

Partnering with Laureus Foundation in the promotion of education and integration of socially disadvantaged children and young people through sports

Grantee: Laureus Foundation Switzerland

Location: Switzerland, Europe

Grant Cycle: 2025

Type of Grant: one-year program support, Human Welfare & Rights

Website: laureus.ch

The Laureus Foundation Switzerland was founded in 2006 by IWC Schaffhausen as a branch of the global foundation Laureus Sport for Good, it supports more than 20,000 children in Switzerland every year within social sport projects. Established in 2000 under the patronage of Nelson Mandela, Sport for Good aims to harness the power of sport as a cost-effective tool to help children and young people overcome violence, discrimination and disadvantage in their lives.

The partnership between the **Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation** (NaEPF) and the Laureus Foundation Switzerland focuses on two key projects: SPORTEGRATION and CHAMPIONS. These initiatives aim to promote education and integration for children and young people in socially disadvantaged situations through the power of sport.

SPORTEGRATION harnesses the power of sports to facilitate the successful and sustainable integration of refugees in Switzerland. With over 200,000 refugees in the country—80% of whom are under the age of 35—many face significant challenges upon arrival, including language barriers, cultural differences, the asylum process, and social rejection. These post-migratory conditions can impact mental health profoundly. Despite the proven benefits of physical activity for mental well-

being, refugees often struggle to access sports due to a lack of public integration programs, limited opportunities, and financial barriers such as high gym membership fees.

Traditional sports clubs frequently do not accommodate their specific needs, and the lack of necessary equipment further limits participation. SPORTEGRATION addresses these gaps by providing inclusive sports opportunities that foster social connection and community engagement.

SPORTEGRATION embodies the unifying power of sports, bringing together young people from diverse backgrounds, regardless of their residency status. The programme offers free sports and educational courses where young refugees and locals connect, fostering successful and sustainable integration in Switzerland. Consequently, SPORTEGRATION creates an inclusive environment that promotes social connections, with a focus on holistic health and intercultural exchange. Since its launch in 2016, the program has reached over 5,000 participants. In 2024, it expanded across four cantons, offering more than 50 courses, including 47 sports courses and 6 educational programs.

The NaEPF's funding will support SPORTEGRATION in its ongoing efforts to improve the living conditions of refugees, fostering their successful

and sustainable integration.

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers.”

Nelson Mandela

Laureus first patron

The Project CHAMPIONS – Lernen und Sport was initiated by Michele Salvatore and its the flagship project of the non-profit association “CHAMPIONS Förderverein Bildung und Sport Schweiz”. The involvement of Laureus and funding from the Bundesamt für Sozialversicherungen (BSV) were key milestones in its development, enabling CHAMPIONS to expand beyond cantonal borders. At CHAMPIONS, disadvantaged children and young people aged 10 to 18 across Switzerland benefit from free, easily accessible extracurricular programs that integrate sports and education. As a complement to school learning, the project actively promotes equal opportunities.

The programme is primarily designed for children and young people, mainly with a migration background, who spend their free time in a self-organised way and receive little support from their parents in school-related tasks. In the afternoons, when there is no school, participants come together to work on learning tasks before engaging in sports activities. Specifically, CHAMPIONS combines both sports and educational activities in one programme, using sports and physical activity to enhance the learning motivation of children and young people. The children are guided by older teenagers, the Junior Coaches. The Junior Coaches lead the afternoons and gain important social skills and work experience, which are relevant for their future career entry. Through football, dance, and other playful activities, participants enjoy a meaningful leisure experience while gaining access to education, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Moreover, they develop essential life skills such as responsibility, conflict resolution, and solidarity across social differences. By creating spaces for

education and socialization, the programme fosters informal learning and strengthens social skills.

The overarching goal of CHAMPIONS is to strengthen the personal development of young people. It provides a safe and supportive environment where they receive individual guidance, enhance their social skills, and build self-efficacy. As they transition into the next phase of life, they emerge empowered, carrying a wealth of valuable experiences that help them find their place in society.

The NaEPF's funding will help CHAMPIONS to scale the project to new locations and support these sites in independently continuing the program in the medium term.