serves as the patron for both Spirit of Football and ISA Kompass, was also actively involved in the festivities. It was a beautiful early autumn day filled with children's laughter - one we will remember fondly.

Facts:

More than 300 people attended the World Children's Day celebration, including girls and boys, parents, grandparents, relatives, people with and without disabilities, and individuals with and without migration backgrounds.

Impact:

Through the collaboration of ISA Kompass, SoF, the WAID Lions, and other partners, an inclusive space was created that celebrated FairPlay, diversity, and togetherness. Activities like street soccer, balloon art, and the presentation of the Future Ball inspired children to engage playfully with themes of teamwork and sustainability. The tug-of-war promoted fun, connection, and group spirit. Clemens Fritz's involvement as patron added extra visibility to the event. The festival strengthened bonds between cultures and generations and left unforgettable memories full of laughter, community, and inspiration.

Highlight:

The tug-of-war was a true highlight, with many children enthusiastically joining in - cheered on loudly by the crowd!

18. WSD – School Projects in Rural Thuringia

Project lead:

Benny Linse

Funders:

- Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken; Beisheim Foundation

Partners:

- Goals Connect e.V.,
- Freiburger Agenda 21, (FairCamp in Bad Lobenstein),
- ASB-Sömmerda,
- Save Nature e.V.,
- partner schools,
- Climate Protection Officer of the Ilm District,
- Ministry of the Environment of Thuringia

Project description:

The reach of SoF's educational programs is increasingly expanding beyond urban areas. This not only supports the dissemination of sustainable values but also enhances the acceptance of our projects across diverse social contexts. Over time, SoF has built a strong reputation with schools, school teachers and social workers in rural regions. The collaboration with ministries - especially the Thuringian Ministry for the Environment - is also becoming increasingly significant. We actively contribute to school-related expert panels and bring our experience into relevant discussions. A key strength of our work is the direct, accessible communication with partners and institutions, which builds trust and allows for flexible content design of educational formats – an essential success factor for tailoring complex content to specific audiences. One core focus lies in connecting sustainable development goals (SDGs) with the everyday realities of children and youth. Together with external partners, we have developed practical methods for addressing these demanding topics in a relatable and hands-on way. The development of an SDG curriculum for schools underlines this innovative approach. Particularly important is the emphasis on social sustainability, which we consider the foundation for addressing other dimensions of sustainability. Strengthening this area is the main goal to create long-term positive societal impact.

Facts:

- Students from grades 1–4: 331 participants
- Students from grades 5–10: 194 participants
- Students from vocational schools/universities: 180 participants
- Teachers, school social workers, principals, etc.: 38 participants
- Participants in extracurricular events: approx. 200 people

Impact:

- 20 workshops conducted across various school types (primary, secondary, vocational, community schools, and grammar schools) in rural areas
- Five two-day democracy workshops for first-time voters at five schools (four of them in rural areas), in the run-up to the Thuringian state elections
- Development and promotion of democratic and social skills: Children as early as grade 1 and adolescents learned to play fairly, resolve conflicts constructively, and treat one another with respect

Highlight:

FairCamps with VfR Bad Lobenstein e.V. (Eastern Thuringia) and WSD partner organizations. The highlight of the past WSD project year was the Easter holiday camp. In the idyllic Kosel Valley, students aged 9 to 15 came together with VfR Bad Lobenstein, SoF, and Freiburger Agenda 21 e.V. for a unique blend of sports and education.

Topics such as global justice, sustainable nutrition, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were interwoven through interactive workshops and team-based play. The camp created valuable learning experiences and a strong sense of community. It clearly showed how sport can connect people and raise awareness for important issues shaping our future.

19. Southeast Erfurt Cultural Projects

Project lead:

Sara Fabbri

Funders:

- Federal Ministry of Education and Research, "Culture Makes You Strong" Program – Alevi Community of Germany (AABF)

Partner:

- Open-Air-Culture – Nature-based art and culture projects in both the analog and digital world

Project description:

We carried out two holiday projects in the summer of 2024, both designed for primary school-aged children during their summer break. Among other activities, the children spent a day outdoors in the forest, exploring it in a playful way while creating artworks focused on sustainability. They were encouraged to discover nature in all its richness, beauty and to build a deeper relationship with it. They collected natural materials like leaves and stones and used them to create artistic pieces.

But the project was about more than just knowledge of plants, trees, and animals - it was also about self-discovery, including mindfulness exercises guided by our teamers. Every day offered new activities - such as visiting a farm and a beekeeping center to learn about the lives of different animals.

Facts:

The children in the holiday program were from grades 1 to 4. They came from various classes and schools in Southeast Erfurt. In total, 25 children participated in the two holiday projects

Impact:

Many parents expressed their gratitude for the wonderful time we provided their children. This feedback motivated us deeply. Praise from the after-school care coordinator, who was enthusiastic about both the project and our team, emphasized how important such opportunities are for children. Our team created a creative and welcoming atmosphere where the children felt comfortable. Our ability to connect art and nature while being attentive to the needs of the children was especially appreciated.

Stories:

Sara Fabbri, project leader: My highlight during the holiday camp was definitely the 9-kilometer hike with the kids. We walked through residential areas, incorporated villages, and across fields with highland cattle grazing, all the way to a farm in Rohda am Haarberg. The group - 14 primary school children and our teamers - was led by the dog Luna, which really motivated the kids. We all made it together and were incredibly proud and surprised at how smoothly it all went!