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# FROM FOOTBALL TO LIFE CHAMPIONS:

a study report on international  
coaching practices and the pedagogical  
role of football coaches



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Conducting a comparative study on football coaching practices and trainers' pedagogical role in seven European countries proved to be a rather challenging methodological and scholarly endeavour. The research team of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory received important and substantial assistance from a variety of institutions and individuals in approaching and carrying out this rigorous and challenging task. We owe our immense gratitude to persons who facilitated and conducted this research on the national level: Krešimir Lacković from Croatia, whose enormous efforts and methodological vigour amounted to effectively co-authoring the study; Radmila Đurović from the Faculty of Sports in Belgrade for her research and report on Serbia; Lenče Aleksovska-Veličkovska and Serjoža Gontarev from the Faculty of Physical Education, Sports and Health from Skopje, Despoina Ourda and Vassilis Barkoukis from the Department of Physical Education and Sport Science of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; Denislav Georgiev, expert freelancer from Bulgaria; Önder Güneş, expert researcher from Turkey; and Daniel Rodrigues Alves and Augusto Manuel Gomes Ferreira from Portugal.

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Thus, while the pedagogical value of the well-known proverb that it takes a village to raise a child can easily be questioned, it certainly took a village of these diverse players engaging in a game regarded as the most important of all unimportant things to generate this study. Of course, authors are solely responsible for the outcomes. While the study's findings and conclusions can be debated, it should demonstrate beyond doubt that for children who participate, their parents, trainers who teach them, and many others who study it, this is far more than a game, rather an important, formative aspect of their lives. This study implies that by recognizing the immense role of football coaches and creating synergy among the plethora of actors involved in their work, we are contributing to something much more than occasionally developing a few future football professionals and champions on the pitch: we are in fact (or ought to be) creating healthy, well-raised, positive-values oriented children who are future champions in the game of their lives. For their sake, let us all partake in this game.

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A young man with short brown hair, wearing a white t-shirt, dark shorts, and dark knee-high socks, stands on a soccer field. He is looking down at a soccer ball on the ground. The field is green with white and orange lines. In the background, there is a white fence with red accents. The text "EXECUTIVE SUMMARY" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## International Legislative Framework for Football Trainers

Our desk research included examining the legal framework governing coach activities and the roles of national football associations in establishing regulations for coaching work. The main challenge in the legislative framework could be described as the tension between the Sports Law, UEFA licenses, and the regulations of national football associations. In some cases, this tension has been resolved relatively coherently and harmoniously, such as in Croatia and Portugal, while in others, like Serbia and Bulgaria, there is a fundamental contradiction between the national legislature such as the Law on Sports and the UEFA licensing criteria and football associations providing it.

**All countries included in this study signed the UEFA Coaching Convention (2020), defining the requirements for UEFA coaching diplomas across different levels of football and futsal. It covers aspects such as coach educators, admission criteria, course organization, content, teaching methodologies, completion criteria, diploma issuance, further education opportunities, and license validity.** While it aims to standardize and codify titles and qualifications, it allows national asso-

ciations to implement additional regulations. As a result, discrepancies arise regarding the minimum criteria for coaching children, primarily due to variations between general national regulations and the UEFA convention.

Within UEFA, there are four core diplomas: C, B, A, and UEFA Pro, along with specialist diplomas such as Youth B, Elite Youth A, Futsal B, and Goalkeeper B and A. UEFA reports that there are over 200,000 individuals holding valid football coaching licenses. The grassroots-oriented C Diploma also includes modules on child safeguarding, basic first aid, and promoting a healthy, active lifestyle, taking a holistic approach rather than being goal-oriented like the Youth B diploma. Overall, our research highlights the differences in minimum coaching criteria for working with children across countries, with the UEFA Coaching Convention serving as a foundational framework.

The “Child Safeguarding Toolkit” mentioned in both syllabi is based on the goals such as: safeguarding children from abuse, and harm, implementing procedures and practices to prevent abuse, raising awareness through training and communication, involving outside agencies in child protection ef-

forts, monitoring progress and sharing good practices in football. UEFA has developed this toolkit to safeguard children involved in European football and providing guiding principles for national associations to implement measures that protect and promote the welfare of children. The toolkit includes important templates such as child safeguarding policies, general risk assessments, codes of conduct for adults and parents, and behaviour codes for children. However, it is important to note that the toolkit primarily focuses on safeguarding and prevention and is far from comprehensive, but also rarely familiar to the interviewed coaches.

Furthermore, there is a question about whether individuals possess the nec-

essary knowledge and resources to fulfil their safeguarding role. It is worth considering that attaining a C license requires a minimum age of 18, which may limit the capacity of younger coaches in assuming this responsibility. Additionally, the UEFA Coaching Convention 2020 states that signatory parties have the right to accept national qualifications or equivalent qualifications recognized under national or European law for domestic competitions or coaching activities. While the convention aims to regulate and unify coaching criteria, there may still be differences among signatories, especially regarding the conditions for coaching work, particularly at lower levels that involve working with young players.

## Research Design

The aim of the research was to obtain data on general knowledge and the use of informal education for promoting positive social values through sports. The research focused on how coaches perceive the pedagogical role of sports and the ways to strengthen that role. Data were collected through the analysis of 140 semi-structured interviews with coaches of young football players in seven countries included in the research: **Croatia, Serbia,**

**Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and Portugal.** The interviews were conducted from February to May 2023 and consisted of about twenty research questions divided into two parts. The first part of the questions related to career and education, while the second part focused on ethics and values. The research sample consisted of coaches of younger age groups in football clubs of various ranks. Based on this, we can conclude that



coaches of youth categories are mostly younger individuals (20-30 years old), often with 5-10 years of experience, and they are still in the process of professional development. Coaches consider this process of improvement

as very important for the quality of their work with children. Upon analysing the data, we identified six most relevant topics and provided a section for each in our report, as listed below:

**1. Formal vs Informal Education of Trainers** - all coaches universally recognize the importance of self-improvement and personal development in the coaching process. However, opinions vary regarding the benefits of formal education and obtaining UEFA licenses. Some coaches consider formal education essential for leading a team, while others believe that attending seminars and obtaining certifications is a more valuable use of time.

**2. Work Principles and Training Structure** - Regarding the structure of training sessions for younger age groups, coaches in all countries follow similar methods. On average, the training sessions have a similar duration. They typically begin with warm-up exercises, followed by ball work focusing on technical football skills, including basic techniques and specific football situations such as set pieces or heading, with the last part usually involving some form of game.

**3. The Pedagogical Role and Essence of Trainer's Profession** - Coaches generally perceive their role as having a significant pedagogical impact, understanding their mission and emphasizing the positive influence they can have on the overall development of children. However, they feel that this aspect of their work is not adequately recognized. All participants acknowledge the challenges of working with younger age groups, where their mission is to teach the fundamentals of football while also fulfilling an educational role. In younger age groups, a prevailing "liberal" approach is adopted, where coaches view coaching children as a form of entertainment. As the age groups progress, a somewhat more competitive approach is introduced, culminating in the senior age group where the coach's mission shifts from primarily educational and developmental to a focus on competition, with achieving results as the primary objective. In essence, a significant number of coaches working with young football players recognize that their role

extends beyond creating professional footballers or developing a small number of highly talented players. They strive to instil in children a love for the sport, promote healthy habits, encourage good behaviour, and foster satisfaction, happiness, and other universal values. Their aim is to facilitate the holistic development of individuals, making them better and healthier individuals in the process.

**4. Trainers-Parents Relations** - The relationship between coaches and parents is an essential aspect of youth football, and trainers strive to establish clear roles from the outset. While tensions can arise between parents and coaches, most coaches have not encountered major issues with parents of young footballers, indicating that excessive attempts by parents to influence coaching roles are not prevalent.

Parents agree that coaches deserve further education, more support, additional training, and seminars in sports psychology and child pedagogy. Regardless of the coaches' current performance, parents are convinced that better education would enable them to have an even greater positive impact on the children. Many parents also recognize discipline as a significant advantage of football training. In younger age groups, parents prefer a friendly relationship between their child and the coach, rather than strict boundaries alike those in school.



The relationship between parents and coaches is generally consistent among the interviewees. All parents believe that coaches should have better salaries, improved facilities, and a calmer working environment to facilitate their job. Despite reservations about certain coaching methods, there is no doubt about the authority of the coaches. Effective communication is emphasized as the most important aspect of collaboration. Some parents are lenient when it comes to the punishments imposed by coaches for poor discipline, while others strongly oppose them.

**5. Ethical Challenges** - Apparently, there is no universal requirement to have a prescribed ethical code, and many clubs do not actually have one. Only a few coaches surveyed have received training in UEFA's approach to child protection, and many are unaware that such training even exists. Some respondents recognized parts of the training from lectures attended as part of a football academy or through participation in international projects, but it remains unclear if these lectures covered UEFA's child protection training specifically. Qualities highly valued in colleagues by the surveyed coaches include honesty, dedication, preparedness, motivation for work, innovation, and calmness, especially in communication with others.

**6. Ideal Type and Possible Improvements** - Coaches in Croatia and Greece, as well as coaches in Serbia and Bulgaria working in the largest clubs, generally express satisfaction with the support they receive from their respective clubs. However, they suggest that seminars should be more frequent, accessible, and that exams for different levels of licenses should be organized more regularly. In other environments, coaches perceive less recognition of their importance, with some specifically highlighting that coaches used to have a significantly higher status and encompassed a range of pedagogical and educational roles that they feel are lacking today.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on 140 interviews conducted with coaches of younger age groups in amateur and professional clubs across seven European countries, the research provides valuable insights into the state, methods, and work of these coaches. The main focus of the research was to examine the pedagogical role of coaches and the importance of formal and informal education in promoting positive social values through sports. The study involved 20 semi-structured interviews with coaches, revealing that the pedagogical role is significant, but insufficiently recognized. Coaches recognize the importance of continuous learning and improvement through formal and informal education.

Formal education and acquired diplomas are not only seen as requirements for working in sports but also as opportunities for self-improvement and gaining new knowledge. However, older coaches no longer have ambitions for further academic education compared to younger coaches. In terms of informal education, coaches utilize various methods and channels, including those that have become more accessible during the pandemic period. Mentoring, learning from experienced coaches, attending lectures by reputable coaches, and participating

in football camps and competitions are mentioned as valuable opportunities for personal improvement in coaching education.

In football-developed countries such as Croatia and Portugal, coaches receive significant support in education and development from their clubs or football schools. Clubs often finance their coaches' development and encourage them to obtain licenses. Coaches also consider it important to educate themselves in other fields closely related to coaching, such as pedagogy, communication, and psychology, which they feel are lacking in traditional educational systems.

Coaches observe a lack of pedagogical and communication skills among some of their colleagues. Regardless of whether a club has a prescribed code of conduct, coaches adhere to certain behavioural rules within the club and expect the same from their young players and parents. They believe their role goes beyond developing football skills and includes an important educational aspect. When conflicts or rule violations occur, coaches aim to resolve them through team discussions before involving higher authorities in the club. Discipline processes exist in some clubs,

but severe penalties like expulsion are rarely used. Coaches prefer to implement minor “sporting penalties” rather than punishing poor performance on the field.

Coaches increasingly adopt a more liberal approach to training and matches, encouraging young players to express their opinions and fostering a love for the game. However, certain predetermined rules must be respected. Coaches recognize the significance of formal education in pedagogy, psychology, and communication, considering it desirable. Therefore, it is suggested to increase the availability of such education through football academy systems or make it a requirement for coaches to attend pedagogical-psychological-methodical-didactic content programs.

While the research primarily relies on subjective assessments from coaches, a more comprehensive understanding could be achieved through field observations during training and matches. Additionally, with a larger sample size, more robust and extensive results could be obtained.

Despite the efforts made by clubs and associations to emphasize the importance of education and recognize the role of coaches in the development of young footballers, coaches feel that

their significance is not adequately acknowledged by the general public. Reducing the influence of parents on clubs and football schools would be beneficial, particularly by decreasing dependence on membership fees and involving alternative financing methods. Implementing sports within the school and university system, as seen in other countries, could provide a solution to reduce the reliance on membership fees. However, finding a suitable alternative system in this region is challenging due to existing traditions. Although fee-free systems have been demonstrated to be feasible in some cases, fully eliminating membership fees remains a complex task.

Efforts should be made to improve the working conditions for coaches of younger age groups, including better legislative regulations, tax benefits, scholarships, and rewards. Similar to scholarship programs for young athletes, implementing similar support for youth coaches would be valuable. The role of coach education within the university system should be elevated or reinstated, as the current emphasis on obtaining UEFA licenses and attending football academies and seminars may diminish the importance of formal education. Some countries, such as Croatia and Greece, have legally recognized the significance of formal edu-

cation, and proposals are being made to further enhance its importance.

Based on the evaluation of coaches' conditions and their pedagogical role

in working with and developing children in football, some guidelines and recommendations to improve future work with children would be as follows:

*Conduct pedagogical and psychological evaluations of coaches through appropriate assessments.*

*Recognize previous diplomas and educational qualifications related to pedagogy, psychology, and sports sciences when obtaining licenses.*

*Organize a greater number of free courses for coaches' professional development, specializing them in working with specific age groups.*

*Find alternative sources of funding for clubs working with children to reduce coaches' dependence on membership fees.*

*Introduce a mandatory Code of Ethics for club members and parents to ensure appropriate behaviour within the club.*

*Encourage professional football players to continue their education and work with children and young people.*

*Organize a national roundtable on the role of parents in the sports upbringing of young athletes.*

*Develop seminars and conferences on sports psychology and pedagogy for adolescents in collaboration with schools and universities.*

*Consider revoking UEFA A and UEFA PRO licenses from inactive coaches, creating more opportunities for others.*

*Facilitate the direct UEFA A license for highly educated individuals.*

*Establish a fund to finance training and internships abroad for young coaches from non- top league clubs.*

*Provide coaching scholarships through a competition, similar to sports scholarships.*

*Create a national database for coaches' journals.*

*Encourage major football academies to partner with smaller clubs to share knowledge in youth player development.*

*Establish awards that recognize the work of youth coaches in the media.*

*Implement a national volunteer or social initiative involving children from different football academies to create a champion community and attract attention.*

## Research Design

**The aim of this research** was to conduct an in-depth analysis of how football coaches perceive the sports' educational and pedagogical roles, as well as to identify solutions to increase these roles. The research included desk analysis, semi-structured interviews with coaches, and two focus groups with parents of children who play football. The final report was based on national studies conducted by researchers from seven countries (Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and Portugal) using written reports in English with the research results.

**The overall goal of the research** was to use this data to develop a module and Moodle course for coaches as part of the ongoing project. Therefore, the most crucial aspect of our research was the interviews with coaches.

Young athlete football coaches were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. A total of 20 interviews were done in each country, with both "professional" and "amateur" coaches of younger age categories, ranging from 11 to 15 years old.

The first part of the report consists of desk analysis. **The goal of the desk analysis** was to obtain detailed information on the legal framework governing coaching, as well as any existing professional/scientific work on the topic at the national level. The desk analysis was intended to be analytical and insightful, and therefore valuable for further monitoring of coaching practices identified through the interviews. The results of the desk analysis are presented in the first part of this report (Chapter 2).

The second, central part of the report includes the results of **interviews with football coaches**. A total of 140 coaches from seven countries were interviewed. Prior to the interviews, participants were given information about the research and an explanation of its anonymity, and they signed their consent. Researchers used pre-defined questions throughout the interviews to obtain the desired information from the coaches. Following the interviews, the data were anonymized, saved in audio format, and a brief interview report was written. The professional and ethical aspects of the research were reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory at the University of Belgrade. The Consent Form, instructions, and interview questions are included in the document's appendix.

In open discussions, coaches shared their views on the pedagogical and educational role that football coaches currently have in the lives of young people, as well as what that role should be. They were encouraged to discuss the current situation's weaknesses and negative aspects, as well as how it could be improved and how coaching work with children could be enhanced. This is one of the key elements for the success of the whole project because, based on our analysis and report, experts will design a module and Moodle

course that outlines the training and is intended for coaches to help them improve and enhance their work and approach.

The third part of the report contains the findings of **the two focus groups with parents** of young football players in each country. Overall, 7 national focus groups were held, each comprising 16 participants per country. The goal was to explore parents' attitudes towards the pedagogical role of coaches. Based on research and analysis of interviews with coaches, the parent-coach relationship is problematic in some areas. Before we started recording, all individuals signed a consent form for recording. At the beginning, they were informed about the objectives and purpose of the research and their anonymity as participants, and that no part of the recording would be publicly released, but serve solely as evidence that the research was indeed conducted.



## Legislative framework for football trainers: comparative analysis

During the initial phase of our research, our objective was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the legal framework surrounding the coaching profession. Specifically, our aim was to compare the similarities and differences in the minimum criteria imposed on coaches when working with children across the countries under investigation. To this end, our desk research encompassed an examination of the legal framework governing coach activities, as well as the roles of national football associations in establishing more detailed regulations pertaining to coaching work.

In this regard, our study commenced with a focus on The UEFA Coaching Convention (2020), given that all countries included in our research are signatories to this convention through their respective football associations. However, while the convention strives for standardization and codification of titles and qualifications, it allows for additional regulations to be implemented by national associations. As a result, discernible disparities emerge concerning the minimum criteria for coaching children. These discrepan-

cies primarily arise due to variations between general national regulations, typically governed by sports laws, and the guidelines set forth in the UEFA convention. Notably, such differences often lead to a reduction in the requisite criteria for working with young players.

The UEFA Coaching Convention (2020)<sup>1</sup> 1 establishes a framework that outlines the rights and responsibilities concerning the UEFA coaching diplomas across various levels of football and futsal. This convention defines the minimum requirements for coach educators, admission criteria, organizational aspects, duration, content, teaching methodologies, criteria for course completion, diploma issuance, opportunities for further education, and the validity of licenses for all approved courses. Furthermore, the Convention outlines the procedures for assessing the competence of coaches educated under non-convention entities or an independent course provider (ICP). Convention is without prejudice to the right of a convention party to accept any national qualification or equivalent qualification recognized under nation-

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1 UEFA (2020) Coaching convention. Available at: [https://editorial.uefa.com/re-sources/025d-0f8430a3fa11-5122cbe26f9c-1000/uefa\\_coaching\\_convention\\_2020.pdf](https://editorial.uefa.com/re-sources/025d-0f8430a3fa11-5122cbe26f9c-1000/uefa_coaching_convention_2020.pdf)

al or European law for the purposes of domestic competitions or other coaching activities on its territory.

There are four UEFA core diplomas: the foundation C diploma, followed by B, A and UEFA Pro. While UEFA specialist diplomas include Youth B, Elite Youth A, Futsal B and the Goalkeeper B and A diplomas. According to UEFA, the number of individuals holding their valid football coaching licenses exceeds 200,000.

Officially, UEFA places significant importance on youth development as an integral component of its overarching strategy. To cater to this specific area, two distinct diplomas have been designed to provide comprehensive coach education programs that concentrate on nurturing young talent: The Youth B Diploma and the Elite Youth A Diploma. As a prerequisite for enrolment in the UEFA Youth B Diploma, participants must possess a valid UEFA B license. This program aims to equip coaches with a comprehensive understanding of effective development and coaching methodologies tailored for talented young players as they transition from grassroots or amateur levels to the elite level. Regarding the Elite Youth A Diploma,

applicants are required to hold a valid UEFA Youth B license, accompanied by at least one year of coaching experience obtained after its acquisition, or alternatively, possess a valid UEFA A license. This course concentrates on the progressive stages of a player's development, with a specific focus on aspiring professional players transitioning from elite to professional football during the pivotal phase spanning adolescence to adulthood.

As per syllabus of minimum content for Youth B diploma<sup>2</sup>, the goal of the program is that future holder must have a comprehensive understanding of how to develop and coach potentially talented young players transitioning from grassroots or amateur level to elite level. Proficiency in four key areas is expected from license holders: Working with players in the period of maturation; Working with players of different cultural backgrounds; Working closely with support staff to develop player potential; and Encouraging involvement of and interaction with parents. Overall, the program is designed to enable the future coach to recognize and develop the potential of young players: the focus is rather on adapting to the physical and bio-

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2 UEFA (2020) Coaching Convention Syllabus of minimum content: UEFA Youth B diploma. Available at: [https://editorial.uefa.com/resources/0267-11ec0776a92c-961eea6c340d-1000/uefa\\_youth\\_b\\_diploma\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://editorial.uefa.com/resources/0267-11ec0776a92c-961eea6c340d-1000/uefa_youth_b_diploma_2020_en.pdf)

logical capabilities of the players and their proper development, rather than on recognizing psychological barriers and specificities. Only one module of this program includes “Care and welfare,” and it is focused on Injury prevention and knowing basic first aid. However, during this module, the coach is expected to know the club’s code of conduct, as well as the “Child Safeguarding Toolkit” for UEFA member associations. The program aims to enable prospective coaches to identify and cultivate the inherent potential of young players, with a primary emphasis on aligning coaching methodologies with the physical and biological capabilities of the players, rather than focusing on the recognition of psychological barriers. Notably, module within the program, titled “Care and Welfare,” covers topics such as injury prevention and basic first aid. However, it is expected that coaches possess a comprehensive understanding of the club’s code of conduct and familiarize themselves with the “Child Safeguarding Toolkit” established by UEFA member associations during this module.

Aimed at grassroots coaches, the C Diploma also covers similar module with topics such as child safeguarding, basic first aid and the importance of promoting a healthy, active lifestyle<sup>3</sup>. Rather than being goal setting focused like Youth B diploma, this basic C diploma has holistic approach.

In syllabuses for UEFA C or UEFA B Youth diploma courses, UEFA refers to a toolkit aimed at safeguarding children involved in European football. This toolkit comprises a set of guiding principles that serve as a framework for national associations to implement measures ensuring the protection and welfare of children. The toolkit, accompanied by additional resources, has been specifically developed to assist national associations in proactively safeguarding children, preventing abuse, and effectively responding to any issues that may arise.

This “Child Safeguarding Toolkit” covered in both syllabi is built around 5 goals<sup>4</sup>:

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3 UEFA (2020) Coaching Convention Syllabus of minimum content: UEFA C diploma. Available at: [https://editorial.uefa.com/resources/0267-11ec01b-ba280-63cf6747f768-1000/uefa\\_diploma\\_c\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://editorial.uefa.com/resources/0267-11ec01b-ba280-63cf6747f768-1000/uefa_diploma_c_2020_en.pdf)

4 UEFA (2020) Child Safeguarding Toolkit For UEFA Member Associations. Available at: <https://uefa-safeguarding.eu/sites/default/files/2020-04/UEFA%20Toolkit%20--%20English.pdf>

**Goal 1:** *Laying the foundation of safeguarding (This includes providing definitions of child, safeguarding, and abuse or harm, as well as clear policy statements/commitments to safeguarding)*

**Goal 2:** *Ensuring organizational preparedness and prevention. (This includes establishing procedures and practices that will help to prevent situations of abuse.)*

**Goal 3:** *Raising awareness. (This includes making sure that safeguarding measures are implemented and do not remain on a shelf. Efforts include raising awareness, training and communication. Education and communication are essential to ensure understanding of safeguarding measures and principles and what they mean for everyone in football.)*

**Goal 4:** *Working with others and reporting concerns. (This includes responding to concerns if they arise and establishing how outside agencies should be involved in efforts to protect children.)*

**Goal 5:** *Measuring success in safeguarding. This includes monitoring progress and identifying good practices to share with others working in football.*

The toolkit consists of important templates such as “Child safeguarding policy for national associations”, “General risk assessment”, “Code of conduct for adults”, “Code of conduct for parents”, “Behavior code for children”. But even though “Child Safeguarding Toolkit” is inclusive and valuable, it is still only a toolkit that focuses on safeguarding and prevention. Furthermore, it is reasonable to raise the question regarding whether individuals possess the essential knowledge and resources to

assume such a role (it is worth noting that attaining a C license requires a minimum age of 18).

Moreover, UEFA Coaching Convention 2020 states that it is without prejudice to the right of a convention party to accept any national qualification or equivalent qualification recognized under national or European law for the purposes of domestic competitions or other coaching activities on its territory. So, although the Convention largely regulates and unifies the cri-

teria for being called a coach, among the signatories of the convention there may be differences regarding the conditions for the work of a coach, especially at the lowest levels that include

## Bulgaria

The primary legislation governing this field is the **Law on Physical Education and Sports**<sup>5</sup>, which places the responsibility for training sports specialists and enhancing their qualifications on the State. The Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) and the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) are tasked with regulating processes related to coaching personnel. Universities specializing in physical education and sports are responsible for providing training and qualifications for sports-pedagogical and coaching staff.

MYS has implemented Ordinance 1 for coaching personnel since 2019, which outlines the requirements for occupying positions and establishes the conditions and procedures for registering coaching staff with the Ministry. The Ordinance specifies the minimum educational requirements and experience necessary for different levels

working with youngsters. Therefore, it is necessary to consider each of the countries that are the subject of this work.

within the coaching hierarchy. It also includes scheduled hours for training these personnel. However, there is a provision in the Ordinance that allows football coaches to bypass the mentioned educational requirements. Although higher education is generally required for coaches, this rule does not apply to individuals who hold an international qualification in education and athlete training, recognized in more than five countries and obtained based on standards and rules set by an international sports organization. This provision essentially aligns with UEFA's regulations.

The Bulgarian Football Union (BFU) operates with two documents that define the requirements for coaches. Firstly, there is the Statute of the football coach in the BFU system, which explicitly states that only individuals licensed by the Bulgarian Football Coaching School (CS) can prac-

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5 UEFA (2020) Child Safeguarding Toolkit For UEFA Member Associations. Available at: <https://uefa-safeguarding.eu/sites/default/files/2020-04/UEFA%20Toolkit%20--%20English.pdf>

tice the coaching profession<sup>6</sup>. The CS Regulations determine who can participate in the licensing process, when, and how. The services provided by the school are fee-based, and the requirements for applicants only include secondary education, without emphasizing the pedagogical skills of future coaches. The objective of the Coaching School is to train and qualify football coaching staff from both Bulgaria and abroad, following the UEFA Convention on Mutual Recognition of Coaching Qualifications.

The BFU system conducts training and qualification of football coaches through the CS in two tracks. One track is designed for applicants with secondary education, preparing them for coaching roles in amateur football clubs and qualifying them for professional football clubs. The second track is for students from the National Sports Academy (NSA). Coaches who have obtained a bachelor's or master's professional qualification at the NSA study for 8-10 semesters (4-5 years). They also need to pass a state exam. In the CS program, the total hours required for each level are approximately 240-300 hours. This structure often discourages aspiring football professionals from pursuing in-depth higher

education, as they typically opt for the "fast track" of the CS and a coaching license to work in football.

Within the BFU system, different qualification levels have been established based on legal capacity. These include Football instructor with Certificate, Assistant football coach with BFU C license, Football coach with UEFA B license, Senior football coach with a UEFA A license, Head football coach with UEFA PRO license, and specialized licenses. Coaches holding a Certificate, which represents the lowest level of licensing, are exclusively permitted to work with children aged 6-7. Coaches with a UEFA C license are eligible to serve as coaches in the Third and Fourth leagues (men) and work with youth teams, but they must work under the supervision of someone holding a higher license. With a UEFA B license, coaches can become head coaches in the Third and Fourth leagues (men), the Women's Championship, and all youth teams outside the Elite groups. A UEFA A license allows coaches to train teams across the entire Bulgarian football system, including men's and youth Elite groups, except for the First League, where a UEFA PRO license is required. In professional football teams participat-

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6 BFS (2020) Статут На Треньора По Футбол В Системата На БФС. Available at: <https://bfcs.bg/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/StatutNaTreniora.pdf>

ing in the First and Second Leagues, it is mandatory to have a Director of the Youth Academy holding a UEFA A license. For the U19 team, a UEFA A license is required, while the U17 team requires a UEFA B license, and the U15 team requires a UEFA B license (unless the U17 or U15 team is part of

## Croatia

Most football schools in Croatia operate as part of football clubs that also have senior teams. However, there are football schools that function independently and are officially recognized under the provisions of the Law on Sports. To operate as a football school, they must be registered as a citizens' association and employ licensed coaches holding UEFA licenses or graduates of the Faculty of Kinesiology. It should be noted that football school teams are not permitted to participate in the state championship system for pioneer, cadet, and junior competitions unless they have their own senior team. So, it is only possible to compete in younger age groups within regional competitions and in the youth cup competition.

In terms of licensing, the framework largely aligns with the licensing programs implemented by European sports associations. Within Croatian football, the structures and governing

an Elite group, in which case a UEFA A license is necessary). In academies associated with the Third League and the Women's Championship, there should be a minimum of two UEFA C licensed coaches. For the Fourth League, one UEFA C licensed coach is required.

bodies of the Croatian Football Association (HNS) oversee the implementation of the

Law on Sports, and the licensing system adheres to the standards set by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). The Croatian Football Association is responsible for organizing coaching education through its own Academy and obtaining a license from this institution is a prerequisite for coaching within the club system. The licensing system comprises various levels, including UEFA C, B, A, and UEFA Pro licenses. Additionally, a newly introduced UEFA A Youth license is available for those working with younger age groups. Diplomas awarded by the Faculty of Kinesiology are also recognized, allowing individuals who have completed undergraduate studies in football or hold the KIF A qualification to be considered equivalent to UEFA licenses.

The new Rulebook on the work of football coaches, which was adopted by the Executive Board of the Croatian Football Association in 2022, provided somewhat stricter conditions for the work of coaches with younger categories<sup>7</sup>. Thus, for the lowest fourth level of competition, for work with juniors and cadets, a UEFA B license, or a National B license issued by HNS or an equivalent university degree with specialization in football, or a KIF B degree is necessary<sup>8</sup>. With a UEFA C license, it is only possible to be a coach of junior pioneers and pioneers, or an assistant coach of juniors and cadets.

Empirical evidence has highlighted a noticeable shortage of professionally

qualified and well-educated coaching personnel in the field of football, particularly in smaller regions situated further away from the capital city of Zagreb, where all training and education takes place, although kinesiology faculties, apart from the capital city, still exist in Split and Osijek. In such cases, the Law on Sports allows for more lenient criteria, permitting clubs to employ individuals without the requisite qualifications, on the condition that mentoring is provided. Notably, mentoring arrangements commonly involve younger trainers who are currently enrolled in the Faculty of Kinesiology or any level of the HNS Academy.

## Greece

In Greece, the Hellenic Football Federation (EPO) is the governing body responsible for the organization and promotion of football at all levels, in-

cluding youth development. The EPO has established comprehensive guidelines and criteria for the selection and training of coaches across various lev-

7 HNS (2022) Pravilnik o dozvolama za rad nogometnih trenera i registracijama za vođenje ekipa u natjecanju te dozvolama za rad sportskih direktora i voditelja škola nogometa. Available at: <https://hns-cff.hr/files/documents/24408/Pravilnik%20o%20dozvolama%20za%20rad%20nogometnih%20trenera%20i%20regi%20stracijama%20za%20vo%C4%91enje%20ekipa%20u%20natjecanju%20te%20dozvolama%20za%20rad%20sportskih%20direktora%20i%20voditel.pdf>

8 Interestingly, Syllabus B contains only kinesiology articles: <https://hns-cff.hr/files/documents/8489/Prirucnik%20B.pdf>



els of competition, with a specific focus on youth teams<sup>9</sup>. These guidelines are designed to ensure that coaches possess the necessary education and qualifications to effectively work with young players and foster their football skills, knowledge, and values, and according to these guidelines, coaches of youth teams are required to meet certain criteria, which includes holding a coaching license issued by the EPO or another recognized football association, such as UEFA.

In Greece, there are different categories of football coaches, including UEFA C, UEFA C+, UEFA B, UEFA A, UEFA-PRO, National Goalkeeping C, National Futsal, UEFA Futsal B, UEFA Goalkeeping B, UEFA Goalkeeping A, UEFA Football Fitness, UEFA Youth B, and UEFA A Elite Youth. And to work as a coach in Greece, individuals must hold a diploma from the Football Coaching School of E.P.O. - UEFA, in accordance with the guidelines of the UEFA Convention, or possess

diplomas from recognized coaching schools.

The legislation also grants permission to graduates of Schools of Physical Education and Sport Science (S.E.F.A.A.A.) from Greek universities with a major in the sport of football, provided they obtained special recognition of equivalence from the Hellenic Football Federation.

In general, the level of professional education needed for coaching positions within football clubs is explicitly outlined in the Guidelines of the National Football Association. A university degree is not mandatory to work as a football coach, as the EPO has created a system where individuals, regardless of prior education or profession, can apply for a work permit and work with children under equal conditions. In other words, possessing a UEFA title signifies the qualification of an individual for the coaching role.

## North Macedonia

According to the Law on Sport, professional personnel in the field of sports are individuals who have completed higher education in sports or have ob-

tained licenses issued by relevant international sports associations. These qualified individuals are authorized to lead sports training and competitions

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9 Hellenic Football Federation. (n.d.). Coaching Licences. Available at: <https://www.epo.gr/CoachingLicences.aspx>

for representatives of national sports federations. Additionally, the national sports federations of the Republic are responsible for establishing and implementing programs for professional development in their respective sports branches.

In both UEFA and the Football Federation of Macedonia, the C, B, A, and PRO licenses are considered core diplomas within the coaching education framework. The Football Federation of Macedonia carries out coaching education through its Educational Centre, which operates under the federation.

## Portugal

The legal framework governing the profession of sports coaching in Portugal is established by Law no. 40/2012<sup>10</sup>. This law outlines the regulatory measures for the recognition, validation, and certification of qualifications in the field of sport and physical activity. It mandates that sports coaches must hold certification from the Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth (IPDJ) to practice their profession. To obtain this certification, individuals must complete a designated training course in sports training that is recognized by the IPDJ. Furthermore, the law emphasizes the

importance of ethical conduct and adherence to professional principles for sports coaches. These principles include respecting the physical and moral well-being of athletes, promoting a safe and healthy approach to physical activity, and maintaining confidentiality in professional matters. In addition to Law No. 40/2012, there are other relevant laws and regulations that may apply to sports coaching in specific contexts. For instance, regulations governing sports in educational institutions may stipulate specific requirements for coaches working in

With a UEFA C license, coaches are eligible to work with the youngest adult categories, commonly referred to as Grassroots categories, primarily focusing on children up to 12 years old. The UEFA B license allows coaches to train youth categories of football players, typically ranging from 13 to 18 years old, who are not part of elite youth football. For coaches primarily involved in Elite Youth Football, which includes the First or Super Leagues in this context, a UEFA A license is required for coaching youth and cadet teams.

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10 Decreto-Lei no. 40/2012. Available at: <https://files.dre.pt/1s/2012/08/16600/0475304758.pdf>

school settings. Similarly, regulations pertaining to the organization of sporting events may establish criteria for the training and certification of coaches involved in those events. Moreover, it is worth noting that the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) has its own set of regulations and criteria for football coaches. These regulations may specify qualifications or experience

necessary for coaching at different levels of competition.

In Portugal, youth football coaches are bound by specific regulations and laws that pertain to the organization and management of youth football teams and competitions. These regulations include:

*Regulations of the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF): The FPF has established specific regulations that govern various aspects of youth football, such as age groups of players and the level of competition. Different regulations are in place for different age categories, such as U13, U15, and U17.*

*Child Protection Law: Decree-Law no. 147/99<sup>11</sup>, also known as the Child Protection Law, is a crucial piece of legislation that aims to prevent and address child abuse and neglect, including within the realm of sports activities. Youth football coaches have a responsibility to safeguard the physical and moral well-being of their players and are required to promptly report any suspected cases of abuse or neglect.*

*IPDJ Regulation: The Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth (IPDJ)<sup>12</sup> has implemented regulations that specifically address the certification of youth football coaches and the organization of sports activities for young individuals. It is mandatory for football coaches working with youth teams to hold certification from the IPDJ and adhere to the institute's ethical and deontological principles.*

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11 Decreto-Lei no. 147/99. Available at: <https://extranet.who.int/mindbank/item/5186>

12 IPDJ (n.d.) National Plan for Ethics in Sport. Available at: <https://pned.ipdj.gov.pt/npse>

The National Coach Training Program (PNFT) in Portugal establishes four qualifying grades for football coaches, each reflecting a specific set of skills and responsibilities and defining the scope and level of their involvement. The coaching courses organized by the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) provide a dual certification accredited by the UEFA Coaching Convention and the PNFT. Upon completion of each grade, trainees receive the corresponding UEFA certification, enabling them to function within the UEFA space and in countries that recognize it. Additionally, they obtain the IPDJ certification, which is necessary to acquire the Professional Title of Sports Coach (TPTD) and obtain legal authorization to practice the profession in Portugal.

## Serbia

The Law on Sport<sup>13</sup> of the Republic of Serbia emphasizes that professional and educational work with children can only be performed by sports experts who have relevant higher education in the field of physical education and sports, or who, in addition to basic professional qualifications, have special expertise for working with children. On the other hand, the same law

The four grades of the PNFT align with the UEFA licenses, with Grau 1 being equivalent to UEFA C, and Grau 4 corresponding to UEFA Pro. Equivalencies with university degrees are possible for individuals who have completed a sports-related degree recognized by both the Portuguese Football Association (FPF) and the Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth (IPDJ). Specifically, a bachelor's degree or equivalent, such as a vocational high-school diploma, can lead to a UEFA C equivalency, a master's degree to UEFA B, and a doctorate's degree to UEFA A. With a UEFA C (Grau 1) certification, coaches can oversee all youth categories except under-17 onwards, and serve as assistant coaches for youth and senior teams up to the 3rd National League level.

states that an international work permit issued to a sports professional by a competent international sports federation or the relevant national sports federation in accordance with the rules of the competent international sports federation is considered a valid work permit under this law. Although it may seem that an international permit is not sufficient for working with children, the

13 Zakon o sportu (2016) Available at: <https://www.mos.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/Zakon%20o%20sportu%202016..pdf>

practice of the Football Association of Serbia (FSS), which renews and re-voles permits, does not indicate such a strict interpretation.

On the basis of the UEFA Convention, FSS adopted new Regulations that regulate the work, profiling, education and status of coaches<sup>14</sup>. According to the Rulebook on the issuance of work permits and the status of coaches, there are the following UEFA licenses for coaches: UEFA PRO, UEFA A, UEFA B, UEFA C, UEFA B GK, UEFA A GK, UEFA Youth B, UEFA A Elite Youth, UEFA B Futsal. In addition, there are licenses of the National Football Association of Serbia: FSS PRO, FSS A, FSS B, FSS C, FSS D, FSS Futsal, FSS Goalkeeper Coach, FSS Physical Preparation Coach and

FSS PRO Club Management. The required level of education for working in the club, the status and function of a coach of a certain level of competition, is defined in the Rulebook on professional work of the FSS. Regarding the different age categories in youth competitions, specific coaching licenses are required for each level. In the second (lowest) tier of youth competitions (territorial leagues), coaches must possess a UEFA C license or FSS D license for coaching the U-10 category. For coaching the U-13 category, a UEFA B license is necessary, while coaching the U-15, U-17, and U-19 categories requires a UEFA B Youth license. The requirements become more stringent for higher-level leagues.

## Turkey

The primary legislation governing football and other sports branches in Turkey is the Sports Clubs and Sports Federations Law, referred to as the Sports Law. Within this law, two specific articles pertain to the football branch, one regulating football player

managers and the other addressing the operations of the Turkish Football Federation (TFF)<sup>15</sup>. The responsibility for athlete, youth, and coach training is delegated to the federations and the General Directorate of Youth and Sports, a state institution under the

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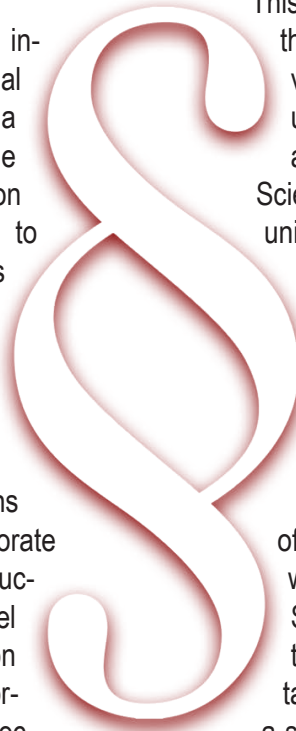
14 FSS (2022) Pravidnik o stručnom radu Fudbalskog Saveza Srbije. Available at: <https://fss.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Pravidnik-o-strucnom-radu-FSS-1.pdf?script=lat>

15 Spor Kulüpleri ve Spor Federasyonları Kanunu, Kanun No. 7405. Available at: <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2022/04/20220426-8.htm>

Ministry of Youth and Sports. Another significant law relevant to this study is the Law on the Establishment and Duties of the Turkish Football Federation<sup>16</sup>.

To train younger categories, individuals who meet the legal requirements can obtain a Grassroots C license from the Turkish Football Federation (TFF). Candidates seeking to work with younger categories must be at least 23 years old and have completed high school education<sup>17</sup>. While coaches are not bound by specific laws, the state establishes regulations through the General Directorate and the TFF issues instructions, which form lower-level sets of rules. The “Regulation on Education of Trainers” formulated by the General Directorate of Youth and Sports<sup>18</sup>. These levels are as follows: Level I (Assistant Trainer): They work alongside the senior coach; Level II: They work with younger categories. (6-10 years & 11-

14 years); Level III: They work in the young categories (15-17 years); Level IV: They work in senior and national teams, as the Level V.



This regulation also governs the requirements for individuals who have graduated from undergraduate programs in Sports Sciences Faculties at Turkish universities to become trainers in sports clubs, but the specific conditions for becoming a trainer may vary depending on the department of graduation. According to the “Regulation on Education of Trainers,” individuals who have completed the Sports Coaching Education program under certain conditions can obtain a senior coaching certificate

[Level III]. The same regulation outlines the conditions for graduates from departments such as “Physical Education and Sports Teacher Education” to obtain a basic coaching

16 Türkiye Futbol Federasyonu Kuruluş ve Görevleri Hakkında Kanun, Kanun No. 5894. Available at: <https://www.tff.org/Resources/TFF/Documents/TFF-KANUN-STATU/TFF-Kurulus-ve-Gorevleri-Hakkinda-Kanun.pdf>

17 Teknik Yönetici ve Öğretici Talimatı. Available at: <http://www.tff.org/Resources/TFF/Documents/TFF/talimatlar/Teknik-Y%C3%B6netici-ve-Ogretici-Talimati.pdf>

18 Regulation on Education of Trainers. Available at: <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2019/12/20191214-2.htm>

certificate [Level II], provided they meet additional requirements. Moreover, the requirements for graduates of Sports Sciences Faculties to become trainers in football clubs are outlined in the “Trainer License Courses Instruction” issued by the Turkish Football Federation (TFF)<sup>19</sup>. According to this instruction, graduates from the Sports Coaching Education department with a specialization in football are directly eligible to receive the TFF Grassroots C certificate and become official trainers in football schools. However, those who have graduated from this department but have not specialized in football can obtain a TFF D License (Grassroots Volunteer Leadership)<sup>20</sup>.

An important document is the TFF’s Instructions for Football Schools<sup>21</sup>. The purpose of these instructions is to establish criteria for the physical infrastructure conditions in football schools, define the content of training programs, and set standards for

trainers. The instructions also outline the procedures and principles for issuing qualification certificates to football schools. However, ethical guidelines are covered in a separate document called the “School Football Code of Ethics,” published by the TFF. The Code of Ethics aims to uphold the values underlying School Football and includes recommendations for the physical protection of children as well as measures to safeguard their mental well-being, such as preventing excessive pressure, physical and emotional violence, sexual abuse, and discouraging rude and abusive behaviour.

In summarizing, the national Sports Law regulates the conditions for coaching work in most countries. Sports laws recognize the authority of national federations in implementing procedures, although certain responsibilities may be delegated to specialized bodies such as the Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth or the

19 Trainer License Courses Instruction. Available at: <https://www.tff.org/Resources/TFF/Documents/002011/TFF/Talimatlar/AntrenorLisansKurslariTalimati-28.12.2010.pdf>

20 Anyone who wants to apply for TFF Grassroots C License must have “TFF Grassroots Volunteer Leader License and at least 36 months have passed or must have been registered as an amateur football player for at least 3 seasons.” TFF Grassroots C License is also a prerequisite for the application of Children’s Football Coaching License Certificate Program. Teknik Adamların Eğitimi ve Sınıflandırılması Talimatı Available at: <https://www.tff.org/Resources/TFF/Documents/TALIMATLAR/Teknik-Adamlar-in-E%C4%9Fitimi-ve- Sınıflandırılması-Talimati.pdf>

21 Futbol Okulları Talimatı, 2010 Available at: <https://www.tff.org/Resources/TFF/Documents/TALIMATLAR/Futbol Okullari Talimati-Nisan-2010.pdf>

Turkish General Directorate of Youth and Sports. However, even in such cases, national federations play a crucial role in the licensing process. Our research has shown that while national sports laws can be strict and require higher education for coaching positions, they acknowledge international diplomas such as UEFA licenses as the necessary minimum requirement. As a result, aspiring coaches are not motivated to acquire knowledge through formal higher education, as a secondary school education combined with a UEFA license issued by football associations is sufficient. However, UEFA licenses do not require a comparable number of working hours as equivalent higher education degrees. Therefore, besides the fact that the UEFA curriculum for obtaining basic licenses is quite basic in terms of competencies for working with children, it remains uncertain how much effective time is devoted to module processing.

When discussing the necessary or minimum requirements for working with children and youth, it is evident that one can become a football coach at the age of 18 or so, with only a high school education and virtually no pedagogical qualifications.

Furthermore, even when there is a progression in terms of required licenses when national football associations

demand higher licenses for working with older age groups or in higher-level competitions, we observe that the lowest criteria are set for working with the youngest children. Therefore, if one wishes to gain the necessary coaching experience to apply for a higher license, they are directed to work with the youngest categories for which they lack the necessary pedagogical and educational competencies. The hierarchical logic is established in a way that coaches learn their profession and build their careers starting from the youngest categories.



# INTERVIEWS WITH TRAINERS



## Research Methodology

Our research aimed to explore how coaches working with junior and youth teams perceive the pedagogical and educational aspects of their job. Additionally, we sought to analyse the challenges faced by grassroots football development, focusing on the experiences and difficulties encountered by these coaches. The research consisted of three phases. During the first phase, we conducted a desk study to gain insights into the specificities of the countries included in the research. In the second phase, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 coaches per country. Finally, in the last phase, we organized two focus groups with parents of children attending training sessions.

The research dynamics depended on finding expert collaborators at the national level. Since the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory at the University of Belgrade led this work package, we started the research in Serbia. The second team involved in the research was the research team in North Macedonia, which also consisted of project collaborators. Through personal contacts of team members, teams in Croatia, Bulgaria, and Greece were identified and engaged. Finally, after a search lasting several weeks, experts responsible

for conducting research in Turkey and Portugal were found and engaged. As the engagement of collaborators took longer than two months, and the work package itself lasted just over five months, meeting deadlines posed a challenge. It was particularly challenging as the research was not conducted completely in parallel in all countries. In some countries, the research was nearing completion in the second phase when it was just beginning in others. However, this had a certain advantage as communication obstacles and task expectations could be more easily overcome with individual researchers.

Multilingualism presented a significant challenge for all teams and researchers involved in the research. Due to language barriers, all materials produced in Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, and Portugal had to be fully translated into English to be processed by researchers at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory (IFDT).

The first phase of the research, which focused on national specificities, particularly in terms of legislation, was conducted without major issues. The desk study aimed to examine the minimum requirements that coaches need to meet for working with the youngest

age groups, as well as the relationship between national legislation and the position of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA).

The second phase of the research, involving interviews with coaches, presented several challenges for the team. Recruitment of coaches was particularly challenging. In several cases, the project partners provided valuable assistance in initiating contacts with coaches in several cases, which later led to a snowball effect in reaching other participants. However, in some cases, the researchers did not have the support of partners from the consortium, which significantly slowed down the recruitment of coaches. In such cases, the researchers had to randomly contact clubs to find interested participants. Nevertheless, in these situations, coaches were not motivated to participate in the research, primarily due to the estimated interview duration of 45-60 minutes, which, considering travel time, required a significant amount of time for which they received no financial compensation. The researchers also struggled to align with the coaches' available time or accommodate their rescheduled interview appointments. While the researchers aimed to conduct most interviews face-to-face, time constraints led to the use of platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet for conducting

interviews. These platforms were used not only due to time constraints but also because the researchers were unable to meet the participants in person due to geographic distances. The geographical distribution of interviewed coaches was directly related to the researchers' work locations. For example, all interviewed coaches in Greece were from the Thessaloniki region, where the researcher was located. On the other hand, none of the interviewed coaches in Croatia were from Zagreb but from a region several hundred kilometres away from the country's capital. In Serbia, all participants were from the capital city. Although this territorial bias is not methodologically desirable, it was influenced by the available material and organizational resources.

The participants were selected regardless of age, gender, years of experience, or possession of a license, as the main requirement was their willingness to participate in the research. The main condition was that they were involved in coaching and had experience working with junior categories at some point in their careers. The youngest coach was 19 years old, while the oldest was 66 years old. The participants were predominantly male, with female coaches being exceptions, except in Greece. In that deviation, we had four female participants,

which was a result of personal contacts made by the researchers. However, many male coaches included in the study also had experience working with women's teams. Within the national context, 20 coaches were interviewed in each country, representing a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 15 different entities (clubs, football schools, futsal clubs, etc.).

The participants were provided with detailed information about their rights as participants, which included voluntary participation, the right to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of their data. Prior to participating in the semi-structured interviews, all individuals involved in the study gave explicit and informed consent. The interviews were conducted by the authors, who have expertise in qualitative research on related topics. They took place in a private setting and in the participants' native language, with an average duration of 45-60 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 17 minutes and the longest 2.5 hours. The interviewer used various strategies, such as open-ended questions, empathetic listening, and contextualizing current events, when necessary, to facilitate the inductive exploration of unforeseen dialogues. Additionally, the interviewer allowed for deviations from the inter-

view protocol by using moments of silence and encouraging discussions that may have seemed unrelated to the initial inquiry. The interviews were transcribed in their entirety without any modifications. To minimize the likelihood of socially desirable responses, the participants were provided with an explanation of the research objectives, guaranteed anonymity, and were encouraged to speak candidly.

In Bulgaria, 20 coaches from 16 clubs in 10 cities/towns (ranging from the capital Sofia to a small town with 30,000 inhabitants) participated in the interviews. These coaches have experience in youth football and lead teams from U11 to U15 age groups. Among them, 10 (48%) hold UEFA A licenses, 8 (38%) have UEFA B licenses, and 3 (14%) have UEFA C licenses or currently do not possess a football license. Eleven participants (52%) have secondary education, while ten (48%) have higher education. Some of the participants have higher education outside the field of sports, while others are currently students. Nine participants (43%) acquired part of their knowledge and skills abroad, while twelve (57%) obtained them exclusively in Bulgaria. Two-thirds of the participants express a desire to upgrade their licenses. The interviewed individuals include head coaches, assistants, analysts, and fitness spe-

cialists. They observe the work with children from different perspectives on a daily basis. Some coaches are club owners, some are employed, and for others, working with children is an additional activity outside their primary job. The average age of the participants is slightly over 37 years. Fourteen specialists (67%) work in professional clubs, while seven (33%) work in amateur clubs. On average, they have 10 years of coaching experience. One of them exclusively works with girls. Only two of them have had a career at the highest level of Bulgarian football. Seven participants (33%) have been part of the club's coaching staff, while the remaining fourteen (67%) have worked exclusively in youth football. Three-quarters of them want their entire careers to relate to youth football.

In Croatia, out of the 20 interviewed individuals, 18 were males and 2 were females. This gender distribution is not considered a deficiency in the interviews since most football coaches are males. Only two coaches did not possess any coaching licenses. The interviewed individuals were mostly younger people studying at the Faculty of Kinesiology and attending the Football Academy of the Croatian Football Federation, where they acquire licenses. They conduct training sessions and matches under the su-

pervision of older, licensed coaches, in accordance with the law. One participant holds the highest FIFA Pro license, and another participant holds a KIF A license, which is equivalent to UEFA licenses according to the law, as it is a specialized study program for football coaches at the Faculty of Kinesiology. Two participants hold licenses for coaching futsal teams, which are different from licenses for traditional football. Additionally, two female participants also hold licenses and attended the Football Academy of the Croatian Football Federation, indicating that there are no differences in the education between female and male coaches in football. Most participants have completed university or higher education, while some are still studying at undergraduate and graduate levels. Only one participant has completed a three-year high school program. The youngest participant is 18 years old, while the two oldest participants are 48 years old. The age distribution could be considered a limitation of the conducted study since none of the participants were over 50 years old. Two participants have less than a year of experience as coaches or working with younger age groups. Among the participants, no one had more than 20 years of experience. Some of them had previously had notable careers as first-league players,

which allowed them to obtain UEFA C licenses and progress faster than their colleagues who did not have sufficient appearances in the first league.

In the research conducted in Greece, twenty football coaches participated, four of whom were women. The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 55 years, with an average age of 34.2 years. The highest level of education among the participants was as follows: six of them had a bachelor's degree from the Department of Physical Education and Sport Science (DPESS), six had obtained a master's degree, and three had completed a doctorate at DPESS. One participant had a high vocational qualification other than physical education, two had completed vocational school, and two had finished high school. Five participants held a UEFA A license, seven had a UEFA B license, five had a UEFA C license, one had a Goalkeeping Pro license, and two did not possess any UEFA license. On average, the participants had 10.55 years of coaching experience and 7.9 years of experience working with younger age groups.

In Portugal of the 20 people interviewed, 19 identified as a man and 1 identified as a woman. This is not abnormal, as most coaches in Portugal are men. A total of 17 coach male teams, and the other 3 coach a fe-

male team. The youngest interviewed was 21 years old, the oldest was 66 years old, with the average age of the interviewed being approximately 33 years old. A total of 4 people has a secondary school diploma, with 2 of them currently attending university, 9 people have a university degree and 7 people have a master's degree. In terms of licenses, 3 interviewed don't have a football coaching license, although two of them are currently studying to obtain a UEFA C license. Of those with licenses, 10 have a UEFA C license (Level 1), 3 have a UEFA B license (Level 2), and 4 have a UEFA A license (Level 3). None had a UEFA PRO license. As per total experience, the years of experience range from 4 years' experience to 30 years' experience. In total experience in youth categories, the years of experience range from 4 years' experience to 22 years' experience. From a total of 20 people interviewed, only 5 (25% of the sample) of them coach as a full-time job, with the other 15 indicating that they coach as a secondary or part-time job.

In North Macedonia eight coaches were college graduates, two were two-year college graduates, and ten were high school graduates. They all held A, B, or C licenses, and two of them also had professional licenses. The interview featured 20 coaches, 12 of whom were older, experienced coaches and

8 of whom were young coaches with two years of experience. Most coaches who work with young children have one or two extra jobs to supplement their income. Coaching is viewed as an extracurricular activity or amateurism, thus while they are initially motivated, their motivation and satisfaction diminish over time. They stated a desire for advancement and further growth, but they considered that financial support should be supplied by the club or the federation, given the low living standards and the ambiguous status of the coaching profession.

In Serbia, 20 out of 50 contacted trainers participated in the study. Three interviews were conducted over Google Zoom platform, while the remaining 17 have been realized in person, through direct communication between the researcher and correspondent. Most of the 20 interviewed coaches were between 20-30 years old, while only a few respondents were over 30. All respondents were male. Coaches of youth categories were mostly younger individuals (20-30 years old), often with 5-10 years of experience, and they are still in the

process of professional development.

In Turkey, in the study, the field research part of which lasted a total of 2 months (March-May), we conducted in-depth interviews with a total of 20 coaches, 8 of whom worked in amateur and 12 in professional teams, through a semi-structured questionnaire. All of the coaches we interviewed who work in amateur teams work in clubs in Istanbul, while those who work in professional teams work in the following cities in addition to Istanbul: Antalya, Ankara, Balıkesir, Bursa and Samsun. Although most interviews were conducted face-to-face, the coaches working in provinces other than Istanbul were interviewed via Zoom. Face-to-face interviews were held sometimes in club buildings and sometimes in cafe-type venues preferred by the participants. The age distribution of the participants is between 25-63 years old. As football is still a largely male-dominated sport in Turkey, all participants we interviewed were male. However, although we tried to reach out, it was not possible for us to interview a female trainer.

## Analysis of semi-structured interviews

This study is based on interviews with football coaches working with younger age groups. A total of 20 semi-structured

interviews were conducted with youth coaches in each of the seven countries (141 in total) for the general



purposes of the project. These interviews aimed to gain insights into the use of informal education by coaches, their methods of communication and interaction with young athletes, adherence to ethical standards, recognition and response to negative phenomena in sports, difficulties and challenges they encounter in their work and how to address them, recommendations for the development of coaching and pedagogical work with young people, and so on.

Therefore, we divided our analysis into six parts. In the first part, we will present the formal and informal education that coaches go through and how they perceive its significance. The second part will focus on the structure of training itself, outlining the activities coaches undertake. The pedagogical role of

coaches and the recognition of their main mission in working with younger age groups will be discussed in the third section, and the perception of the respondents about the importance and challenges of the trainers/parents' relations seen from both sides will be the focus of the fourth part of the analysis. The fifth part will centre on ethical challenges and the sixth will depict how coaches themselves imagine an ideal type of the working setting and provide some suggestions for improving their work and. The final section of the study will be dedicated to conclusions and recommendations, which, along with a review of the findings, will highlight their relevance and offer suggestions and proposal on improving the trainers' role, situation and work overall in particular countries and beyond.



## 1. Formal vs Informal Education of Trainers

*Diplomas come second, love for children comes first. Because what if you have 10-20 diplomas, but you can't transfer all the knowledge you possess to the children? Of course, I prefer working with coaches who combine both diploma and love and patience for children. (trainer, Greece)*

*I would really emphasize the importance of formal education, especially in a pedagogical sense, considering that we work with developing children. (trainer, Serbia)*

The examined coaches have an average of eight to ten years of experience in coaching. Whether they are beginner coaches or coaches with experience in working with younger age groups or seniors, **all coaches generally consider self-improvement and personal development crucial in the coaching process.** However, **opinions are divided when it comes to the benefits of formal education and obtaining UEFA licenses.** Some of the respondents view education as a prerequisite for leading a team, while others believe that attending seminars and obtaining certifications can provide them with new knowledge related to coaching that they did not have

before. On one hand, there are those with higher education who believe that their academic background and four to five years of college give them an advantage. On the other hand, there are colleagues with vocational training who feel they had more time for practical experience and choose only topics relevant to them through courses both domestically and internationally. Although formal education, in the ways of academic degree and certifications or training licenses are important, these participants put much more value, in an improving and learning view, in informal education, specially mentoring and direct contact with more experienced coaches.

» *In sports higher education, there is a lot of unnecessary knowledge, and those four years could be invested in more focused and useful training. I have a secondary education, but I have attended over 40 courses and education programs related*

*to my profession in Bulgaria and abroad. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

» *I believe that university education is an advantage. Things are studied in much greater detail there. Four years of learning cannot be compared to a year and a half. It would be reasonable to obtain the UEFA A license directly with a master's degree. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

» *I attend seminars solely for the purpose of obtaining licenses for work. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *Personally, for me, a university degree is a criterion for gaining certain conditions with an employer, but it is not a measure of knowledge. More knowledge is acquired when you see how someone does things, go and see, ask how something is done. That's where a person learns the most. Even if you see some things done poorly, you know that they are bad and you won't apply them. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I think that, in principle, a combination of all possibilities is very important. From personal experience, I can say that I learned a lot from very simple lectures at those seminars before the season. The lecturers were really experienced and came from real conditions. They conveyed to us the real training conditions. They were well-known coaches, and those seminars were really fantastic. I think a lot could be gained from those seminars. (trainer, Croatia)*

All the coaches are happy with their jobs, but they believe that with a better system and addressing concerns with job security, infrastructure, and equipment, they may reach even higher heights. They see coaching young categories as both a task and a necessity. Beginning with young categories aids in the progressive learning of the profession.

**Practically all respondents desire further improvement.** Very few interviewees said that they are satisfied with the obtained licence, and vast majority is determined to pursue it further.

» *I am interested in obtaining UEFA A and UEFA B licenses in the next few years. Additionally, through personal research of international literature, I stay updated with new information. (trainer, Greece)*

» *I always attend seminars and I am always interested in development. (Greece)*

» *It is a matter of evolution, I believe you always have to evolve as a person, as I grew up I learned that even more... Yes, I am open to it and I look for any opportunities I can get. (trainer, Greece)*

The rare exception are only those coaches who are currently involved in working with younger age groups, so they do not currently need higher licenses that would also allow them to work with teams at the highest senior

level. In addition, respondents rarely show interest in further formal education. The exception here are young coaches who are studying at faculties of kinesiology or other faculties, and their goal is to complete their studies.

» *Regarding licenses, I have the UEFA A license, which is sufficient for working with all youth age categories in Croatia. I have tried several times to enrol in the highest license, but I have not succeeded. The UEFA Pro license was the goal, but currently, for now, I have no ambitions for it because the Croatian Football Federation (HNS) also dictates that this license allows working with all children. (trainer, Croatia).*

Two of participants gave very striking information regarding licenses. It is said that the UEFA Pro license is illegally rented to other people.

» *I don't plan on getting a UEFA A or Pro license. What good will it do me? Those who have a Pro license cannot find a team to work with, so they lease their licenses to others. TFF is aware of this but does nothing about it. Since the TFF does not explicitly prohibit this, those who take advantage of the legal loophole lease their Pro licenses to coaches in other teams. TFF turns a blind eye to this! [Interviewer: How much is it being rented for?]. Let's say you want to work in the A team of a professional club, so you want to rent my Pro license from me. If the club gives you a million lira a year, I get 30 thousand lira a month from you. This is how things go. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *I have a UEFA A license. I also considered about getting a pro license. Courses have been cancelled during the pandemic period. Now it's 200 thousand liras, I don't want it anymore. I have to sell my house and my car to afford it. Also, even if I get that license, it won't give me anything different and new. No matter what I do, that door will not open for me, so I have no hope. This just doesn't apply to me. You have to be a well-known person. There are also those who rent out the pro license. Some of the amateur teams do not even have a coach, they take the manager card and go to the pitch with the team. In some places, people without a primary school diploma become coaches. (trainer, Turkey)*

However, **while practically everyone agrees on the importance of further improvement, there are significant differences among respondents from different countries regarding the role and support of clubs in their education and development.** Some countries, such as Croatia and Portugal, view clubs and national associations as well-organized and supportive in this regard. On the other

hand, in countries like Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria, it depends on the level of the clubs, with coaches in leading teams expressing greater satisfaction while those in smaller teams are dissatisfied with the current situation. In some cases, the prevailing attitude is that coaches are left to their own devices without financial support or assistance from clubs and the national football association. All respondents

from Croatia highlight the support of their clubs or football schools, which encourage education and participation in various organized seminars and trainings. Clubs financially support coaches' education. The most com-

mon limitations mentioned are age, distance to seminar venues or football academies, or life circumstances that have directed them towards non-football-related jobs or have slowed down their coaching path and education.

» *I wanted to pursue UEFA Pro, but some financial matters have hindered me a bit. Of course, I would still like to continue and obtain the highest coaching license in football. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I had to pause my career because I became pregnant, I became a mother. Pregnancy certainly hindered me. I planned it that way. When I was taking the coaching part for the UEFA B license, I completed the final part in the seventh month of pregnancy. And when you go to take the A part, you need to have good grades from the first part. I had one low grade. I simply couldn't concentrate on studying or anything similar because of the child. (trainer, Croatia)*

Coaches from Greece emphasize that they have significant opportunities for improvement; although many coaches emphasize the importance of personal

motivation and individual self-work, it is implied that seminars and trainings are provided by clubs and associations:

» *To enhance knowledge, there are many ways, such as attending seminars or lectures organized by the Thessaloniki Coaches Association, the Hellenic Football Federation (EPO) with its coaching schools, and the Thessaloniki Technical University for football education, which do an outstanding job in various aspects of coaching and instruction. (trainer, Greece)*

The financial support from Serbian clubs in obtaining licenses is partial. Only two or three major clubs finance the acquisition of licenses, while in

other clubs, this is not the case. Similar uncertain situations are described by coaches in Bulgaria:

- » *In the club where I work, educational activities such as seminars are often organized, which are funded by the club. Before this club, I worked in a smaller club where I financed the seminars myself. (trainer, Serbia)*
- » *The Football Federation occasionally organizes courses and seminars, but I cover the costs myself, which can be quite expensive. (trainer, Serbia)*
- » *I received financial assistance from the club for my license. I don't know if I will have such support for the next license. I don't have the financial means to pay for further qualification courses myself, even though I have the desire. (trainer, Bulgaria)*
- » *I have attended over 20 courses and educational seminars in the last three years. I pay for everything myself, and they have never encouraged or shown any interest in it, and I don't think they even noticed. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

In line with that, one of the fundamental problems in both professional development and pursuing a coaching career is the lack of financial security

and the inability to make a living solely from coaching, which is most pronounced in financially less developed countries:

- » *90% of clubs do not offer coaches a good enough salary, and they have to do something additional. Therefore, this profession is not adequately valued. Coaches with higher licenses, on the other hand, do not want to work with children because it is challenging and not prestigious enough. (trainer, Bulgaria)*
- » *I have another job; I have my own business. I cannot sustain myself solely through coaching. (trainer, Bulgaria)*
- » *It is definitely underestimated, often reduced to a secondary job. Additional income for coaches or a hobby. This affects the level of coaches, training, and naturally, the children. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

» *My trainer friends are incredibly selfless. Because they either don't get paid at all or they get very low salaries. The highest salary in the market is currently 7-8 thousand lira (350 EURO). There are very few trainers who get it too. They are paid less than the minimum wage. Actually, we need to talk about them. There are even those who work for 2-3 thousand liras. Sometimes they can get these salaries every 2 months or 3 months. Among them are those who have children. Many do not have pension insurance. While evaluating these people, we can talk about their shortcomings, but I see people who work under these conditions as very self-sacrificing. Sometimes they can say bad words to children, there are some who use wrong expressions such as "you can't be a football player." We have to criticize them, but the conditions are clear. Coaches do two jobs to make money (trainer, Turkey)*

» *Trainer salaries are very low. There are even those who don't get paid. Some of the coaches in amateur clubs' work in secondary jobs such as butchery and grocery store. I don't mean to belittle them, but these are people who did not come from football, have neither played nor trained themselves. But either because he is the parent of a player, he has connections with the club or he was a tribune leader. Then they come and train the kids. Most of them do not have a license, but they work by finding a license from someone else. Coaches coming from football have to work in other jobs because they are not satisfied with the salaries in these clubs. Salaries at our club are also slightly above the minimum wage. But I have to say that our club is an exception. We are one of the rare clubs that pay the highest salary among amateur clubs and pay these salaries on time. (trainer, Turkey)*

Yet, even coaches in more developed environments are far from being fully satisfied with their situation, and they would like to see their position systematically improved. They empha-

size the necessity of working towards improving the material and working conditions for coaches of younger age groups, which can be achieved through better legislation, tax benefits,

or additional scholarships and rewards for coaches of younger age groups, similar to the scholarship programs for promising young athletes.

When asked about the forms of informal education they seek in their coaching advancement, all respondents mention a combination of personal experiences and acquired

knowledge. Training demonstrations on social media and online lectures are certainly desirable in education, although everyone still emphasizes the advantages of in-person education. However, **a large number of respondents also highlighted the absence of pedagogical topics and content in seminars.**

» *Seminars are focused more on football knowledge and less on the pedagogical aspect of working with children. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *Seminars did not contribute to my work with children. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *More psychological topics should be included in seminars, such as the parent-child-coach relationship. (trainer, Serbia)*

Furthermore, as many as 81% of Bulgarian coaches express dissatisfaction with the knowledge and skills in

pedagogy and sports psychology that they had during their coach licensing programs:

» *In our coach education, not enough attention is given to sports psychology and the pedagogy of working with children. Many colleagues and I discuss this issue, considering it a significant mistake. To be a successful coach, one needs to be a psychologist as well. Personally, I admit it as my weakness and would like to develop in this area. I am 46 years old, while the children are around 12 years old, so there is a significant age difference. Maybe we owe it to the children. If I have the financial means, I would like to take advantage of additional learning opportunities. (trainer, Bulgaria)*



» *Seminars on various football-related topics are organized, but unfortunately, psychology and pedagogy are only briefly mentioned during UEFA B license lectures. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

» *Insufficient attention is given to pedagogy and psychology. My higher education helps me. Almost no club has a psychologist. I know only 2-3 clubs that employ experts in this field. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

This perception of a lack of pedagogical training for coaches prevails even in the most developed football environments like Greece and Croatia:

» *To make the system more efficient, UEFA degrees are very effective, but the Hellenic Football Federation (EPO) should also enrich the elements of pedagogy and not focus only on technical courses. (trainer, Greece)*

» *In addition to diplomas, there should be pedagogical training. (trainer, Greece)*

**Coaches see great benefit from mentoring and working with well-established and experienced coaches** in other clubs, which they all consider desirable for their coaching

development. Different forms of mentoring are emphasized by all coaches, regardless of their experience and coaching tenure.

» *Have the knowledge of what football is. Knowledge of what the game is. Knowing how you're going to train that, what method you have. (trainer, Portugal)*

» *Working on one's improvement, educating oneself not only in football terms but also in psychological, pedagogical, and communicative aspects. All that makes a coach. Today, children are very different, society is very different, and that psychological-pedagogical part of how to talk to children, how to approach them, is mandatory. The approach to today's players, especially younger age groups, cannot be the same as before. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Maybe we, as coaches, lack going to another club, talking to those coaches, seeing how they work, what they do. I don't mean on a local Croatian level, but abroad. For example, Maribor has a good football school, maybe someone in Serbia, Partizan, Zvezda has a good school. Ajax has an excellent football school, in Spain, Real Madrid, Barcelona in that way, that kind of experience is missing. (trainer, Croatia)*

In terms of satisfaction, it appears that **coaches derive significant professional satisfaction from working with children and often express a positive emotional connection to their profession.** However, not everyone is equally inclined to stay at this level of competition, and some **see it as preparation or a steppingstone**

**for working with older age groups.**

Thus, a significant number of coaches in Serbia explicitly or implicitly believe that working with senior selections is more challenging, respected, and desirable. However, they also believe that everyone should go through working with younger age groups:

» *The coach should start gradually with young categories, mastering the craft step by step. (trainer, North Macedonia)*

» *The coach should start working with children, but we should also be appropriately paid and have suitable conditions. (trainer, North Macedonia)*

» *I wouldn't stay in working with younger age groups, maybe a few more years, and then move on. First, you should work with children, then with seniors; that's a normal path. Some of my colleagues make a mistake and as soon as they hang up their boots, they start working with seniors. (trainer, Serbia)*

The pinnacle of a coaching career is working with senior selections, while working with younger age groups is necessary for building authority and educating the technical-tactical

foundations of football. Working with younger selections assumes less knowledge and experience.



However, most coaches in Greece explicitly, and in Croatia implicitly, suggested that they are happy working with young children and would prefer to continue working at that level. Only

a small number of participants, especially younger ones, indicated that they would like to work in higher football categories and with adult athletes in the future.

» *Yes, I am very satisfied. Now, after many years of experience, I can be in better teams in terms of the level of athletes and their organization. (trainer, Greece)*

» *Absolutely. I have managed to enrich my years and every year I adopt from the new generation their behaviour, attitude, work ethic, knowledge, and psychology. (trainer, Greece)*

» *Yes, I am happy because I have mainly focused on the developmental level while also being involved in professional sports, but it is more of a personal challenge for me to see if I can achieve it rather than ambition to become a professional coach. (trainer, Greece)*

» *I wouldn't trade it for anything, and I'll explain why: each school has its challenges and I got to see and be present at*

*some training sessions of the juniors and some seniors, and I have more fulfilment training the children than older. (trainer, Portugal)*

» *I've met and know coaches, they're great and should never leave youth categories. But they've been leaving youth categories because a coach can't make a living, so it's inevitable that coaches, no matter how happy and fulfilled they feel, will always want to get to professional football because that's where they get to make a living. I am currently a youth training coach, but I am also a technician of curricular enrichment activities, and I give motor classes in a school, because if I don't, I cannot have my life, I cannot live in reality. (trainer, Portugal)*

» *If I could only make a career as a training coach, I would, because it is really something that gives me great pleasure to see the evolution of athletes and work for the evolution of athletes. Unfortunately, in Portugal this is not possible, you can't only be a youth coach (...) In football, in Portugal, there is no recognition (of youth coaches). A lot of people think that being a football coach is a hobby, but it's not, I got a bachelor's degree, I got a master's degree to be a football coach, but I don't do it full-time because there is no recognition of this profession, because if there were I would be full-time (as a football coach) the same as 10,000 or 20,000 others coaches that are in the same situation. There is no such possibility. (trainer, Portugal)*

The simplest explanation for this difference would be the conclusion that **in countries where coaches of younger age groups have a more stable status and income, they are more inclined to build a career exclusively as youth football coaches.**

## 2. Work Principles and Training Structure

*The most important thing is to teach these children to enjoy football and that football is just a game. And to teach them the basics of tactics and technique, the rules of the game, so that these children would develop a love for football and come and go from training sessions as happy as possible. (trainer, Croatia)*

**In terms of the structure of the training, that is, what they do in training sessions with younger age groups, coaches in all countries implement similar methods.** Approximately, both in younger age groups and in all surveyed cases, the training sessions last an average amount of time. They all start with warm-up exercises, then move on to ball work focusing on tech-

nical football skills, whether it is basic techniques or other elements, working on specific football situations (such as set pieces or heading). The final part of the training session mostly concludes with some form of game. Certain clubs or trainers also practise the analysis of work, but it is essentially an informal one:

» *The final part of the training session focuses on analysing the training in terms of developing critical thinking skills in children. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *At the club where I work, we are not obligated, but I always prepare my training in advance and share it with others if they ask. (trainer, North Macedonia)*

» *I always start with a conversation, then warm-up and technique. I have a plan for every training session and share it with colleagues if they ask. (trainer, North Macedonia)*

**Practically all the coaches (claim that they) have their own training plan and program,** which they are

willing to share with their colleagues in the club. However, the level of professionalism, organization, and coordina-

tion in this regard varies significantly. In some clubs in Croatia, not only is the training plan and program available to all colleagues and the school director, but there is also an obligation to create and upload it to shared club directories, which are usually stored on computer servers. In Portugal some participants made mention of an online platform called “EmJogo,” that

is used for management and training in clubs, where their training sessions are shared. Also, they must keep a training plan of the sessions they coach and need to make it available for the club/institution, as an obligation for analysis and comments, if needed. Most participants said that they also make it available to their colleagues, but it is voluntary.

» *I personally have made requests for the football school that must be respected. There is an operational plan and program, and it is done for all age groups, from the youngest to the juniors and those entering the senior team. So, everything is done according to that plan and program. Of course, coaches have their freedom and creativity within that plan and program to structure those requirements in their own way so that creativity is not lost. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *We have the OPP program, the operational plan and program. It includes attendance at training, all the tests, and what we do with the children. It is available to everyone who needs it, including the director and coordinator. We make the plan and program because it is required by the school, but I am the type of person who likes to have everything organized. I don't like coming to the field and not knowing what and how to do. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *We send the plan and program to the school director, so he has it all in one place, and anyone who wants to can see it. The plans are usually for a semester, and then we have weekly plans. Based on those weekly plans, we create further training plans, individually. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Generally, we work with other colleagues and the school coordinator. They are familiar with the training plan just as I am*

*familiar with the plans of all other colleagues. Of course, we then compare what was planned with what was achieved, draw conclusions, and make corrections. (Croatia, respondent M20)*

» *We have practices 3 times a week: Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday (..) As for the practice plan, yes there is a base that I have had at the moment there was a complication with balls but it has to be followed to the letter because in Tuesday's practice it is a more individual practice more 1 to 1 (players), more 2 to 1, very much based on instead of being the Game itself is small parts of the game, that is, 2 to 1 to create superiority for example in a line or 2 to 1 to create superiority in the middle, the finishing of 2 to 1, 3 to 2, a transition everything that is high intensity in training Tuesday is what we usually do. Following Wednesday's practice, (...) is the only practice that we can have full field so I take the opportunity to put into practice some game situations more than 5 athletes, 6, 7, we play football 7 so have more athletes in Wednesday's practice to be able to do the more intense exercises more exercise more directed to the Game itself, to the total team and to be able to enjoy the whole field that we have. Friday's training as we play on Saturday is a little less intense, training is a little bit more tactical training for the kids to realize, not as tactical as maybe it would be from the under-15s upwards. (trainer, Portugal)*

In distinction, in smaller communities and at the amateur level, even in developed football countries like Croatia, Turkey and Portugal, planning is not mandatory. Additionally, in amateur environments, there are often challenging circumstances that hinder the

implementation of the intended plan and program. These challenges typically include training schedules, time constraints, weather conditions, and lower attendance due to the involvement of elementary school-age boys and girls.

» *In the club, it is not organized in such a way. Of course, I have my own records and a rough plan that I adhere to. Sometimes it's difficult to create a training plan for each session,*

*considering that we are at an amateur level where it's hard to predict the number of players participating in a given training. One rough plan I follow is to try to instil certain things, values, tactical and technical exercises that I set as a goal to cover throughout the season. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *We are not obligated to share the plan with anyone. I create the plan for myself, to help myself, to see what I'm doing in training, and to have a variety of prepared exercises. Sometimes it becomes easier to execute a training session later on. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *We do not do training programs. Amateur teams do not have a training program anyway. We already know what needs to be done at the beginning of the season, in the middle of the season and at the end of the season. In addition, we do not have such time to prepare a program. It is clear what we are doing. We train 3 days a week. We do endurance training on one day, strength training on the other, and ball practice at the end. In addition, it is not clear when the grassroots leagues will start in Turkey. Whenever the TFF decides, we prepare ourselves accordingly. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *I keep a diary regularly, but no one asked me to do it. I share my information with some colleagues. Others mock and call us "computer coaches." They don't need additional knowledge and don't share information. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

» *That is mandatory; the club insists on it. In other clubs where I worked, such a requirement did not exist. But I always kept a diary. In smaller clubs, coaches don't have time for it because they also work elsewhere. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

**Most coaches do not adjust training sessions based on whether the previous match was won or lost, especially in youngest age groups. They**

value the approach and effort in the game more than the result itself. Training sessions are only adjusted according to the age group and when it takes



place. Different exercises are done at the beginning of the week compared to the end of the week, closer to the next match.

» *The approach varies depending on the number of children. It also depends on weather conditions and everything that comes with it. I don't like to impose the imperative of winning on children. They need to progress rather than adapt their training to the achieved result. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *The most important thing for me is the development of children, not the competition, and training sessions do not differ based on whether the match was won or lost. Making mistakes is an integral part of training and the development of every child. (Serbia, respondent M3)*

» *In essence, training does not change based on the match result. We probably discuss certain things and work on our mistakes. (trainer, Greece)*

» *Of course, depending on the outcome of the game, whether they are games won or games lost, the mentality sometimes may not be the same, but the principle of the training plan does not change depending on this, the goal is to always prepare the next game and the next game suffers little impact depending on the result of the previous game. (trainer, Portugal)*

As the main difference between training after a won or lost match, participants highlight the atmosphere. After a won match, the atmosphere is better, and children are significantly more motivated to work. The surveyed coaches emphasize the importance of the approach to the game rather than the final result of the match. In cases of poor approach and mistakes made during the game, some coaches may

adjust the training session to specifically address and correct those mistakes. In North Macedonia, there are players who don't play or receive less playing time, and conversations are held with them to ensure they continue to train and play effectively.

- » *We have a monthly plan, and we don't change it after a loss or victory. (trainer, North Macedonia)*
- » *First, the game and discipline are important to me, not the result. (trainer, North Macedonia)*
- » *We focus on what needs improvement and what is good to motivate them to keep working. (trainer, North Macedonia)*

In Turkey, almost all of the coaches stated that they changed their training programs from time to time according to the deficiencies they saw in the matches during the season. They said that they focused on those missing sides in order to correct the deficiencies and mistakes of the players, es-

pecially after the lost matches. However, none of the coaches stated that they do not have an attitude to give a penalty after the lost match. Especially in younger age groups, because the main purpose was to make football popular, a lost match could never be a reason for punishment.

» *You can't always progress from the same training programs. Teachers need to reinvent themselves. The teacher should be like a screenwriter; you have to shape the program weekly. I proceed by downloading things from the Internet, using the materials I have on hand, or modifying them a little. If we survived a difficult and fast-paced match, I would like the first training to be more joyful. Especially if the score is bad, it is necessary to start the week by making the player love the football again, correcting his psychology, and clearing the negativity in his head in order to restart the week. If it is after a won match, the first training is a bit difficult. I usually do run exercise to break the euphoria of victory. I say, "You are yours the night you win the match, and mine tomorrow!" (trainer, Turkey)*

» *After losing matches, of course, we make changes in our training. For example, we concede goals in certain specific positions. We will definitely work on this in the training after that match. Now each team has set a certain standard for conditioning and strength. That's why you need to do technical-tactical*

*studies. We focus on which techniques we are weak in. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *In younger age groups, work is mostly done to teach, popularize and have fun with football. So, we change the program. I once observed a general decrease in performance and boredom in children. We talked to the managers and let them all rest for a week. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *According to the result of the match, the training plan definitely has to change. These are not people who have learned everything. These are kids in the age group that needs to learn. They can succumb to their emotions and mental deficiencies. The match won, his morale peaked, he lost the match, his morale hit the bottom. He's failed at school, he's been scolded by his parents, and it all takes expertise to fix all of them. A trainer is not enough for this, this situation needs to be handled by experts. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *In Portugal, most coaches do not adjust or change training sessions based on wins or losses. The sentiment is, at these young ages, it does not make sense to make changes, and, in a way, punish the players, as is counterproductive to their development. However, some coaches do focus on the problems and gaps shown in previous games in the next practice sessions, to motivate and develop the players.*

» *I don't agree that there are punishments just because of a loss, because the sport is about winning and losing, and I think what we must evaluate is the attitude of the athletes on the field, the attitude of "Okay I did my best, I tried my hardest, but the others were better." (...) So I think we shouldn't penalize athletes for poor performance, or bad play, or bad execution, because throughout their lives that's what's going to happen the most, and I think the athletes themselves must know how to deal with this pain of defeat, with this sadness. Being honest I don't agree at all with the punishment in relation to the games. (trainer, Portugal)*

**There is a certain contradiction between the declared absence of punishment by coaches and the actual practices they apply, that is, between what coaches say and what they do.** For example, no coach

in Croatia claims to use a punishment system due to a lost match or punishment in general, but some disciplinary measures and penalties can still be noticed in the description of their coaching practices.

» *If we lost a match against a better opponent who dominated us, there isn't much difference. But if we were the ones dominating and still lost because we didn't put in enough effort, then the training becomes tougher. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Maybe if it's a loss, the training is a bit stricter in terms of their behaviour and attitude towards work. But when it's a victory, I might try to be stricter, although they perceive it as more relaxed because we won last weekend, so it's harder for them to understand. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I'm not the type to punish because of a lost match. It's definitely much nicer to work when we win. The atmosphere is better that week. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I heard a good saying from an old coach who led me: "Don't get too high in victory, don't get too low in defeat." We have to follow that because there's a match every five or six days, including cup games, and it's important to stay in a normal line without oscillations. But surely, after losses and wins, the atmosphere in training differs. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I believe that punishments are desirable. Just like at home, a child will try everything. If they bite your hand, and you give them a finger, they'll keep nibbling. There needs to be a line that you draw through some punishment. There should be fear that if they cross that line, they won't play. Or they won't be in the club anymore or won't play the next game. They'll end up on the bench. (trainer, Croatia)*

Most coaches from Portugal do not adjust or change training sessions based on wins or losses, and none of the participants said they punish their teams or players when they lose a game. The general sentiment is that, in these formative years and with young children, it does not make sense and it is not desirable to punish them on defeat. Also, it does not make sense to make changes to training sessions, and, in a way, punish the players, as

is counterproductive to their development, as it will bring no benefits and even create problems.

**Some coaches still modify the planned training program after a lost game.** Primarily, this is done to correct mistakes, and the changes are also used to motivate the children to do additional work because a defeat affects their motivation for training.

» *For me, it's different. In a lost game, there are usually some segments that were not executed properly, so I base the training for that week on working on what was missing. Of course, the same applies when you win because even in victory, you can find something that wasn't good, but it's not about punishing the children; it's about improving what wasn't done well. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Training after a won and lost game definitely differs. From the youngest to the juniors, believe me, it's the same everywhere. This year, when we entered the league and were fighting to stay in it, the cadets and juniors had only one victory in the first seven rounds. Coming to training was no longer a joy, excitement, or motivation. We entered a series of defeats, and now you have to motivate them in a different way. You have to encourage them, convince them that they are doing well and should continue working because their motivation drops. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *We have a process, we have a plan, we often plan monthly, that is, if we lose in the middle of the month we will change the monthly cycle, we can correct something else. Exactly in defeat there are always more difficulties, gaps that we must correct. (trainer, Portugal)*

All respondents emphasize that there are certain conflicts with the players, although they believe that using the word “conflict” might be too strong, especially considering that they are still dealing with children they train. When expressing dissatisfaction, coaches most commonly highlight “displeasure with playing time,” meaning less time spent in the game, or dissatisfaction with their position on the team. During training itself, situations arise where a child doesn’t listen or is livelier, which disrupts the work with the rest of the group. In most cases, all contentious

situations are attempted to be resolved independently, without escalating them to a higher level, such as the school leader or the club’s director/president, who will get involved if the conflict escalates for some reason.

In North Macedonia, coaches stated that there are no penalties for young players in case of defeat or poor performance. However, punishments such as push-ups, running laps, and similar exercises may be given, but after a conversation.

» *There must be a financial penalty for adult football players, while for children, they are guided about their mistakes. (trainer, North Macedonia)*

» *We always start with a conversation with the player, and if it doesn’t yield results, we apply penalties such as push-ups, running, etc. (trainer, North Macedonia)*

**The different methods and approaches coaches use to calm the**

**situation and resolve conflicts are interesting:**

» *When a child is a bit livelier or behaves inappropriately, I prefer to personally address it first through dialogue. I will never scold the child but rather use milder variations of questions like ‘Why did you do that?’ or ‘Do you think that’s right?’ I let others do something else, nothing special, a small number of push-ups, so that the child watches others because of their misbehaviour.” (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Regarding conflict resolution methods, I usually call the child aside and have a conversation if there are any problems*

*or if something is unclear. I also tell the children that if they have any issues, I am approachable, and they can freely talk to me during training, during breaks, between exercises, or after training. They can call me aside and tell me if there is any problem. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I had an experience with U-11 players where there was teasing within the team, but we resolved it through a parent meeting. But kids will be kids. Sometimes parents create more panic and fuss than what actually happened. (trainer, Croatia)*

Some coaches mention warning, followed by reducing playing time or the opportunity to play in a specific game,

and additional conditioning training as methods of punishment.

» *There are no punishments unless they lose control of their behaviour. I believe that punishments help. When the time comes to intervene, I will first try to solve the problem through conversation. If necessary, I will apply punishment by taking away something they truly enjoy, such as reducing their playing time in a game. (trainer, Greece)*

» *I have an idea that sometimes parents are the ones who provoke the kids because, deep down they share their frustrations and the kids, and when there is competition sometimes it becomes more evident and comes more of a decision with coaches. There has never been a need for any process of disciplinary intervention, eventually there may sometimes be a small difference in terms of the method of action that is done with the student (...) but it goes through a wake-up call, it goes through a conversation at the end of the session and eventually sharing what happened to the father, and making it clear that really what we want is to transmit values and namely education, respect etc for all. (trainer, Portugal)*

**There are few examples of elaborated pedagogical approaches to punishment that are in line with modern**

**educational tendencies and methods.** One well-thought-out example comes from a coach in Croatia:

*» When I was coaching the youth team, I had a card method. Three different colours: red, yellow, and blue. If a child misbehaved, teased others, or lacked motivation for work, they would receive a yellow card, which was a warning. If they didn't calm down within ten minutes, they would receive a red card, and everyone knew about it. They would take their ball and perform tasks with the ball outside their designated area. If they calmed down in a few minutes, they would be allowed back into the team. A blue card was given as a reward for good work, good performance. For example, if the task was technical training and five players were doing it while the others were chatting on the side, those five players would receive a reward. And within seconds, everyone would start doing the technical training. It motivated them because it was a reward. They all knew how many blue cards they had within themselves, and I didn't have to keep track of it; they wouldn't deceive each other. Then they would receive some reward. Based on my experience, I needed yellow cards for a month or two, red cards even less frequently, and blue cards were used only after a certain period. I believe that as adults, we prefer to hear praise rather than criticism. (trainer, Croatia)*

In general, it could be derived that the practically all trainers apply similar training structure but writing operative plans and programs and keeping records are often not mandatory, and the actual practices of punishing the players vary significantly. Overall, biggest differences in training appear to be not so much between more developed

and less developed football countries but between big cities and professional clubs on one hand, and smaller communities with small amateur clubs on the other.



### 3. The Pedagogical Role and Essence of Trainer's Profession

*I think that in the whole system, when we're talking about bringing up young athletes, there are many coaches who lack pedagogical training and social skills. They often insult players and primarily focus on themselves. I believe that the national federation, clubs, and all related entities should appoint the most educated coaches, especially in younger categories. The most educated in the pedagogical-developmental part. I think there should be more control in this regard. Someone should come and oversee the situation. I have been part of the Federation system, and there are coaches who, I don't know, behave inappropriately during matches, using foul language and engaging in various activities, even in younger age groups where children should be enjoying themselves, learn, and develop humanistic values. How can they learn when they have someone behaving like that around them? There should be more control in such cases. (trainer, Croatia)*

Coaches mostly perceive that their job has a significant pedagogical role, meaning they recognize their mission and emphasize how their work should positively influence the integral development of children. The primary purpose of coaches working with young football players is to shape and create their personality as individuals and as footballers, whereas the primary mission of coaches working with professional sportsmen is to achieve results and build team chemistry.

Coaches understand the educational role in their work, claiming that the most essential thing is develop persons, be appropriate role models for children, and assist them in learning good technique and behaviour. Other coaches say that focusing solely on the outcome is harmful since it prevents proper future selection, particularly if the children's gender maturity and developmental performance are not considered. Coaches gain basic knowledge of the pedagogical role through UEFA education and licenses, but their own emotions and character

frequently impact their coaching method. Parents label them as unreasonably ambitious, frequently viewing them as biased coaches making subjective recommendations to their own children, oblivious to the negative impact this has on their children.

Many coaches mentioned that in recent years, the importance of coaches in the development and education of young categories has been increasingly recognized, although there is still much room for improvement.

In North Macedonia there are two types of coaches who work with young athletes. The first category comprises experienced coaches who are proven professionals in football but also stress their insufficient treatment (poor pay, inconsistent payment, lack of training facilities, equipment, and so on). The second group consists of coaches with a few years of experience who want to advance, but the concern is how they can afford to spend financially in their informal education given that most of them have just completed secondary school.

*» The main mission of the trainer is to be a teacher. He's a teacher. A player, a young man, is a sponge. Whatever we give him, he accepts. There are some denser sponges, some less dense, but he's a sponge. He will receive what we are giving. The coach is the one who will instil values in you, will also instil in you the process of sport, of the game. The game is a sport played as a team, but everything he will train in football will also result in his own life, in the future, as an adult. It's going to have repercussions. If he is ill-educated, if he is poorly trained, we know that there are optimal windows for the individual to develop. And he will certainly educate himself and evolve in life as a person, as an individual. But if the coach does not have these values, if he does not have personal values, if he does not have technical or tactical knowledge and if he does not have sporting and pedagogical knowledge, he cannot do it. Can't go there. That to me are basic concepts. For me it is simple, coaches specialized in youth football are not coaches like the others. (trainer, Portugal)*

» *Coaches who don't have a proper relationship with children, who shout at them, and insult them, should not be coaches. Children observe what the coach does, and they start imitating such behaviour. (trainer, North Macedonia)*

However, **they feel that it is not adequately recognized.** This is particularly the case in countries with less developed football system like Serbia:

» *In my opinion, the federation has not recognized the broader educational-pedagogical role of coaches because they have not demonstrated it in practice. Seminars last for five to six weeks, two to three days per week, and even that has been reduced. There is also a question regarding the competence of the lecturers, especially in terms of pedagogy. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *Pedagogy involves finding a balance with children, sometimes being strict, and other times being lenient. The pedagogical role of coaches is not sufficiently recognized by the federation. I believe they should visit clubs more often to see how things are done and who works with the children. We don't have that here for now. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *The importance of coaches in the development and education of children is, in my opinion, not sufficiently recognized by the federation. In Serbia, the term "coach" and the job of coaching are considered a hobby, unlike in the rest of the world where it is treated as a science. The pedagogical aspect is at the lowest level here, and that is, in my opinion, quite sad. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *In internal terms, yes there is this recognition, and people notice the work that is being done and congratulate us, because the kids have evolved a lot, changed a lot (...) and the club did have this recognition and showed this recognition (...) externally in terms of associations, I think the association does not value us so much, maybe it values the kids more in individual terms, that they are called to the district teams, it also shows a lot of the value and the work that the club is having, but I think*

*they should do more, and like other associations, I think they should do more, I think they should value more because, I think they don't do enough. (trainer, Portugal)*

*» I think so, these associations are linked to sport and know and understand that coaching is fundamental. I think there is this recognition from these institutions, and they realize that the training coach is fundamental not only for the construction of the man and, as I said, but even for the national product when they reach the end of the process, we have an athlete here who is perhaps the next Ronaldo. Therefore, I would say that the institutions yes (recognize), maybe some people who are not associated, or outside of sport, there is a lack of sports culture, and I think that it is general, generic and in Portugal our sports culture is very linked to the elite to the yield, these do not. (trainer, Portugal)*

**All participants consider working with younger age groups to be particularly challenging, where their mission is equally to teach them the basics of football but also to fulfil their educational role.** The participants differentiate between leading younger age group teams and professional athletes. **In younger age groups, there is a prevailing “liberal” approach where coaches view coaching children as a form of entertainment.** While a certain level of

discipline is required, less emphasis is placed on winning or losing, and the focus is not solely on the outcome of the matches. **As the age groups progress, a somewhat more competitive approach is adopted, culminating in the senior age group where the coach's mission shifts from primarily educational and developmental to a competitive focus, with achieving results as the primary objective.**

*» Yes in this case as we are working with children is to always maintain that discipline of always arriving on time to training, to maintain the discipline of attention to words how to approach, how to communicate, to have that patience also to communicate to them in the best way, not to be so explosive with them but also*

*not to be so light, but for them to be able to realize and understand that it will really take them, it will bear fruit for the rest of your life, that is, to have the discipline necessary to arrive on time in certain places, to arrive on time to a meeting, for example, in 7 or 8 years, maybe a work meeting, a job interview, and I think this is very important. (trainer, Portugal)*

» *It has become mandatory to have qualified individuals on the side-lines, and that is a good thing. You must have people on the side-lines who have degrees, who have worked with children, who have read about it. This was done solely under pressure due to legal regulations, and it is the right thing to do. The people who sit on those benches and manage those age groups, especially, must be educated and capable of rising above and going through a protocol that will help these children in their development. We help them grow, we help them become individuals, develop their psychomotor skills, integrate into society, acquire values, and among those thousands of children, there will be one talented child who should play football, and why shouldn't they, that's what they come for. (trainer, Greece)*

» *The primary mission is the development of young individuals as people, their integration into society through the development of teamwork, collaboration among one, two, three or more players. That's when it comes to younger age groups, and later, as these children grow, the competitive aspect can be introduced, the desire to prove themselves and achieve certain results. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Our goal is not to win trophies. We are trying to improve our children. Being a champion is very simple. You do your research, transfer a player with good physical strength and become a champion. We want children to have fun and learn at the same time. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *The primary mission of working with coaches of younger age groups is much more important and responsible. Because you are the one preparing the child, making it easier for the coach to*

*work with them in the professional stage. The primary mission is to teach the child certain behaviours, to teach them things that will accompany them throughout their lives. Teaching them to repeat certain things so that they become better individuals and good football players. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *In a professional sense, the result is primary in the senior team, and there is no excuse for that. In younger age groups, the primary mission is to shape an athlete in the pedagogical sense. Whether they will become players or not is not as crucial. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *The big goal during training, the most important is by far the values of the game, the values of life are very important in the market, it is very important to educate them, we have to educate them, and above all I think the most important today at these ages is the technical part, it is the understanding part of the game, we cannot dissociate, we look for the talent they have, resources, have the ability to use those resources for the sake of the collective, that's what we look for the most, is that they use their talent for the sake of the collective, and we try to enhance what is good, because a lot of the time we have the best. (trainer, Portugal)*

In short, **a significant number of coaches of young football players recognize that their role** is not only to create professional footballers and develop a small number of highly talented players, **but to instil in children**

**a love for the sport, healthy habits, good behaviour, satisfaction, happiness, and other general values.** They aim to help them develop as individuals and make them better and healthier individuals:

» *They should enjoy playing football and love the sport. Love their teammates and build friendships through sport, but also become better individuals. Our goal is for children to be happy and not be closed off and tense due to fear of making mistakes. (trainer, Greece)*

» *The coach should provide them with fun during training and teach them elements of technique and tactics. It is also good to convey the message that they should develop good habits and do something good for themselves. In older years, the elements are transmitted differently because people at that age have already shaped their character. (trainer, Greece)*

» *The main goal of the coach is to teach fair play, healthy competition, good behaviour, and show children that football is a small community where they will face the same things outside the field, only on a larger scale. Of course, in a specific area, as they are bombarded outside the field. But that small community must guide them to be righteous, to be more mature in their choices, more honest in what they do, and to know what they want. That's what football offers, and you can achieve it. You can provide children with that, teach them things through the ball that will help them in life. (trainer, Greece)*

» *You have to be fully aware of what the stages of development of athletes are (...) and I will give a training a child of 6 years and logically my approach is totally different and is pedagogical but when I go to one of 18 years, I don't cease to be pedagogical but it is totally different, even the body language itself, because it has to do with this identification of the stages development, how are their behaviours at certain ages. I think how they react to our behaviours at certain ages that to me is the most fundamental. (trainer, Portugal)*

» *It may seem strange what I'm going to say but I think the main mission of the coach is to make sure that they don't stop playing football, because this is happening a lot and, interestingly, we are in a country where football is king, where the whole society loves football, where all the children, with some exceptions, want to play football, we've never had so many young players but we've also never had so much early abandonment at 14 and 15 that was the time I started (...) So I think the main mission of the football coach in the youth ranks is to get young people to be able to stay motivated. (trainer, Portugal)*

» *Of course, and we, in addition to being coaches, are teachers, not only of football, but on a personal level, on a human level, especially football being a team sport, we must know how to deal with everyone. (trainer, Portugal)*

#### 4. Trainers-Parents Relations

*The pressures from parents lie at the core of the pressures on children. (trainer, Serbia)*

**In their relationship with parents, the trainers try to set clearly established roles from the beginning.** The coach is the one who trains, decides on the line-up, leads the team during matches, determines positions in the team, and allocates playing time. The parental role is to encourage the child and assist in their sports activities. The surveyed coaches communicate with parents but try to clearly guide them from the start regarding their role in the process.

Only two clubs in North Macedonia have an explicit Code of Ethics for working with children, but the others claim that each coach executes it on their own. Until today, they had received no UEFA training on child protection and rights. In clubs, there is no defined disciplinary system for dealing with unacceptable behaviour by coaches, parents, or other club members. Previous experiences suggest the existence of a responsibility system and a method of dealing with concerns through the club coordinator.

» *I solved the problem with parents who want to tell their children how to play; I kept them 100 meters away from the field, and we also had parent meetings every Monday. (trainer, North Macedonia)*

» *We have the internal regulations, it's exposed to everyone, and some consequences, but the only one that I am sure of is the expulsion of the athlete from the club. However, it's never,*



*so to speak, the applied to 100%, there's always interviews with the various stakeholders of any confusion or problem that may have occurred, the kids are called to talk to the coordinator, the parents are called to talk to the coordinator, the same thing with the coaches, but it's never fully defined what's going to happen, but there it is, there's always this procedure of talking to the coordinator (...) and asking for other types of behaviour from the parents, or from the athletes, the same thing from the coaches, and from there is a period of reflection and seeing if the players, or coaches, or parents corrected the undesirable behaviour of course. (trainer, Portugal)*

*» With the young ones, if there are no results, we need to talk and if there is still an obstacle, it is referred to the coordinator. (trainer, North Macedonia)*

Although there are tensions between parents and coaches, except in exceptional cases, **most coaches have not had major issues with parents of young footballers, so they do not emphasize an excessive attempt**

**by parents to influence coaching roles.** There is a divided opinion about the harmfulness of parents' presence and comments during training and matches. Some consider it burdensome for the child, while others see it



as a form of support for the child and the team they play for. All participants consider insulting their own child and their own players, as well as making remarks to children from the opposing team, as undesirable behaviour. If a

parent behaves inappropriately, the ultimate sanction is the removal of the child from the team. Such conflicts are attempted to be resolved without any negative consequences for the child.

» *It can happen, even with parents. Parents, today, want their kids to be the next Cristiano Ronaldo and instil more pressure on the kid than the kid himself who is there mainly to play football, to have fun and to be with friends. (trainer, Portugal)*

» *I don't like it when parents shout "faster, more, stronger" during a match. I don't yell at them to be faster, more, or stronger, and I am their coach. Usually, I tell the child, "Ignore the stands, ignore what they're shouting, just play football." Let them show what they have learned, and if they can't, it's okay, we will correct it. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *It's much harder to point out something to a parent. It's a more difficult situation because in that case, the child should not be removed from the team because it wouldn't be their fault. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *We have also had problems with parents who, as it is well-known, like to come to training sessions, give suggestions from the stands, shout, and disturb the children. I insisted on a parent meeting as a coach to address these issues. I tried to make parents aware that they are actually doing more harm than good to their children. I think it had a significant impact. The parents woke up, or rather, became aware of the problems where they were not helping their children but either embarrassing them or being counterproductive. (trainer, Croatia)*

Inappropriate parental behaviour is considered one of the biggest problems for all clubs with youth selections.

» *Sometimes, there are situations where a possible physical confrontation can happen. (trainer, Portugal)*

» *Despite the coach praising a child, parents, due to their sick ambitions and frustrations, consider it not good enough. That frustration when it is expressed becomes one of the biggest problems in youth football. Everyone will tell you that if we talk honestly. I'm not sure how that can be overcome. Children are not the problem; parents are. (trainer, Serbia)*

**There is no clear disciplinary procedure for parents, but reactions are based on the situation, through discussions, or in extreme cases by removing the child from the club.** In an effort to maintain authority and set demands during training sessions and matches, compromises are sought in

conflicts with parents because membership fees represent the basis of financing for most junior clubs. Therefore, there is a high degree of tolerance towards children, particularly towards parents who, with their ambition, often feel entitled to interfere and disrupt the work of the club and the coach.

» *I believe the club coordination should get involved immediately and understand the situation, to solve it, and protect the club from the actions of individuals. (trainer, Portugal)*

» *Due to the nature of the sport, there is sometimes inappropriate behaviour, especially from parents, which I consider unacceptable. I believe that children cannot progress in that way. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *Parents can be actors of bad behaviour towards children, usually due to their child not playing. These conflicts can be verbal and physical, but without legal solutions. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *Parents would like to get involved in the work, and some do, attacking coaches. (trainer, Serbia)*

Finally, regarding the coach-parent relationship, cultural and financial factors clearly play a significant role. Greek coaches talk less about difficulties and tensions when working with parents, while in Bulgaria, coaches emphasize that parents who financially influence small clubs and low-funded environments feel entitled to interfere in the coach's work. Overall, coaches are reluctant to allow parents to openly interfere in their work, while parents are often inclined to fervently support their children. Coaches see how this tension has negative consequences for the children, but it seems that

they wait for the situation to escalate before addressing it. Most of these situations can be resolved and even prevented through dialogue. However, in more "stubborn" cases, unfortunately, it is the child that suffers the consequences. If the coach's authority prevails, the child receives sanctions in the form of reduced playing time or even suspension or expulsion from the club. Conversely, if parental influence is stronger, the child may receive unjustified benefits. Neither of these two options is positive for the child's sporting, personal, and psychological development.

» *The most important thing is for children to have fun doing what they want. (trainer, Portugal)*

## 5. What do the parents think?

*It is evident that even coaches with higher licenses lack pedagogy and psychology. Parental support is very important, and if the coach works effectively, they will always have the support of parents. We should not interfere with their expertise but react only in extreme cases. (parent, Croatia)*

We also conducted research through two focus groups of parents of young football players, with 8 participants in each group from seven countries included in the study. Our goal was to explore parents' attitudes towards the pedagogical role of

coaches. Based on research and analysis of interviews with coaches, the parent-coach relationship is problematic in some areas. Therefore, we have formed two focus groups of parents to obtain data for the set goal, as well as the

overall goal of the research. The sample consisted of parents of young football players from different clubs or football schools, as well as parents from different generations of players. Before we started the talks, all individuals signed a consent form for recording. At the beginning, they were informed about the objectives and purpose of the research and their anonymity as participants, and that no part of the recording would be publicly released but serve solely as evidence that the research was indeed conducted.

Somewhat contrary to expectations, various, even diverse groups from the same country shared many common views. Bulgarian parents were united in their view about the need for urgent reforms, both structural and personnel-related. In colloquial terms, parents expect football to be managed by people who care about them. The lack of care and attention is considered a fundamental problem in children's development, which is the focus of our research. In Serbia, a coach, in the eyes of parents, should be a role model for children in terms of authority, as well as a pedagogue, developing their sportsmanship and instilling a love of sports in them. Parents prioritize correct development over success in football, as well as the capacity to work as a team and build a winning mentality, which is vital later in life. Parents in North Macedonia stated

that having experienced coaches with more pedagogical skills working with the youngest children is critical. They must be passionate and persistent in teaching children football techniques. The coach should be a pedagogue or a psychologist who avoids detrimental behaviour such as yelling, offers advice and motivation, and is fully committed to the training sessions while not using mobile phones. There should be more trust in all children, not just those who produce immediate results.

Most individuals want the coach to provide technical information, set boundaries, motivate, encourage, and advise. To instil all of the team sport values he teaches. To make them fall in love with the sport. Also, to teach kids the virtues of competition rather than competition itself. Also, invite the kids to join in the fun. They must respect their teammates, families, and opponents. *'Despite his age, he has demonstrated professionalism, but at times has been a touch more stern than he should be for his age,'* said one participant from Greece. *'The coach has made the kids love the game, but not him.'* In general, the parents from Greece expects the coach for this age group to personify both the figure of a coach and a parent, to immediately correct unsportsmanlike behaviour and be a role model of ethics and a

human being for the kids, to teach them life values such as responsibility, fair competition and perseverance, to be professional and non-discriminatory

and supportive in all aspects of the children; finally, to be sensitive to the different needs of each child.

» *First and foremost, a coach should be an educator, instilling basic principles in them, perfecting something that they carry from their family and upgrading it in that kind of sports way. (parent, Serbia)*

» *All children dream of becoming stars. To be Messi and Ronaldo. But they don't realize how impossible that is in Bulgaria. The system is corrupt - says a father with a successful career. "Let's change the sports leaders! That's the first and mandatory step. We need people with the right attitude. Our Bulgarian Football Union is an empty story!" (parent, Bulgaria)*

» *The state needs to invest more in children. We pay for everything ourselves. There are many talented children, but their parents don't have the means. The costs are enormous. (parent, Bulgaria)*

The second topic on which absolute consensus was reached is the education of coaches. All mothers and fathers are convinced that coaches need support, more training, seminars

in sports psychology and child pedagogy. Regardless of how well they perform their duties, they can undoubtedly be even more beneficial to children if they are better educated.

» *Patience is the key word in working with children. When a person is patient with children, they trust them. But that's something that needs to be learned. (parent, Bulgaria)*

» *Yes, they definitely need pedagogical knowledge, especially when working with the youngest groups. (parent, Bulgaria)*

» *A coach should predispose children to love football. They should be entertainers in the beginning, not from the first train-*

*ing session, where they only give orders and treat them as professional footballers. That's why pedagogical experience is necessary. (parent, Bulgaria)*

» *They need an approach and relationship with children. They should be able to get to know them. They should be psychologists. Putting together a puzzle with 20 different characters. Working with enthusiasm. (parent, Bulgaria)*

However, the question arises immediately about who should invest in these coaches, and the parents' responses vary:

» *A joint investment between coaches, clubs, and the state. And a program to keep them in smaller communities. Regular full-time income is the best for children.*

» *There, the school or club could help them with professional development, paying for training, seminars, and additional education. Clubs must invest in coaching, particularly in the youngest categories, if they want success. (parent, Serbia)*

They also believe it is a poor structure if the coaches are reliant on the children's membership money. In that instance, coaches battle for as many children as possible rather than the quality of their work, which is natural and expected of coaches.

» *Clubs that demonstrate to the coach that they have a fixed income, that they do not rely on membership fees, whether ten, twenty, or fifty, but that they can devote themselves to quality and work. (parent, Serbia)*

» *Unfortunately, quantity does not equal quality. We have the most child football players per capita in the world, as well as the truest aces and the best national team and clubs. It's not about the coach in the first place, but about profit. (parent, Serbia)*

Another interesting conclusion emerged on the same topic. Many admitted that they themselves don't enjoy going to work every day, so it cannot be expected from a children's team coach who works for a small salary and doesn't receive adequate working conditions.

According to the parents, the coach plays an important role in their child's enthusiasm for a particular sport. All parents explained that the main goal

of their children is to enjoy playing football, friendship, and love for the game, many parents highlight discipline as the greatest advantage of football training. Youth football should aim to socialize children, promote discipline, foster a passion for the sport, and allow them to become true football players one day. It is critical to enjoy football. When coaches pursue their roles with dedication, the benefits are significant.

» *That mostly helps him. It's more organized, there is discipline. (parent, Bulgaria)*

» *Every school has discipline problems, but athletes are better off than non-athletic children. (parent, Bulgaria)*

While there may be an ethical code someplace, it is uncertain whether it is universally respected. With a few exceptions, coaches frequently lack significant psychological expertise and tend to base their decisions on outcomes, their mood, or personal qualities.

Some parents from Greece stated that coach has a habit of punishing children for being late to practice, since at this age it is purely up to the parents. They also mentioned that his strict professionalism is not in line with the age of the children, and they would prefer him to be a little more encouraging.

Furthermore, all of them claimed that they were informed about the ethical code at the start of the year through a Power Point presentation and were handed written regulations for the children and themselves. The coach instructed them to post this booklet in a visible location for their children to read at home.

There must be an ethical code, because parents have witnessed coaches misbehaving with children and yelling at them:



» *There must be an ethical code, because I have personally attended, and probably most parents have, matches where coaches do not behave ethically, where they shout at children and from the opposing team, which is completely insane for me. These are the types of people who should not be involved in athletics, especially at this age. (parent, Serbia)*

Disciplinary tactics such as push-ups and running laps are contentious, and parents are dissatisfied when instructors shout, insult, or show disinterest. Running as a punishment, for example, can generate a child's distaste for that exercise, according to some parents, because it will identify him with the punishment, and he will develop an aversion to running. It is preferable to communicate openly. On the other

hand, some parents think that punishments should include additional workouts, such as push-ups, to teach the child to respect the coach and teammates. It is critical that the child understands why he received a punishment. Parents should not be concerned. They don't consider the coach's raised tone to be problematic until it becomes an insult:

» *As far as I'm concerned, I don't have a problem with yelling, as long as it doesn't turn into insults, because children need to be yelled at a bit in order for them to understand that some things are not being done properly. (parent, Serbia)*



The prevailing opinion is that there should not be a distance between children and coaches in younger age groups. Apparently, parents find it much easier and comforting to know that their child has a friendly relationship with the coach, rather than strict boundaries as is usually the case in school. Additionally, the role of the coach and football club in a child's upbringing has proven to be a controversial issue. Almost all coaches claim

that parents and teachers ask them to help in educating the boys. Coaches should hold regular parent meetings and educational sessions with various experts to provide information and understanding about parental responsibilities, rights, and the coach's role. No one denies the authority of the coach, but there are two opposite positions emerging that can be illustrated as follows:

» *If I expect the football coach to raise my child, then I have failed as a parent. (parent, Bulgaria)*

» *Coaches can be close to children, be their friends, while also instilling respect in them. What the coach says is the law. The rules that exist in this school apply to children both during and outside training. (parent, Bulgaria)*

Parents demonstrate awareness and concern regarding aggression, verbal and physical violence. Hate speech is common among parents, notably aimed against referees and, on occasion, coaches. Unfortunately, they all admitted that there is shouting and tension at matches, and sometimes even during training. Parents are often the source of this behaviour, and

some are inclined to justify themselves as being temperamental, explosive, nervous, etc., with shining excuses. Unsuccessful clubs try to rehabilitate extreme parents, while football administration and match security prefer to turn a blind eye. This spoils the atmosphere of the matches and negatively affects all children who have negative role models.

» *After every mistake, they expect an evaluation in the form of a reaction from the stands. In many schools, parents are not allowed to attend training, and that is true. (parent, Bulgaria)*

» *It all starts with the family. We are to blame. What happens at home is carried outside. Relationships among parents are bad, and we understand that. Among us, there are 'black sheep' that leave an impression. But there are also coaches who encourage aggression on the field and enjoy tension. Referees and officials must be stricter. (parent, Bulgaria)*

» *I took him to club matches and national team matches. I regret it. There is a lot of aggression and vulgarity, and little quality football. They learn words and phrases that we don't use at home. (parent, Bulgaria)*

» *In recent years, there have been no problems among the children. They are united. When someone conflicts with another, they don't pass them the ball during matches. That's how they express their emotions and conflicts among themselves. We receive more information about threats and insults from schools than from football. (parent, Bulgaria)*

» *I believe that a parent, rather than a child, will do something inappropriate. Parents frequently have unrealistic expectations for their children. (parent, Serbia)*

» *There is no doubt that the craziest people are the parents of children who play football. Every other game is a battle of the parents. Children are watching and crying. (parent, Serbia)*

The relationship with coaches is also a topic where there were no major deviations among the interviewees. Some parents believe that cooperation with the coach may be jeopardized if the coach begins to hang out with the parents and becomes subjective towards the child. It is critical to maintain limits in communication. The parent should not interfere with the coach's judg-

ments, but instead trust him.

All parents believe that the trainers' job should be made easier with better salaries, better facilities, and a calmer working environment. No one expressed doubt about the authority of the coaches, even if they had reservations about their methods. Overall, they emphasized communication as the most important means of collab-

oration. Some parents are also quite lenient when it comes to the punishments imposed by the coach for poor

discipline, while others strongly oppose it.

» *More meetings and discussions are needed to solve problems. Our coach distances himself and doesn't want that. Maybe he's right, it's enough to communicate about important matters, not just about football. (parent, Bulgaria)*

**Everyone agrees that schools and sports clubs should work in sync.** However, they are convinced that

sports will never become a priority for schools. There are both financial and cultural reasons for this.

» *At the end of both focus groups, we asked all participants to share their observations and thoughts, to draw their own conclusions, and to present specific suggestions on how to improve the relationship among all stakeholders in the process and how to empower the role of coaches. Ultimately, we can conclude that we were dealing with fairly homogenous groups with similar thoughts and attitudes, especially when it comes to the parent-coach relationship. Certainly, a larger group of parents would be welcome for more concrete conclusions, but typical answers can be provided here through an example of Croatia:*

» *Coaches should be educated individuals who have a good approach towards children. Every aspect needs to be elevated to make children feel comfortable. It's impossible to have a coach who has everything we desire. We want a happy child, and what they will become is now irrelevant. (parent, Croatia)*

» *I don't mind a slightly stricter approach from the coach. The club needs to invest in coaches, not only in terms of tactics and technique, but also by encouraging their education in psychological and pedagogical aspects. (parent, Croatia)*

» *The education of coaches is important. Just as we do our jobs, they need to work on themselves too. (parent, Croatia)*

» *If you want a quality coach, then they should be paid well. If we can't afford to pay them, then they should be educated. And parents should trust the coach. (parent, Croatia)*

» *We parents should establish a normal relationship with the coach, just like the communication in school, without fear of reaching out and asking if everything is alright. We shouldn't be concerned about whether they're Messi or not, but rather if they behave normally and listen to what's happening there. We parents are the worst of all, and if we fix ourselves, then our children will have fewer problems. (parent, Croatia)*

» *It all starts from the top, and the management of any club needs to be aware that coaches cannot be without psychological education. Children grow, develop, enter adolescence, and that's where the role of the coach is crucial. I agree that good coaches should be financially rewarded. (parent, Croatia)*

In conclusion, football is an expensive form of entertainment mainly accessible to children from the middle class, while many young people from lower social classes do not have access to organized football, and there is no one to notice and develop their skills. Thereby, **the parents of today's young players invest significant resources - money, organization, time, social sacrifices - to train their children, especially in Balkan countries with less developed football infrastructure and a lack of institutional support. They build trust as stakeholders in clubs, and even pseudo-employers of coaches.** Therefore, they allow themselves at times to exhibit even rude behav-

our at matches. There are few clubs that have financial independence and coaches with enough security and self-confidence to enforce order and discipline not only among children but also among their temperamental parents. **Nevertheless, most football parents realistically assess the situation, know what is best for their children, try to assist the coaches, and create communities around their child's football team.**

## 6. Ethical Challenges

*Any intentional strike is physical abuse. Even when they have new hairstyles and the “teasing” begins, I have banned that in my category because it can lead to some foolishness that could escalate into greater violence. I try to prevent physical and verbal violence. (trainer, Croatia)*

**Professional clubs in Croatia have a prescribed ethical code of conduct for coaches, players, and parents, and all participants are – or at least, should be – familiar with it.** A small number of coaches surveyed recognized that they have received training in UEFA’s approach to child protection, and many participants are not even aware that such training exists. Only a few respondents recognized parts of the training from lectures they

attended as part of a football academy or through participation in international projects. The question is whether the part they heard in lectures actually refers to UEFA’s child protection training.

**In Serbia, there is no written code of ethics or disciplinary procedure for misconduct in clubs,** but all coaches are familiar with the issue and receive guidance from their superiors.

» *The code of ethics and the disciplinary procedure for misconduct do not exist in written form, but they are based on oral rules. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *The code of ethics and the disciplinary procedure for misconduct do not exist in written form in my club, but coaches have rules of conduct among themselves, both off and on the training field. (trainer, Serbia)*

» *The code of ethics and the disciplinary procedure for misconduct do not exist in written form, but more attention is paid to the rules of conduct for coaches. Coaches have meetings with the coordinator to resolve problematic situations. (trainer, Serbia)*

Similar situation is found in Turkey as well. Thus, when asked whether there was an ethical code of conduct in their clubs, most participants responded that there was no such regulation in the written or official form. As in other cases, there is an apparent difference between amateur and professional teams, since such regulation is never found in amateur teams, but occasionally does exist in writing in some of the professional teams (especially in the upper leagues). One participant stated that this regulation is obligatory to be included in the file requested by the UEFA, so they have no choice but to put it in writing. In distinction, coaches working in amateur teams said that they conveyed the ethical rules to the children “orally.”

Unsurprisingly, in the interviews, different interpretations came about what the coaches understood under the concept of ethical rules. While some referred to the concepts of “morality” and “being moral,” others considered it to be “the rules to be followed” in the club. Moreover, even those in more professional clubs were inclined to understand the rule signs they hang above the doors at the entrance and exit of the facilities as “ethical rules.” Alongside with this concept, the other most frequently mentioned conception of ethics was “respect.” It was thus considered more important than all other issues and expected that each individual in the club treats each other with respect.

» *We used to prepare something similar to it and hung it on the walls. When the boy came to the club, he could read them on the wall. But not at the moment. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *We have trainer work instructions. There are rules to protect children here. I also received that training from TFF. With this instruction, we convey the situation to our friends who have not received that training. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *We do not have a code of ethics, but we tell children verbally. First of all, we remind the children of Atatürk's words: “I like the athlete who is smart, agile and virtuous at the same time.” In other words, we tell children how important morality is. A child should be decent, respectful to his friends. This is not a street or a neighbourhood. This is a football club. You can't swear, you can't be disrespectful here. If he doesn't do these, you send him from the team. So, you save the remaining children. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *We have a code of ethical behaviour for working with children. What to do and what not to do. We pay particular attention to their behaviour towards each other. They speak a lot of swear words, they have attention deficits, they do not read books. We are there and pay attention to the children so that they do not behave differently when they are undressing. I say, "If you wear club clothes, you belong here." I don't care what you do outside. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *Parents sign a protocol of 8-10 items, something like a code of ethics. They can't curse the club, and we can't act our way with their kids. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *There are no regulations. Those who do not pay their dues in grassroots management will be fired, but there is nothing for the rest of football, there are only money related things unfortunately. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *We have a "in-house living rules" regulation in writing. If the child come to our sports club as a boarder, this book is given to the player. There are no bans in our club but there are rules. We convey this regulation to our athletes and parents, we explain under what circumstances the child is dismissed from the club, such as having violent contact with his friend or damaging the club's property. There are sanctions for inappropriate attitudes and behaviours, we do not say punishment. (trainer, Turkey)*

The respondents are generally aware that they have a role in familiarizing their participants with hate speech, gender equality, respect for others and differences, and encouraging children to express their own opinions. They see their role in preventive action to avoid incidents that can later be interpreted as hate speech, nationalist, chauvinistic, or racist outbursts. They also believe that

children should not be immediately punished when expressing any form of hate speech towards anyone but rather explained through conversation about the desirable forms of communication towards others and those who are different. In this regard, they consider parents to be significant, although the coaches see themselves as authorities that children listen to.



» *I don't know what they hear and bring from home. Personally, I don't support such things. It's all about personal principles. I don't think anyone should be insulted, so I won't allow that for my child either. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *A few parents came and said, "If there are Syrian children in the team, we will not bring our own children." We said that every child in the team is equal and we will keep them. After all, parents did not take their children from the team. There is no discrimination of religion, language or race here. We will intervene if anyone does. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *There is no discrimination in our team. For example, there is a Syrian boy in the team. Some children tried to protest, saying, "But teacher, this is Syrian." I said: "Is this kid on the same team as you? Does this kid play football with you too? Yes. Then this is your equal. Period." After you, as the coach, say that no child can ever object again. It doesn't matter where it came from. It's important to be human. (trainer, Turkey)*

» *If I see before the game that there is a girl in the opposing team, I warn them to treat her properly. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Hatred should not exist. We always talk and set clear goals for them, to respect themselves first and their teammate, whether they are thin, overweight, or something similar. We don't have players of different races to avoid racism or anything similar, but we emphasize respecting teammates who are different and treating everyone equally. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Regarding older kids, there have been situations where they would say inappropriate things about a player's skin colour. They don't mean it in a bad way, but they would say "black guy" or something like that. I tell them that such things should not be said, that skin colour doesn't matter, and that we all have names and surnames. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *All children need to be cautioned. Children come from different backgrounds and have different upbringings, which is the*

*most important thing. But we are here to warn them, to say and prevent any unpleasant scenes or words, etc. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *When it comes to parents, we need to take a preventive approach. Of course, we always talk when there are international matches or when it involves different races, without specifically mentioning them now. Because there are children who find it interesting when someone says something, and then we might offend someone else on the opposing team. We definitely take preventive measures in any case. (trainer, Croatia)*

When it comes to **role models of young footballers**, the biggest football stars are often highlighted as good role models, but with a caveat that the media doesn't portray a realistic picture, and the real effort that some players have to put in to reach the top is not shown. Footballers who have had a difficult life path and have achieved

significant careers through hard work and dedication are considered good role models. The respondents themselves also mention youth coaches as good role models, as well as the best world coaches who have shown themselves primarily as creators of a good atmosphere and have good communication with their players.

» *In the younger categories, the coach is everything. The parent should also be a role model, but through communication between parents, I realized that parents don't have that power. Many times, parents complain that they can't talk to their child about certain things, about advice on behaviour, and many times they ask the coach to try to solve a challenge that the parent has to solve on their own. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I consider players from the older generation who started from nothing and made some careers to be role models. I consider modern footballers to be PR stars, PR products, not footballers. Players like Neymar and Ronaldo are PR products. I definitely don't consider them good role models. It's easier for me to say, don't look at them. Focus on players from older generations. For example, Pele who started from nothing. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *For everyone, Ronaldo and Messi have been the icons for the past 15 years. They can definitely be role models if we look at them as athletes. I tell my players I train or my son that I doubt they could endure Cristiano Ronaldo's lifestyle for seven days and the amount of training he does. Because it's not about Ferraris, planes, or gels, it's about hard work and sacrifice to succeed... For me, Luka Modrić would be a true idol or a symbol of success for children. It shows what mental strength and power are. I know his character and everything he has achieved is an extreme that probably won't be repeated. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Most children look up to athletes, the best football players. They only know them through TV and how they play the game, but they don't know what kind of people they are. They are still too young to understand who is a good person and who is a good player. I think a good role model would be someone they know best and follow in everything. I look up to my coach; he is my role model. He was a striker, an excellent coach, and he is my role model. (trainer, Croatia)*

**There is a significant difference in the boundaries that respondents consider as abuse.** There are no doubts about any form of physical harm, as it is universally recognized as abuse. Dilemmas arise when it comes to whether verbal communication can constitute abuse. Most respondents consider not only adults but also chil-

dren who exclude another child from their social circle as potential abusers. If any form of abuse occurs within a team, coaches try to address it first through conversations with the children and then with their parents. They are ready to address unacceptable behaviour not only to parents but also to other coaches.

» *For example, some children may refuse to pass the ball to a particular player during training, not choose them for the team, or exclude them in other ways, which is not something that happens in my age group but rather in older ones, where children have already developed certain animosities that younger children don't have. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *If there is constant verbal abuse, it becomes a big problem. The child can be emotionally shaken by it. I believe that abuse can also occur through communication by adults. For example, constantly bringing up things like “how you didn’t fulfil something, how you didn’t score a goal, how you failed.” If it is constantly emphasized, the child can lose motivation, self-confidence, and the will to play sports. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Honestly, I don’t know how to define it. I can’t imagine it because I haven’t encountered it here in this club. Maybe it could be constant shouting at one player who is not your child, even from the coach or the parents. Coaches can yell at children in the heat of the game without any ill intentions. Parents can be harsh towards other children, even towards their own. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *When I compare it to my own experience, when I transitioned from junior to senior football, senior players would do all sorts of things to you. They would play pranks on you, and you would endure it and grow from it, and then you would do the same to others. Back then, it was a form of abuse, but we were tough, stable, and had strong characters. Those who resisted it, most of us did, became true athletes hungry for success*



*and, ultimately, stronger individuals. If those things were done to children today, as I mentioned, we would all end up in court. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I think a form of abuse comes from parents who have high ambitions for their child. They see their child as some sort of image in the near or distant future, idealize them, and try to achieve something at an early age. When we read today's news portals and newspapers and browse the internet, especially when it comes to football, and large sums of money are mentioned, millions. And if that player is worth that much, why shouldn't my child be worth this much? Even if it's a hundred times less, but still "that's enough for me." As a parent, I am also a parent, not just a coach, so I know that adults, parents, think that way, and children simply break under that pressure... (trainer, Croatia)*

**Coaches have encountered inappropriate ways of communicating towards children and others from their fellow coaches.** They consider it a problem that some of them lack even the minimum level of pedagogical approach towards children. In practice, coaches do cross boundaries, which most respondents recognize and do not consider as desirable behaviour.

Moreover, they believe that aggressive behaviour from coaches is incompatible with the coaching profession. **It can be concluded that coaches notice numerous examples of poor practice among their colleagues.** Therefore, they even believe that such coaches have no place in working with children.

» *I think that in the whole system of educating young athletes, there are many coaches who lack a pedagogical direction, lack social skills, and often insult players, primarily focusing on themselves. I believe that the national federation, clubs, they all go hand in hand, should appoint the most educated coaches, especially in the younger categories. The most educated in terms of education and pedagogy. I think there should be more control in that regard. Someone should come and oversee. I've been*

*in the federation system, and there are coaches who, I don't know, someone comes to a match, and they use profanity and do various things, especially in the younger age groups where children should enjoy, learn, and develop human values. How can they learn when they have someone with such behaviour? There should be more control there. (trainer, Croatia)*

**The qualities that respondents particularly appreciate in their colleagues are honesty, dedication, preparedness, motivation for work, innovation, and calmness, especially in communication with others.**

*» There are many coaches whom I would entrust my children to for their upbringing. There really are. There aren't many, maybe I don't know many of them, I haven't met them all. (trainer, Croatia)*

The vast majority of trainers included in this study were men. In this regard, it is interesting to hear the perspective of female team coaches and their experience with the attitudes of young male footballers towards young female footballers, as well as the attitudes of

other coaches towards their female colleagues. Although the sample size is small, it seems that despite deeply rooted prejudices, there is progress. They have not encountered belittlement from opposing male teams.

*» I haven't encountered any club or individual who would insult girls or anything similar. When I was a girl playing with boys, it would be like, "How come girls play football?" or "Why does a girl play football?" Now, girls are really accepted by the boys. (trainer, Croatia)*

*» There's this one boy who comes to training because they say the training is better, and he is the top scorer in the league. And he came, appreciated the girls, and the girls appreciated him. (trainer, Croatia)*

Some of the surveyed coaches had experience working with women's teams to a greater or lesser extent. **Opinions on whether they would lead a women's team in the future differs, but the majority believes that the approach to girls and boys should be the same.** The difference lies in the intensity of training, which is slightly lower for girls. It's interesting to hear the responses from two fe-

male coaches in Croatia who led girls' teams, both regarding their desires to coach male teams and the need for a different approach to coaching girls and boys. While one does not see herself in men's football, the other leaves the possibility open to lead a male team in the foreseeable future. Both respondents believe that there should be a difference in the training approach between girls and boys:

» *I haven't coached a male team, and I wouldn't do it currently. I think the training approach doesn't differ, but it should be different. As a player, I encountered many coaches who came from men's football to train girls. At the beginning, they didn't quite understand that we are women, that we are more sensitive. They were a bit rougher. Then, it takes time for them to adjust. I think all coaches believe in having the same approach, but there is a big difference. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I currently see myself only with girls here. I haven't coached boys, but I would because I don't think there's a significant difference. In my opinion, there is a difference in the approach. You can say anything to boys, but you can't do the same with girls. (trainer, Croatia)*

**Even though the sample of respondents who work/ed with girls is not large, it is nonetheless relevant pointing out the conflicts that female coaches encounter with girls and compare it to the conflicts**

**that coaches have with young male footballers.** There are some similar problems, but some are different from those that the coaches encounter with boys in the team:

» *I can repeat it once, I can repeat it twice, I can repeat it three times, but if I have to repeat it a fourth time, they have to run*

*one lap. Their concentration decreases after an hour, they start talking. Sometimes punishment doesn't help either. Sometimes one of them runs a lap and deliberately misbehaves, but for the most part, they are all obedient. I don't practice punishments, but they also know when I become serious. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *It's not a major conflict, but sometimes a girl becomes jealous if you don't pay enough attention to her. That was a problem for me. There are issues with these girls, mostly related to their personalities. I don't have problems with some of them, but with others, it's constant. For example, they don't come to training because they have a boyfriend, and I find out later, but I manage to solve it somehow. First, I try to talk nicely, explain to them why I do what I do. I explain to them that I have to treat everyone equally. I can't favour one because she comes to training regularly and disadvantage another because she has a boyfriend. (trainer, Croatia)*

## 7. Ideal Type and Possible Improvements

*First and foremost, all professional coaches across all categories need certain things: the necessary tools and equipment for each category. Conditions. Generally, the problem in Croatia is the fields. Every school should have at least two fields. Equipment, so that children don't have to pay for it. Just like when I was a child, I didn't pay for equipment. From older youth players and onwards, they should have a place where children could live, where they could spend time with us. Where they would have teachers who would help them with school. A boarding school, something along those lines. That could be for children who come from other places, it would be perfect. Not just coming for an hour and a half and rushing back home. Where we could talk to them, analyse with them. Furthermore, we should have a nutritionist for*



*their diet. A conversation with a psychologist who would explain to them how to behave in certain moments. We trainers do it all now. From psychologists to economists, fundraisers. We do everything. We perform 16 functions. (trainer, Croatia)*

**Coaches in Croatia and Greece overall, and coaches in Serbia and Bulgaria working in the largest clubs, are generally satisfied with the support they receive from their clubs.** In Croatia and to some extent in Greece, they also appreciate the organization of work within the football federation and other bodies in terms of their coaching progress and development. In this regard, they find it beneficial to be encouraged to attend football academies and various football seminars, which ultimately aim to acquire the necessary licenses for working with football teams. Coaches in North Macedonia and Turkey who work with young children and teenagers are generally unsatisfied with their salary and working conditions, particularly the absence of sufficient football pitches, and even those that do exist are in poor condition. In North Macedonia they claim that major advancements have been achieved in the organization and development of young football in recent years, but that a stable and long-term system is required because football players are not formed overnight. Membership

fees are mentioned as a factor that does not select but rather generates a false notion, particularly among parents, that every child is talented.

They would prefer more frequent seminars, greater accessibility, and more frequent organization of exams for different levels of licenses. They also suggest that lectures should be held in multiple locations, which would facilitate their progress and knowledge acquisition. They believe that the importance of coaches is generally recognized, through the openness of senior coaches to collaboration and the inclusion of coaches working with younger age groups in various regional and national team selections. **They all wish for the work of coaches in younger age groups to be even more appreciated** by the public and the entire football community and its structures.

» *Honestly, I'm not sure to what extent the county football association values the coach because they are not so involved in the work of coaches in a club. Our club actually supports us coaches when it comes to further education. I believe they recognize the work of coaches. Anyway, there are few of us, and there is a shortage of coaches in football schools, which is a financial matter, just like everywhere else. The national federation also gives importance, but they don't provide everyone with the opportunity for further education. They have a limited number of participants on an annual basis. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Perhaps the only thing is to have more frequent education. For example, every year. For a C license, you have to pass everything, three exams in total, to be able to complete the practical part. The Federation also recognizes who is fit for the coaching job. They can approach you one-on-one and say, "You're not cut out for it," while some may say, "You'll have a place in the national team." (trainer, Croatia)*

In other environments, coaches perceive less recognition of their importance, and some specifically highlight that coaches used to have a significantly more significant status and encompassed a range of pedagogical and educational roles, which they generally lack today:

» *The importance of the coach was much greater in the past. Today, in modern sports, the influence of the coach is reduced or insufficient. Let me add one thing. It's not only the reduced influence of the coach; the influence of educators, teachers, and professors has also diminished. There is a downward trajectory when it comes to professionals involved in child development. We used to have coaches who were professional and educated, but now we have a situation where the coach has become an object, and everyone has the right to question their expertise. Somehow, the coach has lost the role they should have. (trainer, Serbia)*

**The question about what would ideal working conditions be and how they imagine it was somewhat surprising and challenging for the coaches.** Many coaches cite concrete examples that exist in the world's largest football centres as working in ideal conditions. The answers vary depending on whether they work in professional first-league environments or if

they are coaches working in amateur clubs or football schools. **Coaches who work in amateur environments mostly emphasize that they would prefer to work in an environment where they are not dependent on membership fees, where they can choose players and work only with the most talented children.**

» *We depend a lot on membership fees in the club, so material security is important. If we have it, I would say to parents, "Your child is good for another sport; they can always stay here and have fun, but it's not worth spending time on them."* (trainer, Croatia)

» *It would look like this: one coach per 12 players, each player would have their own ball on a sufficiently large field. That's the basics, but here, one coach works with 30-50 players alone on the field. Membership fees are high, and I would exempt the players from those fees.* (trainer, Serbia)

» *Free. Membership fees are a corrupting factor and spoil football and relationships in it.* (trainer, Bulgaria)

Their desires and demands, the idea of working in ideal conditions, are much more modest compared to coaches who work in conditions already cre-

ated at a certain level. Coaches from leading clubs do not imagine a better state than the existing one:

» *Everything would stay the same as in this club. I really can't find any aspect of youth academy work that I would change because everything works flawlessly, from the working conditions to the organization of the academy. So, from that perspective, it would be the same as before; I wouldn't change anything.* (trainer, Serbia)

**The main drawbacks in today's work, according to coaches, are the poor training schedules that are not suitable for younger age groups or students, lack of fields or generally poorer quality fields, and a shortage of coaching staff in all aspects.**

They consider organizing a football school within a boarding school, where the school participants would stay during the day and night, fulfilling their extracurricular obligations, as desirable.

*» In my opinion, a perfect working system would include a boarding school for children that would provide education, food, training, something like an academy with experts in the field of nutrition, psychology and pedagogy. That would be good for Serbian football. (trainer, Serbia)*

*» A perfect working system would involve the best coaches because, in my opinion, people are the best resource when it comes to working with children, and then a training centre with good working conditions. The most valuable thing would be peace, without external influences. The work would be focused on learning and training children. (trainer, Serbia)*

*» First of all, nothing happens without the facility, this is the most important problem. But people do not see coaching as a profession. So, let's give a serious bonus to competent trainers in return for a fixed salary and success. Then, let's set goals each season and do material and transfer if needed to get there. I would like to do this from a scientific place. It is also necessary to visit the infrastructure and see what is going on. (trainer, Turkey)*

*» The biggest problem of Turkish football is the lack of facilities. TFF gives money to clubs for infrastructure, but clubs go and spend that money to transfer players to A teams. Our facilities are in very poor condition. Even some of the super league teams do not have proper facilities. Secondly, we need to make a plan together with parents and schools. Some families make children drop out of school because they don't care about*

*school. We have to do everything together with the schools.  
(trainer, Turkey)*

*» I would like to have 8-10 football fields as wide as possible, in various sizes, in nature. I wish we had rehabilitation centres. I would like rooms with two for each child. I would like to have places where children can spend time between training sessions. I would like halls with cinevisions and training rooms. It is very important to be able to use all kinds of technology. I would like to bring educators from Europe and have them train both us and the children. (trainer, Turkey)*

*» First, there would probably be a better selection. Selecting the best players. If we are not dependent on material conditions, quantity is not important to us, but quality is. Then we would probably focus on that. It's hard to imagine. Probably the ideal world for youth coaches would be to have 20 equally talented children at training, being able to implement every idea, concept, and exercise so that the children play exactly as the coach imagined. Let's say we have freedom in selection. (trainer, Croatia)*

*» Maybe it sounds strange, but when we have everything, imagination doesn't work much. But when we don't have much, especially here in the Balkans, then we come up with something great. There wouldn't be much difference from today's training. Maybe the content would be different because we would have more possibilities. Technology, of course, but the goal of the game itself, the training itself wouldn't be much different. (trainer, Croatia)*

*» First of all, I would increase the number of coaches in one category. We often struggle with that. I wouldn't reduce the number of children, but I would distribute them into groups. That's my first thought. I participated with my cousin and a football coach, and we made a plan and programme for a football school. It's not related to any specific one, but in case an opportunity arises to take over a club. So that we are ready. Purely for*

*our own benefit. We discussed the number of children and the number of coaches. I suggested reducing the number of children per coach. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I saw a football school in Hungary. Or rather, in a club where one of our coaches went. Everything that can contribute to a child's development is provided. From nine pitches, including pitches for the youngest players, to artificial turf pitches, and table tennis. I would create a camp similar to that Hungarian club that provided everything for a child's development. Barcelona has a school within the club where they raise children. Boarding school. That's a perfect story. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *I have already fantasized about it before. I would have my own academy, with each category having its own coaches. I wouldn't overdo it, but in the younger categories, I would have coached for conditioning. We would have psychologists. That's my greatest need. I would have a good management that would support it well. And a very good school director. Everyone would be fully committed to the sport. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *Well, everyone would be in one place at the same time. It would be a great entertainment, play, socializing, friendship. It's hard to imagine it now, but I hope that with the new stadium, we will have the opportunity to enjoy this job even more and be unburdened by anything. That children themselves enjoy football. Football is fun, a game, one of the most beautiful, if not the most beautiful, and we need to enable children to truly enjoy training and work. (trainer, Croatia)*

» *A perfect working system would allow for better education of coaches through the creation of academies with quality lecturers, enabling a wider acquisition of both football and non-football knowledge. (trainer, Serbia)*

Bulgarian coaches dream of grass fields, good organization, educated colleagues with whom they could share their knowledge, a professional

approach, and equal equipment. They want to be part of a functional system and have confidence that they are creating a product that won't end up in the

trash at the end of the production cycle. They want to work in teams with 3, 4, 6, or however many motivated and well-paid colleagues are needed.

» *Each group should have three coaches on the field simultaneously. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

» *Good fields, sufficient resources, equal equipment for everyone in the club. This affects the confidence of the children. Qualified coaches, including individual work. A staff of 4 people should be available for a group of 16-18 children. Technology can also facilitate and improve the quality of work. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

» *I have a rich basis for comparison. Two weeks ago, we were in Serbia and Croatia for 5 friendly matches. There, I saw things that I had previously only seen in the West. Academies now have at least 4 coaches on the field. Dinamo Zagreb has 6 people. Attention should be focused on details in the initial training. These gaps appear in the game at the age of 15-16. It's not that we haven't worked on them here, but not with the same attention and dedication. One coach cannot observe 20 children at the same time. We see the result in the end. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

» *First, I would invest in training and methodology. I would rely on the methodology from Serbia and Croatia because they are the closest to us. I would hire people who would create a methodology that suits our children. (trainer, Bulgaria)*

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the analysis of 140 conducted interviews, we gained a good insight into the state, methods, and work of coaches of younger age groups. The main goal of our research was to examine the pedagogical role of coaches, and the research shows that it is significant yet insufficiently recognized, as well as the importance of formal and informal education for promoting positive social values through sports. The research was based on 20 semi-structured interviews with coaches of younger age groups in amateur and professional clubs in seven European countries. The research revealed that coaches are aware of the role of formal and informal education and continuous study and improvement. Formal education and acquired diplomas are not only considered a requirement for working in sports but also a way of self-improvement and acquiring new knowledge, although older coaches, unlike younger ones, no longer have ambitions for further academic education. In implementing informal education, respondents use various methods, tools, and channels, including those that have become particularly accessible and widely used during the pandemic period. Mentoring, learning from older coaches, attending lectures by reputable coach-

es, presence at competitions and matches in football camps are mentioned as opportunities for their own improvement that they gladly utilize and consider desirable in their coaching education. In football-developed countries like Croatia and Portugal, coaches receive significant support in education and development from their football clubs or football schools where they operate. Clubs largely finance their development and also encourage people working in the club to obtain licenses. When it comes to education, apart from the methodology of work, technical-tactical preparation, and training and match management, coaches consider it very important to further educate themselves in other sciences closely related to coaching. They commonly mention pedagogy, communication, and psychology, which they ultimately believe are lacking in educational systems.

Among a certain number of their fellow coaches, they see a lack of pedagogical and communication levels of behaviour. Regardless of whether the club has a prescribed code of conduct, coaches themselves adhere to certain behavioural rules practiced within the club. They expect these positive forms of behaviour from all participants, namely young football players, as well



as from their parents, who must also behave in accordance with the prescribed code of conduct or practically acquired behavioural norms. In their work, they recognize that their role is not only to create better football players and teach them technical-tactical football fundamentals but also to have a significant educational role. They demand respect for certain rules from their students, and if there is a violation of these rules or the prescribed code of conduct, they first attempt to resolve it within the team through discussion. Only if incidents escalate, it is escalated to the level of the leading figures in the football school or club. In some clubs, there is a disciplinary process for both players and coaches, as well as for parents, but the most radical forms of this process, such as expulsion from the club, are rarely used. Therefore, coaches more often implement minor, or as they call them, “sporting penalties,” which are not used in situations when a match is lost or played poorly. Due to the influence of the environment, coaches increasingly adopt a more liberal approach to training and matches. They encourage young footballers to express their opinions and primarily aim to instil a love for football as a game in them. In this process, certain pre-determined rules must be respected. Through formal education, all coach-

es undergo various forms of studying pedagogy, psychology, and communication. Their perception is that such forms of education are very significant, and coaches consider them desirable. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the level of such education through football academy systems or even make it a requirement for coaches to attend pedagogical-psychological-methodical-didactic content programs, which are already being implemented at some faculties in the social sciences. Completion of such a program is considered, for example, a requirement for teaching in secondary schools, colleges, or universities, for those lecturers who have not previously undergone similar programs during their education. Certainly, by using the classical field observation method of observing coaches during training and matches, we would gain an even better overview of the use of pedagogical methods, acceptable communication approaches, and attitudes towards others. As it stands, we primarily obtained a subjective assessment from the coaches, which is particularly evident in the diversity of defining abuse. Additionally, although we consider our sample to be of high quality as we included coaches from different generations, including female coaches in the research, we believe that even more robust and extensive

results could be obtained with a larger sample size.

Regardless of the efforts made by clubs and associations to encourage education, thus raising the significance and role of coaches in the development of young footballers, coaches feel that their role is not sufficiently recognized in the general public. The influence of parents would certainly be further reduced if clubs or football schools were not predominantly financed through membership fees, and if parents did not participate in financing and organizing transportation for matches and tournaments. Different sports systems worldwide have found ways to be less dependent on membership fees, often through the development and implementation of sports within the school and later the university system. Considering the traditions of clubs and football schools in this part of Europe, it is challenging to find a viable alternative system at

this moment that would completely eliminate membership fees, although recent systems in these regions have demonstrated the feasibility of fee-free systems.

Efforts should certainly be made to improve the material and other working conditions for coaches of younger age groups, which can be achieved through better legislative regulations, tax benefits, or additional scholarships and rewards for youth coaches, similar to the scholarship programs for promising young athletes. It is also necessary to elevate or restore the role of coach education within the university system, as the current model of introducing UEFA licenses and attending football academies and seminars diminishes the importance of formal education. In the case of some countries, such as Croatia and Greece, formal education is legally recognized, and new proposals are moving towards enhancing its significance.

*Based on the inspection of coaches' conditions and their pedagogical role in working with and developing children in football, we will provide guidelines and recommendations for improving further work with children.*

*Through diagnosing and analysing the conditions within clubs, special attention should be given to coaches working with children. The focus should be directed towards pedagogical and psychological evaluations of coaches through appropriate assessments, such as testing.*

*When obtaining licenses, previous diplomas and acquired educational qualifications should be recognized, especially if they are related to pedagogical, psychological, and sports sciences, at least in terms of certain privileges.*

*Recognition of coaching diplomas from sports faculties and the establishment of equivalency with relevant licenses. Similarly, coaches with UEFA licenses should be able to have their UEFA education subjects recognized if they wish to enrol in a sports faculty.*

*Organize a greater number of free courses for further professional development of coaches, particularly those working with children. This process should aim to specialize coaches in working with specific age groups, in accordance with the biological and chronological development of the child.*

*With the support of the Association, find other sources of funding for clubs working with children. Provide them with incentives and thereby ensure coaches have a secure financial income, reducing their dependence on membership fees.*

*Introduce a mandatory Code of Ethics for employees and club members, which would be given to every parent or guardian, and by signing it, they would agree to abide by the rules of conduct within the club. This would primarily protect coaches and club officials from inappropriate behaviour by all participants involved.*

*Encourage professional football players to continue their education and work with children and young people.*

*Professionalization of the coaching profession in youth categories, making it a dignified and sole profession through which coaches can sustain themselves - 8-hour work time and a dignified salary.*

*Organization of a national roundtable on the parental role in upbringing young athletes.*

*Development of a series of seminars and conferences on sports psy-*

*chology and pedagogy for adolescents in different cities (in collaboration with schools and leading universities).*

*Revoking UEFA A and UEFA PRO licenses from coaches who have not practiced the profession for more than 3 or 5 years, thus creating more opportunities for coaches who wish to attend courses for these licenses.*

*Facilitating the direct UEFA A license for highly educated individuals.*

*Establishment of a fund to finance training and internships abroad for young coaches from clubs outside the top league.*

*Possibility of coaching scholarships through a competition, similar to sports scholarships.*

*Creation of a common national database for coaches' journals.*

*Unifying sport terminology so that all coaches internationally use the same terms, familiar and accessible to children.*

*Encouraging major football academies to establish partnerships with smaller amateur clubs to share knowledge and experience in the development of young footballers.*

*Creation and promotion of awards that recognize the work of youth coaches in the media.*

*Implementation of a national volunteer or social initiative involving children from different football academies, creating a champion community and attracting attention.*

*Sport nurtures, educates, and instils core values. This should be the motto of every club or federation.*



# APPENDIX:

INSTRUCTIONS, QUESTIONS,  
REGISTRATION QUESTIONNAIRE  
AND CONSENT

## Questionnaire for trainers and instructions for interviews

***IMPORTANT:** While starting the conversation, try to create a pleasant atmosphere for the conversation. Hold the guide so that it does not attract attention and disrupt the conversation. The questions are only guidelines: you should steer the conversation, but get into topics that matter to the interviewee. Be careful to “penetrate below the surface” and not stick to commonplaces. Be sure to steer the conversation toward topics relevant to the project’s goal. Ask specific questions from the guide only if the interviewee did not answer the given questions previously during the conversation! It is preferable to get them to talk on their own on given topics.*

Before starting the interview, give the general information about the research and indicate that they are participating in research on the pedagogical work of coaches. The research is carried out by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade within the Erasmus+ project financed by the European Commission. The research is conducted in 7 countries, one of which is your country.

Thank them for their time, and if they are interested in how long it will take, tell them that the estimated time is 45-60 minutes, but that it always depends on them. If they ask for specific information to which you do not have an answer, tell them that you can find out later because you are only in charge of

conducting the interview, but you can provide them with contacts with the project managers.

It is crucial that you get them to be honest in their answers. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions you will ask, and only their personal opinion is important. Explain to them that if something is not clear they can request clarification, or if they do not want to answer it, they can skip it.

**Be sure to ask them to sign the recording consent before joining the interview itself.** All documents related to this conversation will be marked with a number/code only so that no personal information will be collected. Of course, nothing of what is said will be linked to their name during the

analysis. Anonymity will be fully preserved. Recording the conversation is only for the purpose of not having to write everything down and so that you can fully focus on the conversa-

tion. Only researchers and collaborators will have access to the completely anonymous transcript, and personal data will not be listed anywhere.

## *Interview Questions*

### **Part A - Career and Education**

1. How long have you been a trainer and what categories did you train?
2. What is your educational background and experience, both formal and informal? (Ask about courses, seminars, camps and other non-formal educational forms)
3. Are you obliged to keep a training plan for each training session, which is available to your colleagues/club management?
4. Can you please briefly describe your training? What does it look like in practice? Does it, and - if so - how does it differ after a game was won or lost?
5. Do you think the coaching approach is different if you coach a women's or a men's team and, if so, what would that difference consist of? Have you ever coached a women's team? If not, would you?
6. Are you satisfied with your career? Do you think that working with younger categories is more or less challenging for a football coach?
7. What licences do you have and do you plan to improve (examine limiting factors: e.g., money or time; availability of online courses, etc.)? What is the best way to improve your coaching knowledge? (National programs, clinics/seminars, formal mentoring, video programs, online courses, etc.)

### **Part B – Ethics and Values**

8. Do you have an ethical code of conduct in your club or policy that

focuses on working with children? If yes, were you properly introduced to it?

9. Have you had a training on UEFA's approach to safeguarding children and about children's rights?

10. Is there a clear disciplinary procedure within the club when it comes to inappropriate behaviour of coaches or parents or team members? What are the consequences/fines?

11. What are the most common conflicts between a coach and young players? What methods do you use to resolve these conflicts?

12. Are there consequences/penalties for players in case of defeat or poor performance? Do you think punishments are a desirable part of coaching practice and what punishments do you use and see as effective and desirable?

13. Do you think you have a role in familiarising your trainees with hate speech, gender equality, active citizenship, respect for others? If the response is yes, how do you accomplish that?

14. What do you consider as child (team) abuse by children themselves and adults and how would you respond to it?

15. What do you think makes a good role model in football for children and teenagers?

16. What qualities do you particularly value in your colleagues? And which do you consider incompatible with the coaching profession?

17. What do you think is the primary mission of a trainer? Is it, and if so how, different from the mission of trainers who work with professional athletes?

18. Do you think that your club, the national association and other bodies of the football association recognize the importance of coaches in the development and education of children? Why?

19. Now imagine for a moment an ideal situation somewhere in the future - if you could create a perfect system of work with younger categories and if you were not limited in the financial sense, what would it look like?



## Registration Questionnaire & Note about the interview

Interview no. \_\_\_\_\_, held on \_\_\_\_\_, in \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction - general information about the interviewee** (to be filled in before the start of the interview):

1. **Age:**
2. **Gender:**
  1. Man
  2. Woman
  3. Other/not disclosed
3. **Highest level of education:**
  1. Completed primary school or below
  2. Vocational school or three-year secondary school
  3. High-school or four-year secondary vocational school
  4. Post-secondary school, 3-year BA, Faculty (unfinished)?
  5. University degree or above
4. **Licenses:**
5. **Years of experience in coaching:**
6. **Years of experience in working with younger categories:**

**Code** (create the interview code in the format - interview day, gender, serial number of the interview - e.g., 15022023M2 - and save the audio file on Google Drive under the same cod):

## *Consent Form for participating in the research and recording the data*

Thank you for participating in this interview, which is part of the “**Creating life champions**” research project.

The research is conducted by the **Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory** of the University of Belgrade.

The research topic is the **pedagogical role of coaches in sports**.

The research aims to examine how coaches perceive the educational role of sport and what could be the way to strengthen this role.

The interview will last approximately **60 minutes**.

There are no correct or incorrect answers to the questions I will ask you, but we are interested in your experiences and attitudes. The interview will be recorded and the audio will be transcribed. Notes will be taken for research purposes only and no personal data that can identify you will be recorded nor will such data be included in the research. All personal data such as name, place of birth and residence, occupation, i.e., anything on the basis of which someone could recognize you, as well as personal data of persons you may mention in the interview, will be omitted from the transcript. The recording and transcript will be stored in the database of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory of the University of Belgrade where it could only be accessed only by authorized researchers. The data collected through this research will be used exclusively for scientific purposes, and will be presented in publications (books and scientific journals) or presentations at scientific meetings. In the analysis of the material collected by the research, the personal data of the respondents will be anonymized so that it is not possible to identify the respondents based on the answers given.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can stop and leave the interview at any time, during the interview itself, without any consequences, or you can request a break during which the recording will be stopped and what you said until then will not be included in the research. Also, at any time after the interview, you can request that the recording of the interview and its transcript are deleted from the database. You can do this by contacting Balsa Delibašić, by sending a message to the email address [balsa.delibasic@instifdt.bg.ac.rs](mailto:balsa.delibasic@instifdt.bg.ac.rs). You can contact the above email address with questions related to the research.

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade.

By signing this form, you agree to participate in this research and confirm that the above information has been explained to you and that you understand it.

Thank you for your trust and cooperation!

Researcher

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Respondent

---

Place and Date:

---

# CREATING LIFE CHAMPIONS



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