



Unified with Refugees

Bringing Inclusive Development to People on the Move

***Special
Olympics***



A GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The global community is confronting perhaps the largest human migration situations in the modern era. With armed conflict, political unrest, extreme poverty, and climate change pushing entire populations to the brink, it is estimated that over 65 million individuals are currently on the move.

Refugees and migrants, particularly children and youth, are one of the most vulnerable populations in the world today. They face heightened risk of exploitation, abuse and trafficking. Within this already marginalized population, children and youth with intellectual/developmental disabilities (ID) face even larger obstacles due to entrenched stigma, social isolation, and lack of critical health, education, and social protection services. This compounding discrimination means that refugees with ID are among the most at risk of being left behind by aid programs.

At the same time, all refugee and migrant children and youth, with and without ID, lack safe spaces and activities that can nurture their social and emotional development. Social and emotional learning is particularly critical for this population to overcome the extreme adversity in their young lives. For these children, youth, and their families, inclusive communities and opportunities are the key to a better future.



**There are nearly 30 million refugees today.
Approximately half are under 18 years old.**

A MOVEMENT OF INCLUSION

What began in 1968 as a small summer sports camp in the backyard of a concerned citizen in the United States has grown into a global force for social change - the movement of Special Olympics. Special Olympics has become the largest grassroots disability sports organization in the world, reaching over five million people with ID in 192 countries and territories. Around the globe, Special Olympics has helped bring individuals with ID out of the shadows and into the light of their communities, where their talents and contributions can shine.

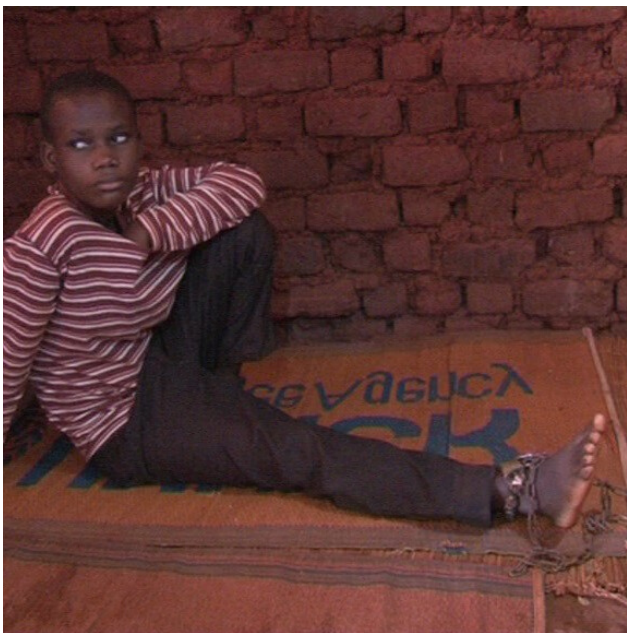


SPORT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Inclusion is the issue of our time. With more populations on the move, the skill sets and mindsets to constructively engage those who are different are urgently needed. A future where stigma and exclusion no longer plague our societies requires a generational tipping point in development of these skills, beginning with youth. To meet this urgency, Special Olympics Unified Sports® has been developed as an evidence-based model that brings players with and without intellectual disabilities to experience and promote inclusion through sports. Providing opportunities for youth with and without ID to play sports, develop as leaders, and engage their communities together builds both positive attitudes towards disability and key social-emotional learning skills. As part of our global commitment to promoting inclusion for those most marginalized, Special Olympics has used the power of its inclusive Unified programming platform to bring key services to refugee and migrant settings throughout various regions of the world.

OVERCOMING ISOLATION

In many cultures around the world, stigma persists that views individuals with intellectual disabilities as a curse, prompting their families to hide them. Families in the refugee camps will often not report or register their relatives with intellectual disabilities, thereby excluding them from humanitarian aid. Even if they did, they would often not be able to find disability-inclusive health, education, or social protection services. Introducing Special Olympics Unified programming in refugee camps offers children youth with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to discover and develop their skills and find a sense of belonging on a team. It also provides the wider camp community with a chance to support the youth, celebrate their achievements, and create a safer environment for youth with and without intellectual disabilities alike.



FROM CHAINED TO CHAMPION

As a young boy, Malaki spent years living in the UNHCR's Nyarugusu refugee camp in Tanzania. Born with an intellectual disability in a place where that was misunderstood, Malaki faced seemingly insurmountable odds in gaining access to the types of things that all youth yearn for: acceptance, belonging, opportunity. As part of a desperate move to ensure their son was safe and protected, Malaki's family was left with few options, beyond restraining him with chains in an effort to limit his vulnerability.

It was the introduction of the simple game of football to red dust fields of the Nyarugusu refugee camp that served as the key to changing Malaki's life. After a Special Olympics board member discovered Malaki, Special Olympics Tanzania began to work with his family and local community to free him. They also brought sports equipment to train local religious leaders in the camp to become Unified Sports coaches. Through the power of sport, not only was Malaki's life changed, an entire world of possibilities opened for hundreds of other refugees with intellectual disabilities in the camp like him.

A WELCOME OF INCLUSION

Gerald arrived in Lampedusa from Cameroon, and found his way to legal residency in Italy. The challenges he faced were, in his words, “almost impossible given how I arrived, and where I came from.” Chief among these was the lack of opportunities to meaningfully integrate into the community. Getting involved with Special Olympics and playing on a Unified football team alongside athletes with intellectual disabilities was a turning point for Gerald.

“I will forever be grateful to the athletes of Special Olympics Italia athletes. They welcomed me. They understood me. They offered their hands of friendship to me when I needed it most- and it continues to serve as a defining moment in my life.

Gerald Mballe,
Special Olympics Italy Unified Partner

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For refugee and migrant youth both with and without disabilities in Europe, Special Olympics Unified Sports has become a pathway to community and acceptance. Special Olympics prides itself on being a movement both for and from people with intellectual disabilities. Through **Unified with Refugees**, refugee and migrant youth without disabilities are also able to join and experience the power of inclusion through sport. Multiple evaluations have shown that Unified Sports has a demonstrated impact on youth without disabilities who participate. Not only are their attitudes about intellectual disability improved, but they also report developing authentic friendships and key social emotional skills such as grit, patience, and communication. In this way, Special Olympics athletes become ambassadors of inclusion, not only for those with disabilities, but other groups on the margins.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPANSION

Special Olympics is committed to expanding the reach of *Unified with Refugees*, and is seeking to grow and diversify programming to deepen our impact for one the most at-risk populations. The *Unified with Refugees* strategy focuses on four key programmatic goals:



Scale inclusive sports programming for refugee and migrant youth

Unified Sports is an inclusive sports program that combines an approximately equal number of Special Olympics athletes (with intellectual disabilities) and Unified Partners (without disabilities) on team. *Unified with Refugees* will expand these opportunities for refugee and migrant youth of all abilities in the various settings where they reside.



Implement inclusive early childhood development programs for refugee children

Special Olympics Young Athletes is an inclusive, play-based, early childhood development program for children ages 2-7 of all abilities that develops foundational gross motor and social skills. *Unified with Refugees* will bring this programming to refugee camps programs in refugee camp settings to support the most at-risk children.



Empower families of individuals with intellectual disabilities with health knowledge

Through Family Health Forums, Special Olympics mobilizes families of individuals with and without intellectual disabilities and disseminates health information, health supplies, and access to health care through local service providers. *Unified with Refugees* will also train Community Health Workers and health professionals in refugee camps on how to provide accessible and equitable health services to individuals with intellectual disabilities.



Amplify the voice of refugee and migrants with and without intellectual disabilities

Refugees and migrants, especially those with intellectual disabilities, are often hidden and silenced. *Unified with Refugees* will lift up their voices and use the global reach of Special Olympics communications platforms and sports diplomacy to share their stories and advocate for support for more inclusive programming and services.

MOVING FORWARD

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER

The movement of Special Olympics understands the ways in which something as simple as play can break down the walls of exclusion and intolerance and replace them with mutual understanding and dignity. It also understands the urgency of supporting the move of migration to the center of the global dialogue – working to empower, motivate, and inspire global change. Inclusive sports programming, combined with early childhood development, health services, and self-advocacy interventions are part of a growing commitment of the Special Olympics to address marginalization and exclusion in all settings for youth of all abilities. **Unified with Refugees** continues to pioneer new areas of collaboration, and new ways of driving inclusion for some of the most isolated and at-risk individuals in the world today. No one understands this urgency more than the athletes of Special Olympics- the architects and authors of inclusion and positive change the world over.



Current Impact

As of 2020

3000+

Refugee Youth with and without Intellectual Disabilities

275

Families of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

Potential Reach

Over 5 Years

50,000

Refugee Youth with and without Intellectual Disabilities

10,000

Families of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

5,000

Unified Sports Coaches

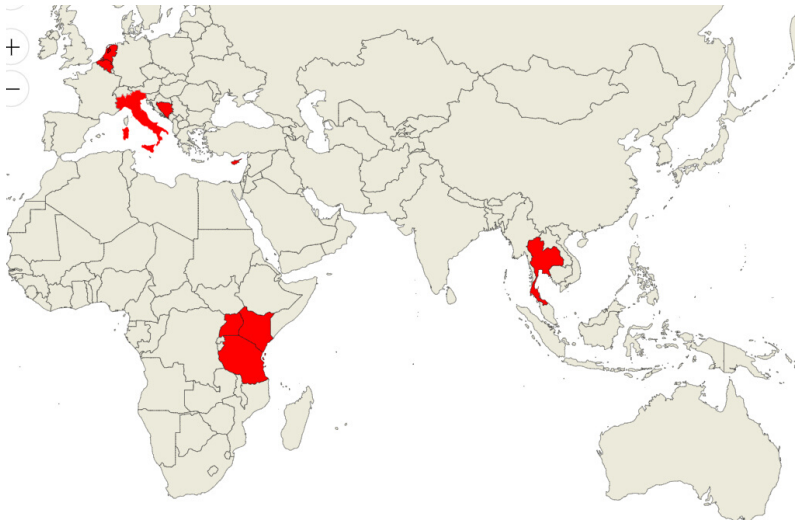
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Nations Worldwide



Geographic Reach

Special Olympics currently has active, inclusive programming in refugee settings in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Malta, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Thailand. Other nations across regions have communicated the need and intention to begin **Unified with Refugees** as part of their national Special Olympics Program.



SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

In an effort to ensure that Special Olympics *Unified with Refugees* harnesses the power and strength of the international community, Special Olympics has developed key international partnerships with UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and others to both gain access to camps and reception centers, and align strategies, services, and interventions with the larger global mandate around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the core tenants of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Special Olympics also works with a number of other partners to support this work, including international service organizations such as Lions Clubs International, as well as corporate sponsors and private philanthropy. We invite other organizations to join forces with us as partners in this mission.

Thank you to our Current Partners



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



Lions Clubs International
FOUNDATION

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