

Social Inclusion through and in Sport: Refugees, Migrants and Minorities

In 2015 more than 1.2 Million first time asylum seekers applied for international protection in the Member States of the European Union (EU). The refugees crossing into Europe also sparked a European crisis as countries struggled to cope with the influx. Furthermore, after events such as the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, the public and political discourse has begun to change. Mass media and politicians have called for an end of the “Culture of Welcoming Refugees” and far-right attacks on refugees are on the rise.

Despite existing challenges the organised sports movement, as well as many new initiatives which organise sport and leisure activities for newly arrived migrants, continue to operate and professionalize. Formal sport organisations, and informal solidarity initiatives dedicated to providing inclusive sport opportunities to the newly arrived migrants, are confronted with a very new situation where experience and best practices are lacking.

While many sport clubs and associations continue to lend practical support to the newcomers, at times they feel left alone in their endeavours, due to limited support offered by the public sector and the sport governing bodies.

Challenges and Opportunities

Across Europe, formal sport organisations, NGOs and informal sport social inclusion initiatives, experience a variety of challenges. Firstly, these challenges include a lack of access to resources such as sporting facilities, sports equipment, and transport. Secondly, there is a lack of involvement by members with adequate knowledge and qualifications on the subject of social integration and inclusion through sport. For these initiatives to be successful, members require specific training on these issues and best practices. Lastly, there exist legal obstacles in the inclusion of migrants and members of minority groups. For instance, what formal registration processes are required in order to be eligible to play in regular leagues? Who is permitted to travel for matches and where? What if they are in the precarious situation of awaiting the results of an asylum or residence application? These obstacles and more need to be discussed and planned for.

Another important opportunity of these initiatives is the current exclusion of women and girls from sport initiatives. The majority of sport inclusion opportunities offered to refugees and minorities target young men and boys. Additionally, the initiatives are almost exclusively focussed on football, rather than sports that are more traditionally inclusive of women and girls. Currently, some sport inclusion projects do not even attempt to reach refugee girls and

women. For sport to be a successful social inclusion initiative, it must be fully inclusive of all genders. This inclusiveness includes contributions by women and girls as both players as well as organisational roles. Furthermore, specific gender sensitive sport programmes are needed which consider religious or cultural restrictions. What best-practices exist for the inclusion of women and girls in social inclusion initiatives, especially regarding traditionally gendered activities?

Another area for improvement would be to include in these initiatives other sports beyond just football, which are popular in regions of origin (e. g. Cricket). This will serve to improve the attraction and inclusiveness of these programmes.

Moreover, there is need for capacity-building of migrant and minority football teams and initiatives including refugees and asylum seekers in order for them to participate in regular leagues and competitions. What kind of networks and forms of cooperation are needed in order to facilitate the empowerment and capacity building of migrant and minority organisations?

The way forward – Sports volunteering as a avenue for inclusion

In the years to come, it is important to move away from a charity approach and avoid the tendency to offer patronising ‘help’ to newly-arrived migrants. More sustainable and respectful strategies for encouraging integration and inclusion are needed in order to gain the valuable contributions of migrants and minority groups in sports, not only as active players but also as future coaches, administrators, managers and referees.

Organised sport across Europe is to a very large extent based on volunteering and community involvement. Therefore, an important step towards the participation of all social groups is to improve the equal access of migrants, minorities and - in the medium term - also refugees to sport through sports volunteering. With this in mind, the conference will include discussions about encouraging volunteering by migrants and minorities in sport clubs and the establishment of inclusive, intercultural sport programmes.

Societies across Europe are changing at a rapid pace, with everyday signs visible in almost every community. Diversity is a part of society and how we, as European societies, celebrate and bring together these differences and work towards a common goal is a key challenge for us all. ‘Helping’ out in the community or volunteering your time to assist others plays an important role in bringing people to come together for this common goal. Sports clubs often provide a focal point for a community, providing a common ground through which people can collectively come together. Working with clubs to set standards including their ethos and image, has benefits for clubs and the community at large.

While there is a lack of data about the representation of migrants and minorities as volunteers in sports, it seems clear that migrant volunteers are under-represented in main stream sport organisations across Europe. We need to identify existing barriers which impede the

volunteering of these groups in sport and strategize to eliminate such barriers. How can we support and encourage potential volunteers? How can we encourage local clubs and sports organisations to involve more people from diverse backgrounds as volunteers?

The European Commission estimates that approximately ten million people volunteer in more than 700,000 sports clubs. Volunteering in sport, football in particular, accounts for the most common type of voluntary activity in over half of all EU countries. The Eurobarometer “Sport and Physical Activity” shows major differences between the different member countries: a comparatively large proportion of respondents from Finland (18%), Austria (15%) and Ireland (14%) state that they volunteer to support sporting activities, whereas respondents from Portugal (2%) and Italy (3%) rarely do so (European Commission 2010, 64ff.).

European Sport Inclusion Networking

Against this backdrop, in 2011 a group sport organisations and NGOs from 7 countries came together to form the Sport Inclusion Network (SPIN). SPIN has been designed to promote the inclusion and involvement of ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees through and in mainstream sport across Europe. It brings together a mix of experienced national key players in the field of countering exclusion and discrimination in sport, including the founding organisation of Football Against Racism in Europe (FAR) VIDC-fairplay, the Italian sport for all association Unione Italiana Sport per Tutti (UISP), the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), the Portuguese Professional Players Union SJPF, the migrant-led Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organization from Hungary, the multicultural Finnish sport initiative Liikkukaa, as well as the German Organisation Camino, an expert on action-oriented research on sport and youth. In the framework of the new Erasmus+ sport programme the network has implemented the project *European Sport Inclusion Network - Promoting Equal Opportunities of Migrants and Minorities through Volunteering in Sport (ESPIN)*. The ESPIN project aims to increase sports participation and the inclusion of migrants by promoting equal access to organised sport. One tool for the increased participation of marginalised groups in sport is an improved access to volunteering opportunities. ESPIN’s objective is to increase the opportunities for migrants and minorities as volunteers through the establishment of equal partnerships and training of mainstream sport organisations. In 2017 the SPIN partners launched the new project “Sport Welcomes Refugees – Social inclusion of newly arrived migrants in and through sport”. The project aims to provide knowledge, training and qualification to work with the new target groups. It will enhance the social inclusion and participation of newly arrived migrants on different levels of sport through training, awareness-raising and capacity-building of sport stakeholders. The project lays also a focus on involving female refugees.

In the long run, more sustainable forms of integration and inclusion are needed in order to fully harness the potential of refugees and asylum seekers in sport, not only as active players but also as future coaches, administrators, managers and referees. Finally, the cooperation of

all stakeholders is indispensable: local authorities, public bodies, sport governing bodies, clubs, institutions who care for asylum seekers, self-organisations of migrants and NGOs need to work together.

Resources

VIDC (ed.) (2012) Inclusion of Migrants in and through Sports – A Guide to Good Practice 2012, Vienna.

<http://www.footballforequality.org/fileadmin/mediapool/pdf/spin/SPIN-GPG-sc.pdf>

Schwenzer, Victoria (2016) Baseline Study Equal Access for Migrant Volunteers to Sports Clubs in Europe, Berlin.

http://www.footballforequality.org/fileadmin/mediapool/pdf/spin/ESPIN_Baseline_Study_Equal_access_for_migrant_volunteers_to_sports.pdf

VIDC / FAI (eds.) (2016) Handbook on Volunteering of Migrants in Sport Clubs and Organisations. Vienna, Dublin.

http://www.footballforequality.org/fileadmin/mediapool/pdf/spin/2016_Migrants_Booklet_3.pdf

VIDC (2016) Report European Networking Conference: Equal Access and Volunteering of Migrants, Minorities and Refugees in Sport. Vienna.

http://www.footballforequality.org/fileadmin/mediapool/pdf/spin/ESPIN-Budapest_SCREEN_final.pdf

Author

***Kurt Wachter, MA** is head of department at the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC). In 1997 he founded the anti-racist football initiative fairplay at VIDC. From 1999 until 2010 he was the European coordinator of the Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) network. In 2014 he completed the MA programme Sport and Development at Southampton Solent University (UK). Currently he is the leading two Erasmus+ projects “Sport Welcomes Refugees” and “Queering Football”. He has also written widely on football and society in sub-Saharan Africa.*

Contact: Wachter@vidc.org

Further Information:

www.sportinclusion.net

www.fairplay.or.at

Redaktion**BBE-Newsletter für Engagement und Partizipation in Europa**

Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (BBE)

Michaelkirchstr. 17/18

10179 Berlin

Tel.: +49 (0) 30 62980-114

europa-bbe@b-b-e.de

www.b-b-e.de