



FIDE Social Commission Report

Q2 & Q3 of 2026

Author: FIDE Social Commission (SOC)



Dear Members of the FIDE Council,

On behalf of the FIDE Social Commission, we are pleased to submit this report summarizing our activities from April to September 2026 and outlining our planned initiatives for the end of 2026. We wish to thank the FIDE Council and the FIDE Management Board for their continued support, strategic guidance, and trust in our work. Their backing remains essential as we advance our social mission across the global chess community.

We are encouraged by the ongoing recognition of FIDE's dual nature—embracing both competitive excellence and a profound social responsibility. This affirmation continues to guide our efforts and reinforces our commitment to making chess accessible and beneficial to all segments of society.

During this reporting period, we have maintained the momentum built during the Year of Social Chess, building upon the strong branding and visual identity that proved so effective in unifying our communications. Our social media strategy has been further refined, allowing us to sustain and grow our global reach, engage diverse audiences, and highlight the transformative impact of chess on individuals and communities.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of my colleagues in the Social Commission, our partners within FIDE, and the many national federations and local organizations that implement social chess projects on the ground. Their passion and hard work continue to drive our shared mission forward.

Looking ahead to the end of 2026, we plan to intensify our efforts in expanding social chess projects worldwide, with particular attention to reaching underserved populations and strengthening existing collaborations. We also remain ready to coordinate with the FIDE Educational Commission as the educational dimension of chess gains further prominence, recognizing the deep synergy between our social and educational objectives.

We are pleased to present the detailed overview of our activities, outcomes, and upcoming plans in the following sections of this report.

Main projects and events by FIDE SOC on April – September 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 Bhubaneshwar.

The European “Chess for Freedom” workshop took place in Teramo, Italy, from May 17 to 19, bringing together prison administrators, educators, chess officials, researchers, and social project coordinators to explore the growing role of chess in rehabilitation, reintegration and social inclusion. Organised with the support of the Italian Chess Federation (FSI), the TERCAS Foundation, and the FIDE Social Commission, the event combined conference sessions, project presentations, international case studies, and a visit to the Teramo prison, where delegates met inmates participating in the 2nd Continental Online Championship for Prisoners.



A record number of 50 countries (42 countries in 2025) and 71 Male (50 teams in 2025), 21 Women (13 teams in 2025), and 19 Youth (13 teams in 2025) teams participated in the **2nd Continental Chess Championship for prisoners** that was held from May 12 to 21, 2026. The African Continental Championship featured teams from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Kenya, Ghana, Eswatini, as well as new countries Nigeria, Namibia, Madagascar. Both Zimbabwe Male and Women teams finished at the top of their groups, with Zimbabwe Male team winning the overall competition. The European championship included Serbia, Armenia, Romania, Norway, Ukraine, Croatia, England, Spain, Poland, Latvia, Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, Georgia, and Greece, and new countries of Belgium and Albania joined this year. The Asian continent was represented by teams from India, Mongolia, the Philippines, Kyrgyzstan, and Singapore, and a group of four teams from the Australian region – Australia, South Australia, and a new one from Vanuatu. The overall competition winners are two Youth teams from India. Mongolia won the Male and Women sections.

On August 12, 2026, the inaugural **World Youth Leadership Forum** united global minds in Chicago. Representatives from the United States, Switzerland, Romania, Ukraine, and El Salvador gathered to discuss developing leadership skills, share ideas to foster chess in society and education, and build meaningful global connections in an inclusive and supportive environment.



The keynote speaker was **Paul Vallas**, former superintendent of four United States cities and CEO of both the Chicago Public Schools and the School District of Philadelphia. Mr. Vallas has dedicated his career to public service and educational leadership. During his tenure with Chicago Public Schools, he brought chess education to dozens of schools across the city. He shared insights on the role of chess in today's technological world and its potential to foster international cooperation, especially among young people.

André Vogtlin, President of the Swiss Chess Federation and Chair of the FIDE Social Commission, shared basic leadership tips for young leaders. **Dariana Didiliuc** and Ștefan Cotei from Romania shared details of the *Chess in Schools* project, where 37 out of 42 counties, representing more than 150,000 students, participate in one of the largest worldwide educational chess projects. **Alejandra Zavala** from El Salvador discussed the *Chess for Freedom* (chess in prisons) project, which she has been involved with since its inception in 2021. The initiative is now an important part of the "Plan Cero Ocio" by the Government of El Salvador.

Florent Vogtlin, President of the Chess Club in Muttensz, Switzerland, stated that in just two years, the club went from the edge of closing to a lively, growing community. This was the result of replacing classical games with faster, more social formats, including blitz and rapid events. A "Chess to Go" initiative even brought the club to a local café. **Jonathan Chen** from California partner of the *Infinite Chess* project for children with autism. He and his sister co-founded a non-profit organization that has raised over \$125,000 to support various chess projects in the United States and worldwide. A highlight of the day was the presentation by two deeply moving speakers from Ukraine: **Danylo** (12) and **Esmeralda** (11), who shared their experiences using chess as a rehabilitation tool during wartime in their home city of Odesa.



International Chess Organizer Dr. **Mikhail Korenman**, who alongside International Chess Organizer **Jeff DiOrio**, works on the International Youth Forum and Intercontinental Scholastic Chess Tournament, concluded the first International Youth Forum with a thank-you note to all participants. He emphasized that while this was the first-ever Youth Forum, it will not be the last.

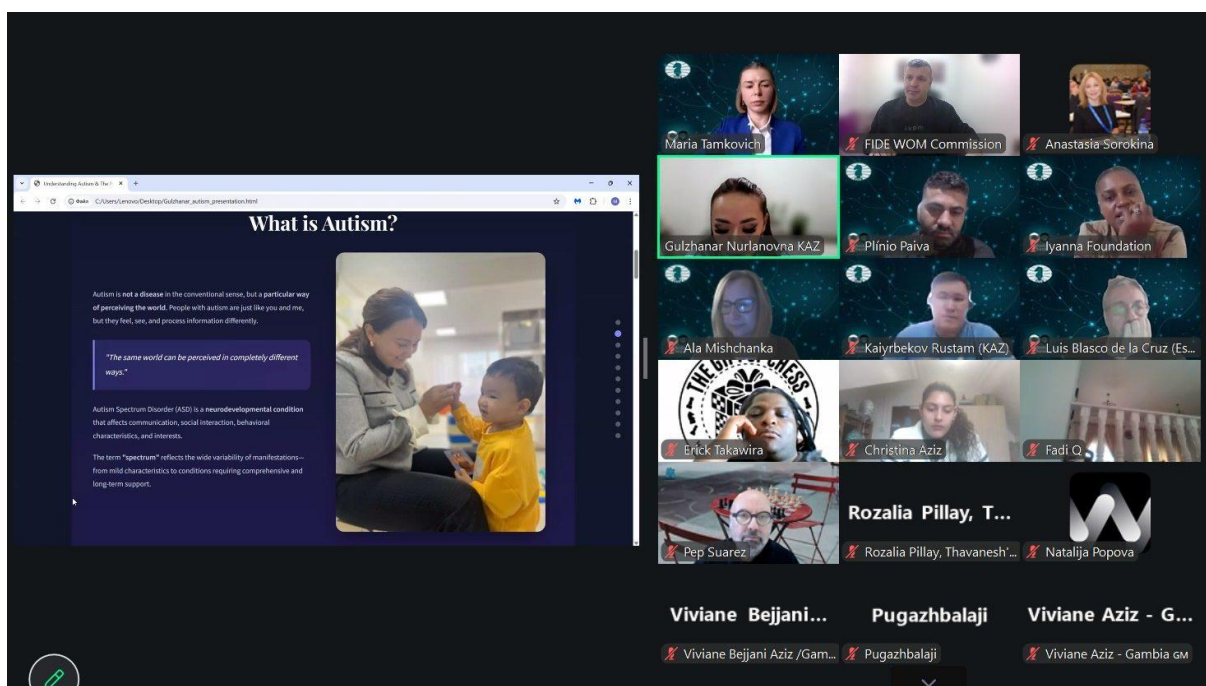
The FIDE Social Commission suggests considering the scaling up of this event and the organization of a global Youth Leadership Forum, which would not be limited solely to social chess initiatives, but would instead offer young leaders the invaluable opportunity to gain insights and exchange experiences with their international counterparts from the chess world.

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

- October 13-15, 2026 is the VI Intercontinental Online Championship for Prisoners.
- March 17-19, 2027 – Chess for Freedom conference in Chicago (registrations will open soon).

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. 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.

On April 4, 2026 the FIDE Infinite Chess project hosted **“An Atypical Day”**, an online event dedicated to International Autism Awareness Day. What unfolded was more than a talk – it was a global moment of listening, learning, and genuine human connection. Participants from 35 countries around the world gathered virtually to step beyond the 64 squares and into the real lives of families living with autism. Through personal stories, expert insight, and an open Q&A, the event delivered on its promise: to shift perspectives, one move at a time.



During the 10th stage of the project starting in September 2026 the following partners will join the inclusive chess family: Trinidad and Tabago, Singapore, Switzerland, Malta, Turkmenistan. Partners are finalizing the preparatory stage and get ready to the project start accordingly.

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
- translation of the second part of the Infinite chess handbook requested by the permanent partners (September-December 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 (October 2026)

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 in August 2026; the next offline training camps in cooperation with UNCHR and Chess Kenya are planned for September 2026.



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 2026, the programme continued expanding 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.

In 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.
- 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.



FIDE SOC organized **series of masterclasses on various topics** starting with an interactive online masterclass on May 4th, cutting through the theoretical noise to deliver a session grounded in hard-won experience. Titled "**Funding: Best Practices**," the masterclass lived up to its promise, thanks to the candid insights of guest speaker Gundula Heinatz, Board Member of the Swiss Chess Federation. With the mission to help chess clubs and federations "learn from the best – without repeating the same mistakes," the session provided a clear roadmap for organizations often struggling to secure financial stability. Heinatz, who is responsible for fundraising and elite sports for the Swiss Federation, didn't offer get-rich-quick schemes. Instead, she presented a mature, digital-first strategy rooted in chess's unique position as "the most digitized sport in the world."

3. Lessons Learned

- **Think big, start small.**
- Partners and sponsors want a "crystal"-clear vision and funding purpose.
- Use the network from your other (business) activities
- Involve additional platforms

What was difficult?

- **Nobody is waiting for you!**
- **Content** and «good» marketing material **should be ready** (flyer, LinkedIn profile, website)
- **Stay digitally present and connected**

June was marked with master-classes by FIDE SOC "**Chess as a Tool for Social Transformation**," led by the distinguished International Master and social reformer, Mr. Atanu Lahiri. The session provided a deep dive into how chess can transcend its traditional boundaries as a game to become a powerful vehicle for social change and community empowerment. During the masterclass, Mr. Lahiri shared this transformative journey, outlining a scalable model for using chess to address critical social issues. He presented a powerful framework for how chess can be utilized to combat challenges such as digital addiction, low attention spans, gender bias, and conflict.





July 2026 was the month to celebrate the International Chess Day. The Permanent Mission of Armenia to the **United Nations in Geneva**, in partnership with the FIDE Social Commission and UNESCO, hosted a **prestigious side event on 8 July** at Hall XIV of the Palais des Nations, commemorating the upcoming World Chess Day 2026. The event was organized in close collaboration with a broad coalition of international and local partners, including the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), UNESCO, the University for Peace, the International Chess Federation (FIDE), the Swiss Chess Federation, and the Geneva BOIS-GENTIL Chess Club. This diverse partnership reflected the shared commitment to advancing chess as a tool for diplomacy, inclusion, and social development.

The highlight of the afternoon was an **exclusive simultaneous chess exhibition featuring Grandmaster Levon Aronian**, one of the world's most celebrated chess talents. The event attracted approximately 70 registered participants, bringing together diplomats and representatives of international organizations based in Geneva. During the exhibition, Grandmaster Aronian played simultaneously against 25 participants—marking the first time such a high-profile simul had been held in conjunction with this specific side event.



On International Chess Day 2026, the FIDE Social Chess Commission (SOC) hosted a powerful **online panel discussion titled "Chess as Social Value."** The event brought together nine leading practitioners from around the world to share personal stories and demonstrate how chess is being used as a tool for rehabilitation, inclusion, and social development. The panel, moderated by André Vögtlin, Chair of the FIDE Social Chess Commission, featured a diverse group of experts. Each panelist shared a personal "defining moment" that confirmed the profound impact of their work. Looking to the future, panelists identified the need for greater collaboration, storytelling, and government engagement.

As we look ahead to September, the FIDE Social Commission is poised to make the upcoming World Chess Olympiad in Samarkand not only a celebration of competitive excellence but also a vibrant hub for dialogue, inspiration, and community building. Our agenda is both ambitious and diverse: on 15 September, we will proudly host the **awarding ceremony for our Storytelling Challenge**, honouring the voices that have so powerfully illustrated chess's capacity to transform lives, on 23 September, the **Commission** will convene for its formal **meeting** to assess our progress, refine our strategies, and chart the course for future initiatives. Perhaps most excitingly, we are thrilled to introduce **the Social Chess Blitz Talks** — a dynamic side event reimagined in the spirit of TED Talks, yet infused with the distinctive energy of the chess world. We are reaching out to inspiring individuals to step onto our stage in Samarkand and share their unique perspectives, experiences, and breakthrough ideas in a concise, impactful format. Each speaker will have just five to seven minutes — no elaborate presentations, only the voice, the story, and a single compelling message that lingers long after the final word.



It is our sincere belief that these Blitz Talks will spark fresh thinking, forge unexpected connections, and remind us all that chess, at its heart, is a game of human stories waiting to be told. Together, these September events — set against the historic and cultural backdrop of Samarkand — will underscore our unwavering commitment to making chess more accessible, inclusive, and socially relevant: not merely as a sport, but as a lifelong catalyst for growth, understanding, and positive change.

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

September 07, 2026