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# **FIDE Social Commission Report**

*Q1 of 2026*

**Author:** FIDE Social Commission (SOC)



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Dear Members of the FIDE Council,

On behalf of the entire FIDE Social Commission, we are pleased to submit this informative report summarizing the landmark achievements of the "Year of Social Chess" and outlining our vision for the future. We wish to thank the FIDE Council and the FIDE Management Board for their unwavering support, strategic guidance, and consistent help throughout the Year of Social Chess 2025. This support was instrumental to our success, culminating in the highly productive conference held in Bhubaneswar, which served as a vital hub for collaboration and planning. Your belief in this initiative has been a cornerstone of our work.

We were particularly heartened by the affirmation from the FIDE Congress regarding the dual nature of our federation. It was incredibly encouraging to hear the clear recognition that FIDE's mission extends beyond the competitive board to encompass a profound and vital social mission. This acknowledgment reinforces our commitment and validates the importance of integrating chess into the fabric of society.

The Social Chess Year 2025 demonstrated the tangible power of this mission. A key factor in its success was the development of a strong and coherent branding concept. This visual identity was so effective that it was even adopted by the competitive chess sector, ensuring a consistent and unified "FIDE look" across all communications. The distinctive logos of the Social Chess Year were prominently featured across a wide range of activities worldwide, implemented by national federations and social project organizations, creating a powerful global narrative.

To amplify this message, we developed and executed a comprehensive social media strategy. This effort was executed with great success, leading to a substantial increase in our global reach and visibility. Our strategic collaborations, particularly on Instagram, allowed us to connect with new and diverse audiences, showcasing the human stories behind the chess pieces.

This success would not have been possible without the tireless dedication of my colleagues in the Social Commission and our partners within FIDE. Their hard work and passion made it possible to structure and deliver monthly activities targeting different social groups—from at-risk youth and the elderly to individuals with disabilities and those in remote communities.

Looking ahead, the Social Commission is committed to maintaining this momentum. We will continue our intensive work on the expansion of social chess projects worldwide. Furthermore, in alignment with the upcoming thematic focus, we stand ready to support the FIDE Educational Commission during the upcoming Year of Educational Chess. We believe that the social and educational aspects of chess are deeply intertwined, and we look forward to fostering a fruitful collaboration to ensure the continued growth of our beloved game in all its forms.

We are excited to present the full details of our activities, results, and future plans in the following sections of this report.



### Personnel changes

**Maria Tamkovich** took up her position as **Commission Secretary** on January 1, 2026. We wish her all the best and much satisfaction in her new role. A new commission members has been found: Tünde Csonkics and new Chess for Elderly project leader April Zhong. With these two personnel changes, the Commission is complete and operational.

### Website & Social Media

The commission has commenced a **comprehensive remastering of its website** and social media presence to enhance user engagement and reflect our current strategic priorities. The editorial overhaul will include a complete reconstruction of the HOME page to improve navigation and visual impact, as well as substantive updates to the main projects' pages to ensure content is current and accurate. Furthermore, the Get Involved section will be significantly expanded to feature dedicated portals for volunteering opportunities and platforms for project sharing, aiming to foster greater community participation and collaboration

### Main projects and events

The year has started from the remarkable event wrapping the FIDE year of Social chess and introducing the new chapter of Educational chess year. The **FIDE Global Conference on Chess in Society and Education opened at KIIT University in Bhubaneswar** on 14 January 2026, bringing together education leaders, researchers, social impact practitioners, and chess organisers for a three-day programme. Chair of FIDE SOC Andre Vögtlin opened the conference with review of the FIDE Social Chess 2025 highlights and priorities for 2026. He shared the flagship campaigns across the year, including a month-by-month rhythm of themed initiatives, and the Social Chess Day tournament "Every Move Counts", organised with Lichess.org, which drew 20,078 players worldwide.



The first day of the conference was devoted to the Social chess initiatives around the world and intensive work of FIDE SOC. Dr. **Cristóbal Blanco Acevedo** followed with a neuroscience-focused presentation on how chess engages the brain across multiple systems rather than in a single "chess area". **Francesca Bonelli**, Head of Partnership and Coordination at UNHCR, outlined the scale of global displacement and the role sport can play in wellbeing and opportunity. UNHCR reports that 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced by the end of 2024. **Russell Makofsky**, Founding Board Member of The Gift of Chess, spoke online about a practical, distribution-led approach to access, tracing the organisation's origins to community initiatives during the Covid-19 pandemic and outlining its goal of



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distributing one million chess sets globally by 2030. FIDE SOC project leaders highlighted main project updates for the audience. **Anastasia Sorokina** presented Chess for Protection, focusing on expanding safe, structured chess activities in refugee settings, particularly for girls and schools. **Mikhail Korenman** presented updates on Chess for Freedom, outlining developments in prison chess and upcoming continental and intercontinental competitions. **Prabitha Urwyler** presented Chess for Hope and Recovery, describing chess as a tool that provides structure, routine, and reflection in rehabilitation contexts. **April Yunwei Zhong** highlighted how Chess for the Elderly supports both cognitive activity and social connection. Maria Tamkovich presented Infinite Chess, focusing on adaptive learning models designed to meet players where they are.



**FIDE SOC Ambassador Mukesh Ranjan Das**, Executive Director (HR) at IndianOil, joined the conference to discuss IndianOil's support for prison chess programmes. He described chess as an effective tool for building discipline, patience, and decision-making skills among inmates. The session continued with a presentation by Abhijit Kunte, who outlined IndianOil's long-running support for chess-based rehabilitation programmes, particularly within correctional institutions.





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The final academic block connected research with practical application. **Sabine Vollstädt-Klein** spoke about chess and self-regulation in addiction-related contexts. **Hilario Blasco Fontecilla** addressed the socio-educational use of chess in relation to ADHD. Joining online, **David Smerdon** presented work on the Gender Equality in Chess Index, highlighting the role of data in understanding participation and equity. The second day of the conference shifted its focus toward chess in education, with sessions dedicated to policy frameworks, research outcomes, and practical implementation in schools and learning environments.

The conference concluded with announcement of the results of the **FIDE Social Chess Storytelling Challenge**. The initiative received a total of 56 entries, including 43 grassroots submissions and 13 professional productions, showcasing stories from across the world that highlight chess as a tool for social impact, inclusion, and education. The Best Short Film (Professional) award went to Alberto, on a Blue Day, directed by **Cristóbal José Blanco Acevedo**, for its sensitive and reflective portrayal of chess as a tool for emotional expression. The Best Grassroots Film (Amateur) award was presented to The Childhood Board by **Alfredo Castañeda-Herrera**, highlighting the role of chess in childhood development and community connection. The Social Commission Choice Award was awarded to Checkmate Autism and the Power of Chess by **Evguenia Charomova**, recognised for its powerful depiction of how chess can support inclusion and empowerment for individuals on the autism spectrum.

The Outstanding FIDE Social Award was presented to **Viraj Upadhyay** and Vihanan Upadhyay for their initiative Pawns to Kids, which focuses on making chess accessible to children regardless of background. Created by the teenage brothers Vihanan (14) and Viraj (12), the initiative has introduced chess to hundreds of children in remote villages, orphanages, and underserved communities. The FIDE Social Chess Award was presented to **Bernard Wanjala**, Advisor to the FIDE Social Chess Commission and a leading figure in Kenyan and African chess. Benard Wanjala has played a pivotal role in introducing chess to the Kakuma refugee camp, using the game as a tool for education, inclusion, and opportunity within displaced communities.





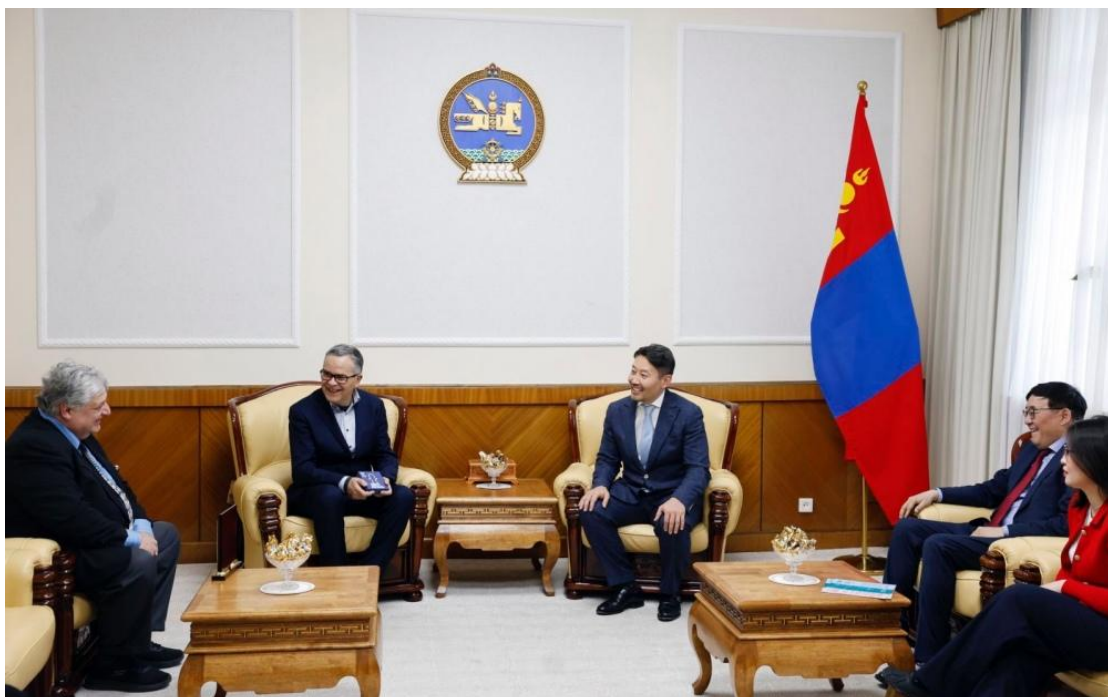
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Following the feedback from participants and chess community, FIDE Social Commission with support of the FIDE Commission for Women's Chess organized **the online Storytelling & Impact Content Masterclass** on 7th March - first event in series of monthly educational activities. This online masterclass offered practical tools, creative inspiration, and professional insight into how impactful films are created – from the first idea to the final cut. More than **170 creators, athletes, organizers from 94 countries** were inspired by Maxim Kolyshev, a Cannes Lions finalist, creative director and film director, winner of over 150 international awards and multiple Grand Prix in social advertising and impact campaigns. Maxim shared how powerful stories are born and how ideas turn into films that move people, build communities, and create real social impact.

**Next planned activities planned by the FIDE SOC include the online meetup by the Infinite Chess project in April devoted to the International Autism Awareness Day and online masterclass on funding the social initiatives in May 2026.**

**Chess for Freedom** is an initiative by FIDE and Cook County (Chicago, USA) Sheriff's Office that brings the transformative power of chess to incarcerated individuals, promoting personal growth and rehabilitation. Since its launch in 2021, the project has **expanded to 57 countries**, with prisons worldwide embracing chess as a tool for developing critical thinking, discipline, and decision-making. Chess for Freedom project is a partnership between the **FIDE and Cook County Sheriff Organization in Chicago** and we also appreciate the support of the **Gift of Chess** non-for-profit organization from New York that provides thousands of chess sets for correctional facilities world-wide. The Indian Oil Corporation is the project long-time support organization and now with the **KITT University** were co-sponsoring a Chess for Freedom section at the Social Chess Conference in Bhubaneswar.

In January 2026 FIDE SOC Chair André Vögtlin and project leader Dr. Mikhail Korenman visited Mongolia to become acquainted with the country's social and educational chess initiatives and to further strengthen international cooperation in socially oriented chess programs. During the visit, the delegation was honored to be received by the **Deputy Prime Minister of Mongolia, Khassuuri Gankhuyag**, who was presented with the Social Chess Year Award in recognition of Mongolia's outstanding achievements and long-term contributions to social chess programs and community development initiatives.





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Two leading chess academies – ABCChess Academy and Steinitz Academy – presented their training programs, development policies for junior and youth players, and socially oriented chess projects. André Vögtlin and Dr. Mikhail Korenman also visited the Women’s Federal Correctional Facility, whose team has participated in all Chess for Freedom championships and has won the competition three consecutive times. The delegation met with Colonel Batbayar Bumdari, Head of Prison No. 407. In recognition of their contributions to the Chess for Freedom program and their support of socially impactful chess initiatives, representatives of the correctional facility were also presented with the Social Chess Year Award.

**On the 5th March an invitational pilot-test tournament will be host by FIDE SOC for mixed groups (8 teams from England, Georgia, and Latvia) who will play together in one tournament (male, female, and youth teams). That is the first event of this type, and we would like to see if may lead in a future to the "Open" tournament format.**

**For the following months Chess for Freedom is planning to continue implementation of the next activities:**

- Official visits to Georgia, Greece and Albania to meet with local authorities and discuss potential launch of the project there.
- The Continental championship for prisoners is scheduled for May with the following dates: African continent - May 12, American continent - May 14, European continent - May 19, Asian continent - May 21.
- Italian Chess Federation in cooperation with TERCAS Foundation will host the European workshop for Chess for Freedom project on 19th May.

**Chess for Protection** is the initiative, running since 2021 in partnership with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), has become a gathering space for well **over 2,300 participants across 37 schools**, and uses chess as a vehicle for education, social interaction and personal development, offering hope and perspective to the participants. Over the past 4 years, the Chess for Protection Programme has achieved significant milestones, transforming the lives of refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei through the power of chess. **Currently the project is active according to the approved budget with the main goal to prepare the refugee teams (open and women sections) for the World Chess Olympiad 2026 in Uzbekistan.** FM Sergejs Klimakovs is preparing participants for the tournament providing not only online sessions but also offline training camps. He has visited Kakuma already in March, 2025 and is planning to arrive in April and November for the next offline training camps in cooperation with UNCHR and Chess Kenya.





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The Girls Club is also active as part of the Chess of Protection project. The chess training combines online lessons with experienced coaches, training with a local tutor, and workshops featuring inspiring guests as well as the Girls Book Club. The online trainers, WGM Anastasiya Karlovich (UKR) and IM Salome Melia (GEO), are both exceptional educators and accomplished chess players. The Girls Book Club is run by Natalia Ryzhenko and Anastasiia Karlovich, who presents books, read, and invites the girls to conversation. During the discussion, students watch short videos and cartoons to understand the material better since the lessons are online. For the moment 250+ girls from 4 local schools have online chess lessons every Saturday followed by the offline teaching sessions by local facilitators.



**Infinite Chess project** aims to increase knowledge and awareness of chess for children with autism spectrum, give practical advice to teachers and parents, study the benefits of introducing to chess and develop various teaching methods. The pilot project of chess classes for children with autism spectrum is a follow-up of a successful initiative implemented in 2019 for 4 groups of 4 kids in each. In January 2021, a pilot project was supported by FIDE and went global by launching in 5 partner countries: Spain, Turkey, France, Gibraltar, and South Africa. With support of FIDE Planning and Development Commission (PDC), International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Kindness on Board Foundation the FIDE Infinite Chess project is **active now in 28 countries for more than 270 children** with autism and co-occurring conditions.

FIDE Infinite Chess project is happy to continue the **partnership with Kindness on Board Foundation**, an NGO based in the USA, California. The foundation not only organized the fundraising campaigns to support the project's partners but also started the second group and conducted chess lessons for 10 kids with autism spectrum. Ambassador of the project and co-author of the Infinite Chess Handbook Ala Mishchanka visited Kindness on Board Foundation team with educational seminar and also awarded the founder and director Jonathan Chao with the Social Chess Year Award for valuable support and contribution to the autism awareness and Infinite Chess project development.



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During the 9<sup>th</sup> stage of the project started in January 2026 the following partners joined the inclusive chess family: Clube Xadrez Rei (Brazil), Clube de Xadrez Carioca (Brazil), Chess Buddies & Mates Community (Malta), Galatasaray Sports Club (Turkey), Shreejan Learning Hub Foundation (India). Trinidad and Tabago, Singapore and Turkmenistan are finalizing the preparatory stage and get ready to the project start in a few months.



**For the following months Infinite Chess is planning to continue implementation of the next activities:**

- expand the geography of new partners by widening the project's footprint and promoting access to the benefits of chess
- increasing the current partners' experience by adding more groups and kids, focuses on vertical growth—enhancing the quality and reach within existing communities.
- securing the project's financial and media support
- PR campaign devoted to the International Autism Awareness Day including weekly posts with parents' video feedback on the participation in the project (April 2026)
- Online meetup on the International Autism Awareness Day gathering specialists and families with autistic kids to share the challenges and ways to raise awareness in the community (April 2026)
- Creation of the second part of the Infinite chess handbook requested by the permanent partners (May-June 2026)
- Educational seminar for the teachers and parents on how to use the Infinite chess handbook and presenting the second part of it for the intermediate level of participants (June 2026)



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**Chess for Elderly** programme of the FIDE Social Commission aims to promote healthy ageing, reduce loneliness, enhance cognitive engagement, and strengthen intergenerational bonds through inclusive and community-based chess initiatives. In 2025, the programme expanded significantly, **engaging partners across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas**. Activities included the global March Roadshow, international presentations, and the consolidation of **Chess for Connection** as FIDE's flagship intergenerational initiative.

Starting from January 2026 project leader April Zhong launched the following initiatives:

- Akure, Nigeria Initiatives: in partnership with Synergy for Women Development Initiative, Chess for Elderly project organized two chess groups in Akure.
- Federal University of Technology (FUTA): Chess for Elderly is working with university students to bring Chess for Connection to senior citizens within the university community, including retired staff. In January, they hosted a virtual training session for student volunteers on how to engage senior participants and organize intergenerational chess events. Each participating university now has a designated student leader coordinating members and planning coaching sessions with senior citizens.
- Eco-Chess Set Project: In collaboration with a local NGO, Chess for Elderly project is supporting the development of an eco-friendly chess set made from recycled pure water sachets (plastic waste that significantly impacts local communities). The initiative aims to train secondary school students in two states while fostering intergenerational engagement with senior citizens during weekend community sessions. The project is currently under review by the local Ministry of Education.



**For the following months Chess for Elderly is planning to continue implementation of the next activities:**

- The future plans of the project include Uganda and Gambia, April has connected Regional Directors respected areas and planning several events in the coming months.
- Expansion to Windsor, Canada considers continue expanding the program reach there. So far, Chess for Elderly have successfully implemented at two Windsor senior home locations.
- Organize and host the annual 2026 Canadian Intergenerational Chess Challenge.



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**Chess for Research** project of FIDE SOC aimed at establishing an **international, evidence-based ecosystem for applied chess research**. The year 2025 marked a deliberate transition from isolated initiatives to a structured, scientifically grounded approach to Social Chess.

Following by the valuable experience of the Global Social Chess Research Conference, were the Social Commission conducted extensive outreach to researchers working on cognition, psychology, education, neuroscience, addiction, disability, social development and sustainability through chess, new milestones were achieved during the FIDE Global Conference on Chess in Society and Education in Bhubaneswar in January 2026.

Dr. **Cristóbal Blanco Acevedo** explained that chess activates multiple areas of the brain simultaneously, particularly those linked to memory, calculation, and emotional control, while cautioning that not all forms of cognitive training translate effectively into real-life performance. **Rodrigo Barbeito** introduced a **sociocultural perspective** on social and therapeutic chess.

**Chess in Education 2026** | **FIDE SOCIAL CHESS YEAR '25** | **KIIT**

**DR. IM CRISTÓBAL BLANCO ACEVEDO**  
NEUROSURGEON, NEUROSCIENTIST

**true story**

Awake brain surgery  
Language, attention, memory mapping  
Blindfold chess in the operating room  
A scientific demonstration

2000  
1535  
1070  
605  
140  
CBA

**Sabine Vollstädt-Klein** spoke about role of chess-based cognitive training in alcohol and tobacco use disorders, effects on self-control, craving, executive functioning and brain activation and shared practical integration of chess-based cognitive remediation as add-on therapy in clinical rehabilitation programmes. **Hilario Blasco Fontecilla** addressed the socio-educational use of chess in relation to ADHD.

**Chess in Education 2026** | **FIDE SOCIAL CHESS YEAR '25** | **KIIT**

**DR. HILARIO BLASCO FONTECILLA**  
CHECKMATE OF ADHD

**04 The Path Forward: Infinite Chess**

**SCALE**  
Expand "The Secret Trail of Moon" and standardized chess-therapy curricula to new regions.

**VALIDATE**  
Continue longitudinal studies to ensure credibility with health funders (2026 Vision).

**INTEGRATE**  
Position neurodiversity support as a core pillar of the FIDE Social Commission's strategy.

**unir** LA UNIVERSIDAD EN INTERNET | **emooti** INSTITUTO DE SALUD MENTAL Y BIENESTAR



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**For the following months Chess for Research is planning to continue implementation of the next activities:**

- continue to develop collaborations started in 2025, support pilot projects and ensure that new research genuinely strengthens FIDE's mission to use chess as a tool for education, well-being, sustainability and social development worldwide.
- showcase existing and ongoing research on chess and its impact on individuals and communities.
- gather evidence to support funding applications and policy recognition and build a global research and practice network around social chess.

A joint working group will coordinate research activities, prioritise topics, oversee quality and ensure that findings are shared back into the FIDE structure and with member federations.

Thank you to the engagement of a dedicated group of the FIDE SOC project leaders as well as our commission's secretary we build a social chess environment with the long-term goal to get world wide scope of activity. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the **FIDE President and FIDE Council and FIDE Management Board** for the extensive support of social chess and all social initiatives launched by the commission and its partners.

André Vögtlin, Chair of FIDE Social Commission  
Maria Tamkovich, Secretary of FIDE Social Commission

March 02, 2026