BUILD, CONNECT, SUPPORT:

SOUTH ASIANS IN FOOTBALL PLAN 2025-28

The FA

FOR ALL

INTRODUCTION

Football is the nation's favourite game, with more than 30 million spectators, over 100,000 grassroots teams and around 15.7 million participants. It has the power to unite communities, improve lives and inspire positive change, on and off the pitch.

We recognise that when it comes to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), not everything is within our remit or reach – or our control. However, at The FA, our commitment to creating a game free from discrimination is as strong as ever. We must embrace the unique diversity of our country and continue to use football as a force for good.

South Asian representation across our game is increasing

The 2021 UK National Census has reconfirmed that Asian communities comprise the largest ethnic minority groups in the country with 10.6% (6.3 million) of the overall population. This group has also seen the largest percentage point increase from 2011.

As part of our new equality, diversity and inclusion strategy 2024-28 known as 'A Game Free From Discrimination', this is the first time we are launching a plan specific to South Asian communities. In previous years, we have focused on wider Asian communities and now is the time to focus our efforts on the largest minority ethnic group in England.

We've made good progress in this area in recent years, but we know there is more to be done to make the game more accessible for diverse communities on and off the pitch. More South Asian people are playing, coaching and refereeing within the game and continuing to grow these participation levels remains a strategic priority for our organisation.

'A Game Free From Discrimination 2024-28' available to download

ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS: ENGLAND (INCLUDES WALES)	2011	%	2021	%	ASIAN POPULATION SPLIT BY REGIONAL GROUPS
Indian communities	1,412,958	2.5	**1,864,318**	3.1	South Asian
Pakistani communities	1,124,511	2.0	**1,587,819**	2.7	
Bangladeshi communities	447,201	0.8	**644,881**	1.1	
Chinese communities	393,141	0.7	**445,619**	0.7	East Asian
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: other Asian	835,720	1.5	**972,783**	1.6	Other Asian/Mixed Heritage or Multiple ethnic groups with Asian Heritage
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	341,727	0.6	**488,225**	0.8	
Other ethnic group: Arab	230,600	0.4	**331,844**	0.6	Arab
TOTAL	4,785,858	8.5	**6,335,489**	**10.6**	

UK Census 2021 data: England and Wales

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-24

LAUNCHED THREE ANNUAL REPORTS ON 'ASIANS IN FOOTBALL' HIGHLIGHTING OUR EXTENSIVE WORK

DELIVERED OUR FA 'FAITH AND FOOTBALL SERIES' CONNECTING THOUSANDS OF PARTICIPANTS TO FOOTBALL

ENGLAND FOOTBALL
A GAME FOR ALL
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

INTRODUCED OUR EDI 'COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE' INTO GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL, THE NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM AND WOMEN'S PYRAMID

The FA
FOR ALL
The FA KICKSTART
LEADERS MENTOR PROGRAMME
Supported by BARCLAYS

INTRODUCED THE FA 'KICKSTART PROGRAMME' INTO THE FOOTBALL INDUSTRY TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

ENGAGED WITH SOUTH ASIAN FEMALE COMMUNITIES AND SPORTING PARTNERS TO INCREASE REPRESENTATION

DELIVERED MULTIPLE SEASONS OF 'FOOTBALL & ME' FOCUSED ON SOUTH ASIAN ROLE MODELS

DELIVERED MULTIPLE COACHING PROGRAMMES TO INCREASE PIPELINE OF SOUTH ASIAN COACHES AT ALL LEVELS

DELIVERED NUMEROUS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES ON EDI, FAITH GUIDANCE AND KEY DATES

LAUNCHED NEW REFEREEING STRATEGY WITH CLEAR TARGETS ON INCEREASING DIVERSITY IN REFEREEING

Serious Misconduct in Grassroots Football

The FA & Kick it Out - Joint Action Plan

LAUNCHED OUR SERIOUS MISCONDUCT ACTION PLAN TO TACKLE MISCONDUCT AND DISCRMINATION AS WELL AS CONFIDENCE IN REPORTING

SOUTH ASIANS IN FOOTBALL: OUR AIMS 2025-28

THE FA STRATEGY 2024-28: INSPIRING POSITIVE CHANGE THROUGH FOOTBALL

OUR AIM FOR THE SOUTH ASIANS IN FOOTBALL PLAN:
To make a positive difference in the participation and inclusion of all South Asian communities across football.

1. Raise awareness of pathways into football across all areas of the game – playing, coaching, refereeing, supporters, volunteering and off the pitch.
2. Embed South Asian inclusion across grassroots football by working with grassroots organisations and County FAs.
3. Develop opportunities to increase South Asian female participation across grassroots, talent, workforce and supporters. Continue to work in conjunction with our key national partners and across our priority areas.
4. Create more engagement opportunities and communication interventions between The FA and wider communities.
5. Present a holistic football wide 'joint approach' wherever possible working closely with all football bodies and key stakeholders.

WHERE WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE – OUR INFLUENCE AND CONTROL COVERS THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- Grassroots football
- National League and Women's Pyramid
- Coaching and Talent ID
- Refereeing
- Education and Awareness

Other areas outside of The FA's remit where our partners are making progress:

- Professional Players and player development
- Recruitment and practices in Professional Academies

UEFA
women's
euro
GLAND 2022
NE TO UEFA
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CURRENT PARTICIPATION LANDSCAPE

South Asian communities now make up 6.9% of the population (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) excluding 'Other Asian' and mixed ethnicity. Across the game, South Asians are well represented in grassroots football with averages placing above the census numbers indicated in green. South Asian representation dips below national averages in the affiliated game for adult males and children 5-15 years old (both male and female).

CATEGORY	ALL FOOTBALL	AFFILIATED FOOTBALL
Adult Male (16+)	11.1% (+3.7%pt)	6.5% (+1.7%pt)
Adult Female (16+)	15.4% (+1.8%pt)	17.3% (+6.0%pt)
Child Male (5-15)	8.0% (+1.1%pt)	5.0% (-0.2%pt)
Child Female (5-15)	7.4% (+0.7%pt)	4.6% (0.0%pt)

(Denotes YoY change)

OUR TARGETS

ADULT PARTICIPATION

MALES 16+ FOOTBALL AT 11% OR ABOVE

FEMALES 16+ FOOTBALL AT 15% OR ABOVE

OVER 6.9% IN ADULT/YOUTH PARTICPATION INDICATES AN OVER-REPRESENTATION AGAINST NATIONAL CENSUS FIGURES

FOR A DETAILED BREAKDOWN OF THIS DATA, CLICK HERE

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

BOYS 5-15 AFFILIATED FOOTBALL AT 5.5% OR ABOVE

GIRLS 5-15 AFFILIATED FOOTBALL AT 5% OR ABOVE

ACHIEVE A NET INCREASE OF 500 SOUTH ASIAN REFEREES BY 2025-26 SEASON RESULTING IN 1200 SOUTH ASIAN REFEREES

COACHING TARGETS

SUPPORT 1000 COACHES IN THE TALENT AND PROFESSIONAL GAME THROUGH POSITIVE ACTION PROGRAMMES BY 2028*

MAINTAIN NUMBER OF SOUTH ASIAN LEARNERS AT ENTRY LEVEL TO 3.5% OR ABOVE

MAINTAIN NUMBER OF SOUTH ASIAN COACHES AT UEFA LEVEL AT 4.1% OR ABOVE

*From historically under-represented groups inclusive of female, black and South Asian coaches.

OUR LATEST RESEARCH

HUMANKIND RESEARCH

In 2024, we conducted research into South Asian communities and their experiences of football via research partners Humankind. This research was conducted to help enrich The FA's understanding of South Asian communities and their experiences, with informed, independent, and impartial research so we draw on it as our work progresses. The aims of the research are outlined below:

1. Providing enhanced intelligence to guide The FA's work through to 2028, and contribute to how The FA executes it's wider EDI strategy 2024-28.
2. Helping course-correct interventions in-place or planned, that warrant amending, if they are to achieve bigger impact on target South Asian communities.
3. Informing how FA messaging can be appropriately positioned so messages land as intended with South Asian audiences.
4. Supporting successful execution of programmes outside of the core South Asians in Football plan.

Our qualitative research was conducted with ~40 South Asian participants with varying degrees of relationship to football and across every major South Asian community, gender, faith and geographic region

PARENTS/CAREGIVERS
Supportive but less engaged mums and highly invested caregivers who are often fathers responsible for children involved from early years such as Little Kickers to those in school (11+).

YOUNG PLAYERS
12-14, 17–18-year-olds all playing via school.
Older participants engaged at Sunday League level, and some experience of the academy system and infrastructure.

GRASSROOTS PRACTITIONERS
A spread of coaches, referees, part-time administrators (organising teams and leagues).
Often male, fathers; some females, mothers.

CFA / ADJACENT ADMINISTRATORS (INCL. COUNTY FA MANAGEMENT & LEAGUE OFFICERS)
Roles include Community & Inclusion Manager, non-executive director at County FAs; EDI officer at Football League; Football Dev. Officer.

To support progress and address challenges across the game, our research points to several areas of focus for both South Asian males and females.

Our research validates much of the anecdotal evidence we have been hearing over the last few years. Our detailed research can be summarised as below.

HUMANKIND RESEARCH

BUILD: INSTITUTIONAL

What we heard:

- Perceived reluctance to make game more accommodating to key South Asian groups, and endurance of overt racism, often in mainstream spaces.
- Many people can feel unsafe, unwelcome, and having to prove themselves to gain recognition.
- For players and talent, appraisals seem to be ethnically-guided, allowing stereotypes suggesting South Asian talent is lesser to persist --> loneliness and stifled progression.
- Fears of discredited experiences or re-traumatization make reporting discrimination in an imperfect system hard.

What we will address:

- **Supportive and welcoming environments and infrastructure**
- **Addressing prejudice and biases**

CONNECT: CULTURAL

What we heard:

- Grassroots is not accommodating of faith-based practices and dress, which reinforces the perception of 'not for us'.
- A sense that football is still especially unwelcoming for those with visible markers of faith.
- Females in football face gender-based challenges, yet South Asian females face additional barriers, even in school – a key space for fostering a positive relationship to sport.

What we will address:

- **Normalising visibility and representation**
- **Cultural and religious sensitivity**

SUPPORT: COMMUNITY

What we heard:

- Nepotism and a lack of proactive inclusion from white majority caregivers is still evident, making it harder for caregivers to integrate and support their children's development.
- Those with the weakest relationship to the game and culture of football often feel least comfortable in football spaces and are least exposed to the wider benefits.
- For administrative and practitioner roles, limited representation and support means there is limited incentive to pursue these paths.
- Some female players spoke of how cultural expectations placed on them delayed their entry into football – leaving them on the backfoot, and less comfortable in mainstream spaces.

What we will address:

- **Community engagement and outreach**
- **Parental and peer support**

We have also collaborated with Humankind and Nike on a specific research project on Muslim girls highlighting the need to support PE teachers and coaches on inclusive practice and enabling Muslim girls to participate with confidence in PE, extra-curricular and community football provision.

FOR A DETAILED SUMMARY OF OUR RESEARCH, CLICK **HERE** ←

OUR THREE FUNDAMENTAL PILLARS

IN PROGRESS | NEW

BUILD

Our core focus on participation and improving diversity of officials, players, coaches, volunteers and employees.

- NLS & WOMEN'S PYRAMID
- WOMEN & GIRLS
- REFEREE PROGRAMMES
- COACH PROGRAMMES
- TALENT ID

CONNECT

Building the right programmes and interventions to help people feel welcome at any level in the game and normalising South Asian representation.

- 'SA IN FOOTBALL' WEBPAGE RESOURCES AND SIGNPOSTING
- A GAME FOR ALL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE
  - GRASSROOTS, NLS, WP EDI COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE
  - PRO-CLUB COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE
- FA YOUR GAME YOUR WAY ROADSHOWS
- FA DISCOVER MY TALENT ROADSHOWS
- ONLINE ENGAGEMENT 'FOOTBALL & ME'
- THE FA SOUTH ASIAN SHIELD

SUPPORT

Building a wider community, communicating and engaging across more spaces and developing community initiatives.

- PARTICIPANT RESEARCH
- GRASSROOTS PARENT SUPPORT NETWORK
- CLUB TO CLUB PROGRAMME
- The FA For All | KICKSTART LEADERS MENTOR PROGRAMME Supported by BARCLAYS — DEVELOPING DIVERSE LEADERS ACROSS THE FOOTBALL INDUSTRY

Although our plan will focus on all South Asian communities, our research points to some critical groups to focus on:

- Parents/Caregivers with little to no relationship with the game independent of their child's.
- Participants with most visible markers of faith and those that require football in line with their religious practices.
- Female South Asian participants that often face multiple challenges in football.

Sondico
Royal Ca
Oxford

HOW DOES IT ALL FIT ACROSS THE GAME?

EXISTING PROGRAMMES | NEW INITIATIVES/PROGRAMMES

There are many overlaps to BUILD, CONNECT AND SUPPORT across the plan.

GRASSROOTS	NLS AND WOMEN'S PYRAMID	PRO-GAME
A GAME FOR ALL – ENGLAND FOOTBALL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE	**GRASSROOTS, NLS, WP EDI COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE** Ambassadors in the heart of the South Asian communities: connecting and building.	**PRO-CLUB COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE** Connecting CCOs and Academies with local SA communities: improving access to pathways and talent.
FA YOUR GAME YOUR WAY ROADSHOWS - YEAR 1+		

FA RESEARCH

GRASSROOTS PARENT SUPPORT NETWORK - YEAR 1+
- Education and awareness for parent/caregivers.
- Peer to peer support.
- Recruitment & Talent ID support.
- Navigating through grassroots football.

TALENT ID - YEAR 1+
- Funded places to develop SA talent:
- Level 2 Talent ID (up to 24 per year).
- Level 3 Talent ID (up to 5 per year).

CLUB TO CLUB PROGRAMME - YEAR 2+
- Support the holistic development of grassroots and NLS community clubs.
- Connect developing clubs with more prominent clubs across the pyramid to learn and share.
- Support recruitment, Talent ID and player pathways.

THE FA SOUTH ASIAN SHIELD - YEAR 2+

South Asian clubs competition and engagement at St George's Park.
- Steps 4-6 competition.
- Junior football tournament (boys / girls).
- Awareness workshops.
- Recruitment and Talent ID.
- Pathways awareness.

St. GEORGE'S PARK

SUPPORTED BY FA CORE PROGRAMMES - YEAR 1+
- FA EDI Strategy.
- FA Refereeing strategy.
- FA Women & Girls Strategy.
- FA Coach Programmes.
- FA Grassroots Strategy.

FA ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS

HOW DOES IT ALL FIT ACROSS THE GAME?

EXISTING PROGRAMMES

There are many overlaps to BUILD, CONNECT AND SUPPORT across the plan.

SOME OF OUR PROGRAMMES RELATING TO SOUTH ASIANS IN FOOTBALL

The FA 'Faith and Football Series'
Thousands of people have practised their faith and celebrated the contribution of Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Jains and Buddhists across football.

'Football & Me'
EDI Content Series. Two full seasons of profiling South Asian role models. Season 3 out now.

FA KICKSTART
Leadership programme for underrepresented professionals in the football industry.

FA Men's Technical Director John McDermott speaks to the KICKSTART Leaders Mentor Programme 2024-25 cohort at St. George's Park / KICKSTART Mentees at Barclays headquarters

CASE STUDIES

PROFESSIONAL CLUB COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE Supported by The EFL and The FSA

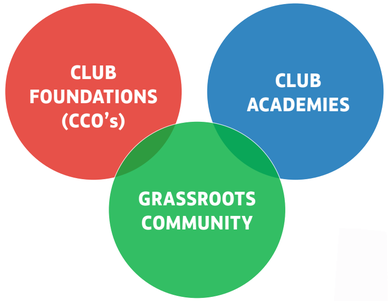
Building on the success of our EDI Community of Practice for grassroots football, the National League System and the Women's Pyramid, we will expand into professional clubs to strengthen their connection with South Asian communities in the most diverse regions across the country. The programme will:

1. Support the work of the professional clubs and Community Club Organisations (CCOs) in their efforts to drive diversity and inclusion into academy football, Emerging Talent Centres (ETC), professional roles and volunteering at the club.

2. Drive best practice and EDI conversations into club environments to ensure a collaborative approach to South Asian inclusion.

3. To collect examples of good practice, drive new initiatives and build trust between club and community.

4. Build connection with The FA's Club Consultant programme – providing EDI insight and expertise.



THE FA 'FAITH & FOOTBALL SERIES'

We will continue to work with faith communities across the country and celebrate major faith dates in the calendar. In 2024, we also renewed our 'Faith and Football' network working group to include representation from every major faith in the country to consult with on faith matters across our game.

Our Faith and Football series is much more than just events — it's the foundation for lasting goodwill, opening doors for meaningful collaborations and future partnerships. Since its inception, the series has welcomed communities celebrating football through our marking of Chanukah, Christmas, Vaisakhi, Ramadan, Diwali and Buddha Day. Through each gathering, we build trust, create shared goals, and inspire mutual respect. These moments of connection foster a sense of unity and purpose, laying the groundwork for ongoing relationships that continue to grow, strengthen, and drive impact within our communities.

We regularly publish factsheets such as Ramadan Guidance, online briefings and training sessions focused on faith.

CASE STUDIES

OUR COACH PROGRAMMES

THE MENTEE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Provides a season-long placement for aspirational, intentional coaches, aiming to accelerate their development and help them break into the professional game, with each coach receiving a bespoke and agile programme.

THE CLUB PLACEMENT PROGRAMME

Partnering with professional clubs to give coaches from historically underrepresented groups the opportunity to experience a structured programme to gain valuable experience in a professional environment.

OUR COACH DEVELOPMENT GROUP

A targeted, positive action initiative designed to give coaches working in the talent development pathway in the boy's game or within Steps 1-4 of the men's National League System the opportunity to gain invaluable experience and support as they develop their skills and work towards a career in the professional game.

PARTIALLY FUNDED PLACES

Providing financial support for historically underrepresented groups inclusive of ethnically diverse, females and disability.

COACHING EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE

As the women's game continues to develop in England, it is crucial that the coaching and leadership talent at an elite level are provided with the guidance and support to maintain a culture of effective leadership within their high-performing environments.

REGIONAL MENTEE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

To address the significant underrepresentation of coaches from historically underrepresented groups within the professional game. A connected season long regional programme to support 50 aspirational coaches from historically underrepresented groups to transition from grassroots into talent & senior pathways. An immersive and developmental experience through personalised and connected learning opportunities with a blended approach.

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS PROGRAMME

To identify, recruit and support new coaches/volunteers from historically underrepresented communities across grassroots football through the delivery of our Stepping over the Sidelines training.

CASE STUDIES

ENGLAND ELITE COACH PROGRAMME

Our flagship programme has seen many elite coaches experience coaching at the highest level with our England teams. A positive action programme designed to provide under-represented groups with coaching opportunities within the elite england set-up, the programme is jointly owned with The PFA and aims to:

- Build a larger talent pool of diverse coaches at elite level. Two South Asian coaches have participated in the programme so far. Our aim is build on this in the coming years.
- Provide unique national team experiences to build experience and employability.
- Break down perceptions that elite coaching opportunities can be inaccessible.

LEARN MORE

Our new South Asians in Football webpage will provide a one-stop shop for resources and more information and will be developed over the coming season. A new South Asians in Football Working Group will also work closely with us to support, guide and challenge our work in the coming years.

CLICK HERE FOR OUR WEBPAGE

FULL URL:
https://www.thefa.com/inclusion-and-anti-discrimination/south-asians-in-football

We would like to thank all of our stakeholders across the game for being involved in our consultation process since December 2023 specifically the organisations below for their support and input. We would also like to thank the many coaches, players, referees, administrators, volunteers and parents who have given their input into this plan throughout the consultation period.

Professional Footballers' Association

PROFESSIONAL GAME MATCH OFFICIALS

FSA FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS' ASSOCIATION

KICK IT OUT

Premier League

EFL

You can also email us at our longstanding email address serving all Asian communities: AsianInclusion@TheFA.com

HOW TO REPORT DISCRIMINATION

To ensure we create 'A Game Free from Discrimination' we all have a responsibility to step up and report discrimination.

If you want to report discrimination in the professional game whatever your involvement, please follow this guidance:

Reporting Discrimination in the Professional Game (thefa.com)

If you want to report discrimination at either Wembley Stadium and St. George's Park, please follow this guidance:

Reporting Discrimination at Wembley Stadium Connected by EE and St. George's Park (thefa.com)

If you want to report discrimination in the Grassroots game whatever your involvement, please follow your guidance:

Reporting Discrimination in the Grassroots Game (thefa.com)

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