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## Social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons through sport

### Report<sup>1</sup>

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

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### Summary

Population movements in European countries call for a strategic vision for the social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP). As such, sport promotes physical and psychological well-being and has a great potential for social integration of migrants, refugees and displaced persons in the host country or society. If used appropriately, sport conveys positive values and strengthens community cohesion. It can also transmit values and deconstruct stereotypes, especially when it comes to vulnerable people in migrant, refugee and IDP communities.

Many social inclusion policies and good practices exist at the level of host communities as well as at local, regional, national and international levels. However, support programmes are needed in several areas. Member States and sports organisations should be encouraged to develop their own national and local initiatives, and should join international instruments and initiatives, including those of the Council of Europe, such as the European Sports Charter and the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport. Further work should also be done to raise public awareness of the contribution of sport as a tool fostering the social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons. States should also strengthen national sports structures with a view to better including these populations.

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## A. Draft resolution<sup>2</sup>

1. The Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the universality of sport. It notes that it can be a fantastic catalyst for empowerment and physical and psychological well-being. Sport can heal and bring the best out of people, it contributes to reinforcing self-esteem. Sport can help in developing a positive and fresh outlook on life, bringing communities together, as well as helping to build them. Practising sport can build mutual respect and encourage team spirit.
2. The Assembly notes that generating important positive values, sport has many advantages and can play an instrumental role in the integration of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons in their host country or society. Sport can also provide a sense of safety to persons on the move who faced numerous challenges during their migration journey.
3. The Assembly notes that sport is often considered as an effective social policy tool which reduces anti-social behaviour and increases community cohesion. In this context, it underlines the importance of the active involvement of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as of host authorities at central, regional, local and community levels, in building policies and mechanisms fostering the inclusion of these vulnerable groups through sport.
4. The Assembly is well aware of the existing efforts at national and international levels in this respect notably in the context of the Global Compact on Refugees and its invitation to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), States and sport entities to sign partnerships to foster access to sporting facilities, including in refugee-hosting areas. It hails the efforts of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to promote sport activities for refugees and to support the participation of refugee athletes at the Paris Olympics 2024 thanks to the Refugee Olympic Team. It also welcomes the launch of the Olympic Refugee Foundation by UNHCR and the IOC.
5. Last but not least, the Assembly underlines the Council of Europe's active role in promoting sport as a means of inclusion and peace through the adoption of legal instruments such as the [European Sports Charter](#) and relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member States such as Recommendation [Rec\(2001\)6](#) on the prevention of racism, xenophobia and racial intolerance in sport, Recommendation [Rec\(2003\)6](#) on improving physical education and sport for children and young people in all European countries, Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2015\)2](#) on gender mainstreaming in sport, as well as Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2012\)10](#) on the protection of child and young athletes from dangers associated with migration.
6. While the establishment of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) by the Committee of Ministers in 2007 has been another paramount milestone in promoting sport within Council of Europe member States and beyond, the Assembly welcomes the outcome of the Council of Europe's Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport held in Antalya on 26 October 2022, where the Ministers called upon EPAS, *inter alia*, to "use sport as a tool for social integration of disadvantaged groups, such as migrants, refugees, persons with disabilities and senior citizens; develop a toolbox based on best practices for inclusion of disadvantaged groups in all aspects of sport and devise a communication plan to promote it widely" (Resolution No. 1). The Assembly also hails the decision of the Governing Board to organise the EPAS 2023 Diversity Conference on the topic of the inclusion of migrant and refugee children through sport.
7. Conscious of the existing barriers challenging the success of inclusive programmes for migrants through sport, the Assembly calls the Council of Europe member States to:
  - 7.1. have due regard to the values and principles laid down in the European Sports Charter;
  - 7.2. access to the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport, for those which have not yet done so, so as to ensure a better implementation of the European Sports Charter and benefit from a more effective international co-operation;
  - 7.3. adopt and ensure the application of legislation prohibiting any discrimination in sports due to nationality, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language or disability, or any other form of discrimination;
  - 7.4. facilitate travel to international sports events for refugee athletes, on the same basis as non-refugee athletes through legal and practical measures;

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 11 May 2023.

- 7.5. ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to practice sports and undertake specific action to guarantee that the most vulnerable people, including migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, have proper access to sporting facilities and activities, actively considering the financial costs required, but also the age, gender, ability and other diversity needs;
  - 7.6. ensure that coaches are trained to be able to detect migrants', refugees' and displaced persons' vulnerabilities and overcome them, and put in place assistance services to allow them to feel safe and protected in sports centres;
  - 7.7. contribute, through the organisation of language courses, to ensuring that language differences are no longer a barrier to inclusion.
8. In line with the Global Compact on Refugees, the Assembly encourages States, sport entities, the UNHCR and the IOC to sign further partnerships to foster access to sporting facilities, including in refugee-hosting areas, to promote sport activities for refugees, to support the participation of refugee athletes at the Paris Olympics 2024 and to harness the Olympic Refugee Foundation launched by UNHCR and the IOC.
9. Aware that structural and cultural barriers are harsher where vulnerable migrants, refugees and displaced persons, such as women, children, members of the LGBTQI+ community or disabled persons are concerned, the Assembly urges Council of Europe member States to develop specific targeted actions to promote their social inclusion in the receiving societies with the involvement of these target groups in the decision-making processes.
10. As women can be prevented from practicing sports because of prejudices and also for logistical reasons, the Assembly recommends:
- 10.1. the organisation of wide media campaigns and coverage of women sports with the aim of reaching a larger number of young girls who are reluctant to enrol in sports due to cultural or psychological barriers and reducing stereotypes and discriminatory narratives;
  - 10.2. the setting-up of child-minding services within sports organisations in order to enable women athletes to have their own time for sports practice.
11. In order to fight against discrimination notably against members of the LGBTQI+ community and persons with disabilities, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States and sports organisations to develop awareness-raising campaigns spreading messages of tolerance and inclusion while deconstructing stereotypes and in particular to join the Council of Europe's Combating Hate Speech in Sport project.
12. The Assembly reckons that the wider migration flows in European countries require a strategic vision for the social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons. For this purpose, it considers that Council of Europe member States should privilege long-term and sustainable projects, investing in cross-sectoral initiatives leading to the further inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons into the receiving societies, such as undertaking sport-based activities in parallel with educational programmes. To achieve this, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to earmark greater funds to develop effective policies of social inclusion in order to avoid that the costs be borne by sports organisations, as their excessive amount could push them to limit sport-based operations. As a result:
- 12.1. migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons should be granted free access to sport facilities and sport-based activities, including the supply of sport uniforms when required;
  - 12.2. given the healing effects of sporting activities, sport organisations should be properly equipped with psychological and social assistance available to all enrolled individuals, in particular for migrants;
  - 12.3. equal access to sports facilities, including for people with disabilities, should be ensured.
13. Further funds should be ring-fenced for the promotion of collaboration among sport and non-sport organisations with the aim to setting up co-operative mechanisms and cross-sectoral societal actions.
14. The Assembly is convinced that public awareness of the benefits of sport as a means of promoting the social inclusion of migrants should be pursued. For this purpose, it calls on member States together with sports organisations to:
- 14.1. develop effective awareness-raising campaigns to highlight the importance of including migrants in societies, thus reducing cases of racism, discrimination and hate speech;
  - 14.2. organise communication campaigns targeting migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons so that they are aware of specific projects aimed at their social inclusion.

15. Given the importance of exchanging knowledge and experience, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to allocate adequate financial resources to maintaining the sustainability of the Council of Europe sport migrant integration platform. Furthermore, it encourages them to upload their projects on the platform; so that they can benefit from a wider visibility at the international level but also create emulation among other local, regional, national and international sport organisations for the development of a larger number of sport-based programmes for the inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.

16. In accordance with the UNHCR's overall participatory and community-based approaches to refugee protection and assistance, the Assembly encourages all stakeholders to work together with refugee athletes and refugee-led organisations in the field of sport and to financially support refugee-led organisations. Furthermore, the Assembly strongly calls for national sports organisations, Olympic and Paralympic Committees to be fully funded to support refugee athletes.

## B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Nigar Arpadarai, rapporteur

### 1. Introduction

1. Migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons face numerous challenges during their journey heading to a safer place, which can affect their ability to adapt to an unfamiliar environment when settling down in a new country. In addition to the lack of family and social support, the newly arrived migrants can experience difficulties into integrating in the host community and are at risk of being quickly marginalised.

2. The practice of sport and physical activity can provide migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons with opportunities to be involved in a supportive environment and to strengthen social bonds more easily. As pointed out by the 1992 Revised Code of sports ethics of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, "Sport is also recognised as an individual activity which, played fairly, offers the opportunity for self-knowledge, self-expression and fulfilment; personal achievement, skill acquisition and demonstration of ability; social interaction, enjoyment, good health and well-being".<sup>3</sup> More recently, the 2007 White paper on sport of the European Commission underlined that sport "generates important values such as team spirit, solidarity, tolerance and fair play, contributing to personal development and fulfilment".<sup>4</sup> It also encourages people to take part in the community they live in and helps to enhance active citizenship.

3. Considering its beneficial effects on mental and physical health, sport is often considered an effective social policy tool which can limit anti-social behaviour, increase community cohesion and help to develop self-esteem.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the inclusion of migrants through sport is conceived as a process which requires the involvement of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as members of the host community.<sup>6</sup>

4. Numerous European countries, but also sports clubs and sports federations have implemented projects facilitating the inclusion of migrants through sport, either on a national or a local scale. Members of the civil society, such as non-governmental organisations and local associations, are also behind the implementation of many projects and initiatives aiming to improve migrants' social inclusion through sport.

5. International and European organisations also play a key role in encouraging and enabling the implementation of such measures. In this respect, the Council of Europe has been particularly active in promoting projects aimed at enhancing migrants' social inclusion, such as through the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport. Moreover, the Sport migrant integration platform was set up as a network of project holders aiming to promote the social inclusion of migrants through sport. Implemented in the framework of the Action Plan of the Council of Europe on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe (2017-2019) and in co-operation with the Union of European Football Association (UEFA), it is a useful tool to share good practices and connect initiatives on this topic. The European Union as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are also driving forces in the implementation of sport-based inclusive measures at international level.

6. The present report aims to give an overview of the benefits of sport as a social inclusion tool, the best practices in this matter and solutions for the effective implementation of the inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons through sport.

### 2. Sport as a tool for the social inclusion of migrants

7. Migration processes can be very hard from a personal perspective, as they frequently force migrants to leave their family and friends and approach new cultures. The limited knowledge of national laws and their vulnerability position may lead them to fall victim to abuse, exploitations or social marginalisation.<sup>7</sup> In this context, local communities retain an important role in promoting the social inclusion of newcomers, for

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3. Recommendation No. R(92)14rev of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the Revised Code of Sports Ethics, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 24 September 1992 at the 480th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies and revised at their 752nd meeting on 16 May 2001, under Section "Defining fair play".

4. COM(2007)391, "White Paper on Sport", 11 July 2007, paragraph 1.

5. Russell Hoyer, Matthew Nicholson, & Kevin Brown, "Involvement in sport and social connectedness", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50(1), 21 February 2015, pp. 3–21.

6. ISCA, [https://irts.isca.org/pdf/IRTS\\_Implementation\\_Guide\\_Final.pdf](https://irts.isca.org/pdf/IRTS_Implementation_Guide_Final.pdf).

7. UNHCR, IOC and Terre des Hommes, "Sport for Protection Toolkit. Programming with Young People in Forced Displacement Settings", 2018, p. 14.

instance by forging interpersonal relations, promoting migrants' access to public services and including them in the community's daily life by identifying their main vulnerabilities. Sport can be thus a crucial tool in this framework.

8. Social inclusion should be developed through a two-way approach. While migrants benefit from better understanding local traditions and developing a sense of belonging to the receiving community, welcoming locals are also enriched by the encounter with other cultures and the human and financial contribution migrants can make to the community. It is therefore essential to plan community-based approaches for migrants' social inclusion through sport, where sporting activities are not only designed to strengthen interpersonal relations and to break down barriers of intolerance, but also to effectively include migrants in societies. In other words, local sport and non-sport organisations should co-operate so that migrants can use sporting activities to share knowledge, access social services and contribute to the labour market, without falling victim to abusive networks. The co-operation among local actors is also fruitful for better tackling any problem which may arise in the context of social inclusion of migrants.

### **2.1. Sport as an effective trauma healer and a means of empowerment**

9. Migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons may have suffered from trauma in their country of origin, during the process of migration and when settling in the host country. These trauma usually have a long-term impact on their mental health, which may even exacerbate in case of social exclusion, inability to find work or to comprehend local customs in the receiving society. In fact, in 2019, the *Comité pour la santé des exilé·e·s* (Comede) noted that 64% of the exiled people seen by psychologists and doctors in France between 2013 and 2017 were suffering from psycho-traumatic syndromes, due to verbal and physical violence or inability to integrate in communities.<sup>8</sup> The combination of all these factors may have detrimental effects on migrants' confidence and psychological well-being.

10. However, sporting activities can have a healing impact on migrants' well-being. First of all, sports allow people to escape daily problems or, at least, not to constantly think about previous traumatic experiences.<sup>9</sup> Connecting with members of the local community also makes it possible to export these healing effects in daily life, as breaking down isolation barriers constitutes the first step to overcoming personal difficulties. Furthermore, the presence of coaches, trainers or volunteers at sport centres may become a shelter for people in need of psychological assistance; as talking with them can be a tool to overcome misperceptions or to share difficulties and fears. In other words, sport associations may become places where migrants feel safe and protected.

11. Besides their known positive impact on physical well-being, participating in reducing stress and improving health, sport activities can also reinforce personal resilience to difficulties.<sup>10</sup> They can help migrants and locals to understand themselves and others, by drawing attention to vulnerabilities and strengths. They also favour the development of soft skills, such as the ability to adapt to new environments or to take reflective decisions. Finally, success in sport reinforces leadership skills and self-confidence.<sup>11</sup>

12. The development of self-esteem can thus have ripple effects in terms of migrants' empowerment. Being good at sports develops a sense of prestige within a sport community, which is even greater when occupying positions of responsibility. For instance, migrant coaches, volunteers or assistants are respected by locals and can become role models for newly arrived migrants to participate in socially inclusive sporting activities. Furthermore, the employability effects of sport inclusion can arise as crucial forms of migrants' empowerment.<sup>12</sup> In fact, participation in sport activities can open the way to volunteering projects or traineeships as coaches, advisers on socially inclusive policies, etc. Finally, sporting activities can be included in educational programmes, thus providing migrants with more opportunities to integrate into societies, to obtain diplomas and to make new friends. In other words, sport lets people become masters of their own life and bridge cultural differences with others.

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8. Comité pour la santé des exilés, «*La santé des exilés. Rapport d'activité et d'observation 2019*», 2019, p. 82

9. IRTS, «*Barriers and future opportunities for sport and non-sport organisations to use sport and physical activities for inclusion of refugees*», 18 June 2020, p. 7.

10. UNHCR, IOC and Terre des Hommes (2018), *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

11. Chiara D'Angelo, Chiara Corvino and Caterina Gozzoli, «*The Challenges of Promoting Social Inclusion through Sport: the experience of a sport-based initiative in Italy*», *Societies* 2021, 11(2), 12 May 2021.

12. European Commission, «*Mapping of good practices relating to social inclusion of migrants through sport*», 30 June 2016, p. 10.

## **2.2. The value of sport in a community-based approach**

### **2.2.1. The linkage with the host community**

13. As a community-based approach presupposes co-operation among local actors and the engagement of migrants in socially inclusive projects, benefits can be underlined for both sides. From the migrants' perspective, they concern the possibility to introduce themselves in the receiving society, to benefit from ripple effects in terms of social networks and to develop a sense of belonging.

14. Sport can often play a role of icebreaker for migrants.<sup>13</sup> In fact, regular participation in sporting activities can help to introduce them to the local community and to undertake the first steps for effective social inclusion. The creation of friendships enables migrants to get to know other people. In this way, trust bonds may foster migrants' access to the local labour market and other educational activities (for example language courses, etc), reducing the perceived differences with locals.

15. Furthermore, sport can also be a vehicle for the transmission of values and customs.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, thanks to sporting activities, migrants can develop a sense of belonging to local communities and get accustomed to club cultures or local traditions.<sup>15</sup> The persistence of reciprocal misperceptions due to cultural differences thus decreases, by leaving space for bridging common perspectives.

16. That said, a community-based approach for social inclusion through sport can also bring important benefits for the concerned societies and sport organisations in terms of social cohesion, namely "the ties which hold people together within a community (including the degree to which they interact; share common cultural, religious or other social features and interests; and/or are able to minimise disparities and avoid marginalisation)".<sup>16</sup> In fact, co-operatively pursuing common goals lets people rely on each other, thus creating trust bonds. Though success in sporting activities can be an important tool to strengthen migrants' confidence and respect within a society, competitive environments may also be detrimental to social inclusion, and the loose-or-win scenarios may end up reinforcing hatred and stereotypes among different groups. Therefore, sporting activities aimed at fostering team co-operation are often pursued to overcome these difficulties and to forge interpersonal ties.<sup>17</sup>

17. However, the most concrete effects of establishing inclusive links between migrants and the receiving society through sport relate to the ability of widening personal perspectives thanks to the encounter of different cultures.<sup>18</sup> Receiving societies can thus understand migrants' vulnerabilities and set up joint effective solutions to counter them. Furthermore, sport bridges differences among peoples, reduces discrimination and fights stereotypes. Effective inclusivity projects can thus change the receiving society's posture and narrative towards migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons in the long run.<sup>19</sup>

### **2.2.2. The inclusion of vulnerable persons**

18. Sometimes, inclusivity sport-based projects target specific categories of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons. In this way, they aim to identify their vulnerabilities and to find community-based solutions.<sup>20</sup>

19. Two main factors help explain the scarce participation of women in sport. On the one hand, cultural barriers may prevent them from joining sport-based projects. They sometimes need the authorisation of their fathers, or other male peers, and some cultures may perceive sport as unsuitable for women. These cultural obstacles to female inclusion are sometimes even reinforced by local sport activities themselves since they are often based on a culture of masculinity and patriarchal mechanisms. Furthermore, compared to boys, girls are often portrayed as introverted and hard to reach, thus even decreasing the attempt to socially include them through sport. On the other hand, female sports often suffer from scarce media coverage, reducing the

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13. IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 8; see also European Commission (2016), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

14. Mabilard Vincent, «[Le sport: un facteur d'intégration ou d'exclusion sociale?](#)», septembre-octobre 2012, p. 9

15. UNHCR, IOC and Terre des Hommes (2018), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

16. *Idem.*

17. ISCA (2018), *op. cit.*, p. 18.

18. IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

19. UNHCR, IOC and Terre des Hommes (2018), *op. cit.*, p. 16; see also IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

20. See in this respect Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the Revised European Sports Charter (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 October 2021 at the 1414th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies), Article 6.2, d.

possibility of developing role models who may end up pushing migrant females to participate in sporting activities.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, these factors combined may lead women to remain silent and not to advocate for greater attention to their social inclusion through sport.

20. If migrant women's vulnerabilities are correctly identified, sport can contribute to fostering their empowerment and visibility in societies. Either sport associations can develop programmes specifically targeting migrant females or women coaches should be given more visibility in order to act as catalyst for change and role models for young female migrants.<sup>22</sup> In the first scenario, gender-based programmes could be more effective in tackling specific gender needs. In the second case, greater visibility of sportswomen could have ripple effects in terms of social recognition and empowerment.

21. Sporting activities can also be a useful tool to transmit values to children.<sup>23</sup> Sport is indeed based on respect for rules commonly agreed, in the same way that societies have decided to define their existence. Therefore, sport transmits principles at the basis of daily life. In addition, teaching children not to discriminate against people on the basis of different characteristics and to deconstruct stereotypes allows sport associations to lay the foundation for a more inclusive society.

22. Cases of discrimination in sporting environments are often registered against the LGBTQ+ community. As a consequence, the fear of verbal and physical violence pushes around 20% of LGBTQ+ people to refrain from participating in sports they are interested in.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, coaches and trainers bear a great responsibility in spreading inclusive values. In this regard, sport organisations have started tackling the issue of homo/transphobia in sport by developing awareness-raising campaigns. Furthermore, the increasingly frequent coming out of sport professionals is actively helping to spread tolerance within sport associations and organisations.

23. Finally, sport can also be a stage for social inclusion of people with disabilities. In fact, people with disabilities often encounter physical barriers to access sport, as well as local communities' prejudices. In addition, sport-based projects often suffer from lack of sufficient funding for para-sports. Yet, a larger media coverage of Paralympic Games has contributed to reshape the perception of disabilities, and paralympic champions are driving change for a greater social inclusion of disabled people.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.2.3. Sport as a means of promoting gender equality

24. Literature has demonstrated that women are often absent from sporting activities, since they are rather asked to "help around the house",<sup>26</sup> by cleaning or cooking. In addition, pre-defined codes of conduct may push them to go to sport centres only to watch their boys playing. Besides, when they are involved in team sports, they may be relegated to "inferior" roles, so that boys can play without worrying about their participation. The combination of all these factors reinforces power imbalances in societies.

25. However, sport should be a driver for the promotion of gender equality. Though mixed teams may sometimes perpetuate mechanisms of discrimination, coaches and volunteers can promote gender equality by evenly distributing play roles among girls and boys. In addition, modifying sporting activities in order to foster co-operation for the achievement of a common goal can forge trust relationships, where everyone bears a certain degree of responsibility and importance. Furthermore, wider media coverage of professional women's sports would help shape societal perceptions of women athletes and to elevate female champions as role models for young girls. In this way, bridging the divide between men's and women's sports has a ripple effect on daily life in society.

21. Mabillard Vincent (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

22. David Ekholm, Magnus Dahlstedts and Julia Rönnbäck, "Problematising the absent girl: sport as a means of emancipation and social inclusion", *Sport in Society*, Vol. 22, No. 6, 13 January 2019, pp. 1053-1055.

23. Delphine Rouilleault, «Le sport sur le podium de l'insertion », *La lettre de l'asile et de l'intégration*, N. 96, January 2022, p. 7.

24. OutSport, "OutSport Toolkit. Supporting sport educators in creating and maintaining an inclusive sport community based on diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations", 2019, p. 6.

25. Mabillard Vincent (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

26. David Ekholm, Magnus Dahlstedts and Julia Rönnbäck, *op. cit.*, p. 1051.

### 3. Barriers challenging the success of inclusive programmes for migrants

26. Literature and international actors have highlighted several factors which can hinder the effective social inclusion of migrants through sporting activities. These can be summed up into two main categories: structural and socio-personal barriers. All these factors may often intertwine creating hostile environments for migrants. It is thus essential to know them in order to effectively tackle their negative impact on a community-based approach to social inclusion of migrants through sport.

#### 3.1. Structural barriers: lack of access and financial constraints

27. Structural barriers may affect both migrants and organisations involved in promoting sport-based activities for the social inclusion of migrants. From the migrants' perspective, they mainly revolve around their lack of or limited access to sporting activities due to the location of sport centres and the need of transportation, costs of participation, as well as legal constraints. Furthermore, prioritisation of activities amounts to another important structural barrier.

28. The first important factor limiting the possibility of migrants to access sport activities is the locations of sport centres and socially inclusive sport projects. Usually, these are undertaken in the city centres and migrants living in the suburbs have less possibilities to reach the locations.<sup>27</sup> The absence of effective transportation networks or their high cost may play a crucial role in deterring migrants from participating in sport activities which are located far from their accommodations. In addition, access to sport facilities may be sometimes restricted for informal activities, thus further reducing the possibilities of migrants not enrolled in a sport club to play with other members of their community.

29. Not only do migrants have to face transportation costs, but enrolment in sport clubs may require an entry fee. In addition, sporting activities may involve some hidden costs, such as mandatory sport uniforms or travel costs for competitions. Though some sport clubs highlight the importance of having common attires as a means to reduce differences among players and to strengthen the belonging to a community, the costs of these uniforms are often high, especially for migrants.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, this burden may even appear heavier for unemployed migrants and end up increasing mechanisms of social inequalities.

30. Legal issues can sometimes create obstacles to the participation of migrants in community-based sporting activities. Indeed, residence permits may be necessary to enrol in sport clubs and to participate in competitions. However, it is especially the uncertainty in their status due to the ongoing procedure of obtaining a residence permit which may psychologically induce migrants not to integrate in sport communities or to engage in personal relationships, as they could soon be forced to leave the country.<sup>29</sup>

31. Finally, sport is often not a priority for migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons. Lack of sufficient money may push them to prioritise activities essential for family sustenance over leisure. In this context, migrant children are often asked to contribute to the family's livelihood, by taking care of their siblings or helping with household chores.

32. However, structural barriers may also limit the capacities and possibilities of sport organisations to effectively include migrant workers in their activities. These structural obstacles relate to lack of sufficient funding, policy gaps, organisational factors and difficulties in undertaking co-operative projects with other actors.

33. The first and foremost obstacle to social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons through sport is the lack of sufficient private and public funding. The issue is even magnified in case of volunteering projects or when migrants are granted free access to sport activities. Three main reasons can help explain the absence of sufficient financial support. Firstly, sporting activities are often not prioritised by private and public actors. Secondly, private and public actors need verifiable data on the efficacy of sport for the inclusion of migrants, so that they know their funds would not be wasted.<sup>30</sup> However, the lack of funds may lead them to prioritise other projects. Finally, funding is often earmarked, imposing on sport organisations methods and induced costs. In this way, operative actors may be restricted in their capacities and the inclusivity of sport projects may be only partially effective.

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27. IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

28. IRTS (2020), *ibid.*

29. Jondis Schwartzkopff, "Integration of Refugees through Sport. A review of empirical literature and evaluation studies", 20 November 2022, p. 13; see also IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

30. UNHCR, "More than a game. The UNHCR Sport Strategy 2022-2026", November 2022, p. 15.

34. The lack of sufficient funds to sporting activities may be explained by policy gaps and inadequate political perspectives, as well. State funds are often based on short-term objectives, with low or absent sustainability prospects, and lack of cross-sectoral vision. These shortcomings thus reduce the possibility of sport organisations to develop multi-annual and cross-sectoral projects and to gain visibility. As a consequence, on the one hand, newly arrived migrants may be unaware of dedicated socially inclusive sporting activities due to their discontinuity.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the lack of communication among States' departments may lead to financing similar projects within the same area of intervention but neglecting a more effective differentiation of targeted activities.<sup>32</sup>

35. Organisational deficiencies at sport and non-sport associations may constitute structural barriers, as well. In particular, some sport organisations are not interested in promoting the social inclusion of migrants, but they rather prioritise competitions. In this way, the acceptance within these clubs is conditioned to high levels of physical and technical abilities, which therefore exclude migrants who are not familiar with sports or those who feel hesitant to enter sport clubs.<sup>33</sup> These mechanisms of social exclusion are even exacerbated by coaches' and volunteers' low skills in dealing with different cultures or by the lack of psychological assistance to migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.<sup>34</sup>

36. Finally, difficulties in carrying out co-operation projects among sport and non-sport local organisations may create structural barriers to their efficacy. The presence of trust bonds is often considered a prerequisite to develop further collaborations, and the absence of programmes bringing together different stakeholders in this domain does not facilitate cross-sectoral activities. In this way, associations and volunteers tend to design projects only with trusted actors, without engaging in other possibly fruitful partnerships. Besides, divergences in mindsets, values and approaches may prevent the creation of community-based activities. Differences in human and financial resources may even magnify these difficulties, as more funded organisations usually pretend to lead the projects.<sup>35</sup>

### **3.2. Cultural and personal barriers**

37. Apart from structural barriers, obstacles to social inclusion of migrants through sport can also derive from cultural, interpersonal and personal elements. In fact, the efficacy and the sustainability of sport activities for the social inclusion of migrants are not only dependent on funding and access, but also on the ability to embed values of inclusion and tolerance into societies. In more general terms, sustainability requires a common perspective between the receiving community and the newcomers.

38. The main obstacles to participation in sporting activities are based on linguistic, psychological and cultural factors. Their impact can sometimes be exacerbated by hostile behaviours or lack of inclusive communication and activities by the local communities.

39. Language is the first obstacle to an effective social inclusion of migrants into local communities. The inability to speak local language(s) undermines the chances of connecting with locals and even understanding the rules of a sport activity. It can thus have a detrimental psychological impact on migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, as the inability to overcome their unfamiliarity with local sports can reinforce reluctance towards sporting activities and the feeling of being unsuitable for them.<sup>36</sup>

40. Furthermore, barriers may arise from cultural and religious traditions as well. Parents may sometimes prohibit their children from participating in sport due to either being unfamiliar with or unaware of the positive social effects. This can be particularly evident when girls are involved.

41. Moreover, cultural differences may represent practical barriers to migrants' participation to socially inclusive sport activities. For instance, drinking or sweating may be perceived as offensive or inappropriate in some cultures.<sup>37</sup>

42. Finally, local communities themselves may end up creating hostile environments for migrants' inclusion. Not all sport and non-sport organisations are committed to inclusive projects, and they may not understand the positive social effects of sport. As a consequence, they may be reluctant to approach different cultures,

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31. ISCA (2018), *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

32. IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

33. IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

34. IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

35. IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, pp. 18-20.

36. Mabillard Vincent (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 9; see also UNHCR (2022), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

37. IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

calling for a pure assimilation of national customs by migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons who should eventually set aside their own cultural and religious traditions. Expectations are thus imposed on them, forging an unfriendly environment for social inclusion.<sup>38</sup> Further hostile attitudes can even occur through verbal discrimination or acts of bullying and violence towards migrants. The combination of all these elements may end up pushing migrants to neglect any form of sporting activities.

#### 4. Existing policies and practices

##### 4.1. Best practices among States' policies

43. In Azerbaijan, the role of sport has always been recognised as a crucial tool for the enhancement of the social inclusion of young people, especially refugees and internally displaced persons. In this framework, during the recent decade, the government built 100 modern settlements and 805 sport centres for refugees and internally displaced persons, and erected Olympic complexes offering various facilities (such as sports halls, football fields, volleyball and tennis courts, gyms, swimming pools etc.) in the most populated regions of Aghdam, Agjabedi, Barda Fuzuli and Tartar. Furthermore, Azerbaijan also implemented the international project "Football Schools with Fun" by Cross Cultures Project Association within its districts. The project aims at building solid ties between the most vulnerable and marginalised people, including migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, and local communities, by organising football matches. Overall, around 30 000 professional IDP athletes, including 3 839 women, got opportunities to train and participate in sports competitions in Azerbaijan.<sup>39</sup>

44. In France, under the umbrella of the Ministry of Sport, the Agence Nationale du Sport was established in 2019 in order to keep the society ready to address new challenges and develop sport practices across the French territory. In particular, in 2022, the Agence provided regional and local actors with €175 000 of subsidies devoted to the promotion of social inclusion of migrants and disadvantaged people through sport.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, France bears a great responsibility in promoting migrant inclusion through sport especially since the next Olympic Games will be held in Paris in 2024. In this framework, two projects deserve to be mentioned. On the one hand, "Génération 2024" will allow 10 000 young people each year to participate in projects for the social and environmental impact of sport. In addition, within this framework, "Plan héritage" will be carried out in schooling context, so that disabled and newly-arrived students can have equal access to sporting activities.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, "Impact 2024" subsidises sport organisations, regional and local actors to promote sport around four themes, among which "sport for inclusion, equality and solidarity". In this framework, in 2022, the project financed eight programmes for the social inclusion of migrants with a total amount of €280 000.<sup>42</sup>

45. In Germany, "Integration through Sport" is an ongoing programme for integration of migrants, which started in 1989. In 2015, it widened its scope to include refugees as well. The programme aims at promoting "integration into sport", where locals and migrants co-operate to shape sporting activities, "integration through sport", namely forging interpersonal networks between migrants and the receiving society and raising awareness of the benefits of social inclusion, and "support of intercultural opening of sports", through which sport organisations are trained to deal with cultural diversity. Financed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees, it reached a total budget of €11,4 million in 2016 and 2017.<sup>43</sup>

46. Thanks to the large experience of coaches and trainers involved in the project, "Sport for Integration" has been a driver for developing further projects elsewhere, such as in Greece. The 2021 "Kids love Sports" programme aims at enabling 4 000 children, the majority being refugees, to visit the Panathenaic Stadium, to learn its history and to practice sporting activities in the following two years.<sup>44</sup> Besides, thanks to the support of Germany, the Hellenic Olympic Committee was able to set up the "Together in Sport" programme in March

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38. IRTS (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

39. Data provided by the Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

40. Paule Ignatio, meeting of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons of 7 December 2022.

41. Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la jeunesse, "Génération 2024. L'héritage éducatif des Jeux olympiques et paralympiques", p. 12.

42. Paule Ignatio, meeting of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons of 7 December 2022.

43. For further information on "Integration through Sport", see the Sport migrant integration platform on the [Council of Europe website](#).

44. <https://heyzine.com/flip-book/79296396b9.html>.

2021. Within this framework, trained coaches introduced unaccompanied young refugees to sport, by conveying values and principles enshrined in sporting activities. As of September 2022, 7 550 children, 53% of which are migrant, have participated in the two projects.<sup>45</sup>

47. Strengthening the social cohesion of migrants living in Türkiye through sports has been the aim of a project designed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Türkiye and implemented notably with the support of the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF), UNHCR, and the Turkish Olympic Committee, “Social Cohesion Through Sport”. Implemented between 2019 and mid-2022, it allowed a total of 7 503 children and youth between the ages of 8 and 18 to benefit from sports activities, of whom 3 503 beneficiaries were migrants and 4 000 from the host community. Given its success, which allowed to promote social cohesion amongst the migrants and host populations living in urban areas in Türkiye and enhance the protection situation of the migrant youth through engagement in sports activities, a second phase was launched, which will last until May 2025. Activities, including sport courses in different branches, sports festivals and youth camps, awareness-raising seminars on topics such as health, nutrition, hygiene, children's rights, self-awareness, anger control methods, environmental awareness, Olympic Games, sports culture and ethics, are taking place in the provinces of Ankara, Bursa, Mersin, Şanlıurfa, Adana, İzmir and İstanbul.

#### **4.2. Local initiatives**

48. Several local initiatives are carried out by NGOs, civil society and private associations to transmit messages of tolerance and inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons. Due to the large amount of programmes, it is possible to mention only some of them. The following projects were all uploaded on the Council of Europe Sport migrant integration platform, a database where sport organisations can share knowledge and projects, as well as effective policies that can inspire others.<sup>46</sup>

49. Operative since 2007, the Italian association LiberiNantes promotes free access to sport for migrants and refugees living in the Rome territory, by carrying out several projects of inclusion. For instance, the association allowed a football team composed of refugees and internally displaced persons to participate in competitions, developed a hiking project in order to let migrants know territories they live in and their history, and established education courses for migrants. LiberiNantes provides migrants with free access to their sporting activities and the equipment necessary to carry them out. Finally, LiberiNantes contributes to the implementation of international projects, such as the EU-funded programme FIRE+, aimed at fostering migrants' and refugees' inclusion in and socialisation with local communities through football.<sup>47</sup>

50. Another interesting programme has been carried out by the University of Vienna and the NGO Hemayat since 2013. “Movi Kune – Moving Together” is targeting migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons suffering from psychological trauma. They use sport as a tool to let migrants tie friendship bonds with members of the local community and empower them. Sport can thus teach them how to deal with future challenges. Besides, the project providers complement practical activities with scientific research in order to better use sport for psychological well-being on the basis of the results of their sport-based programmes.<sup>48</sup>

51. Finally, in Paris municipality, Liberfoot by the association Les Dégommeuses specifically aims to include migrant women and LGBTQ+ community members. The Association has thus created a football team mainly composed of LGBTQ+ migrants, providing them with the equipment necessary to carry out sporting activities. The programme strengthens the spread of inclusivity messages and tolerance. Thanks to their experience, Les Dégommeuses also carries out advocacy work and shares knowledge with stakeholders.<sup>49</sup>

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45. Spyros Capralos, EOC/HOC President, meeting of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons of 19 September 2022, Athens.

46. As of 1 March 2022, the Platform contained 68 projects from several member States of the Council of Europe, 28 of which have a local scope. For further information, see the [Council of Europe website](#).

47. For further information on LiberiNantes, see the Sport migrant integration platform on the [Council of Europe website](#).

48. For further information on Movi Kune – Moving Together, see the Sport migrant integration platform on the [Council of Europe website](#).

49. For further information on Liberfoot, see the Sport migrant integration platform on the [Council of Europe website](#).

### 4.3. International co-operation

#### 4.3.1. Council of Europe

52. In the last decades, the Council of Europe has been particularly active in promoting sport as a means of inclusion and peace. The Committee of Ministers has reiterated its attention to the matter on various occasions, recommending actions in different related domains, such as through, *inter alia*, Recommendation [Rec\(2001\)6](#) on the prevention of racism, xenophobia and racial intolerance in sport of 18 July 2001, Recommendation [Rec\(2003\)6](#) on improving physical education and sport for children and young people in all European countries of 30 April 2003, and Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2015\)2](#) on gender mainstreaming in sport of 21 January 2015. In particular, Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2012\)10](#) on the protection of child and young athletes from dangers associated with migration of 19 September 2012 called upon States to “encourage sports organisations to draw up and apply all appropriate measures within their power to prevent abuses in connection with the migration of young athletes, in particular children, and to adopt rules on agents’ activities, including clear ethical instructions concerning their tasks and responsibilities” (paragraph 1), as well as arranging social inclusion of young athletes by “(a) facilitate(ing) their integration; (b) provid(ing) dual education (sports training and school or vocational education); (c) channell[ing] unsuccessful athletes into other activities; (d) provid(ing) appropriate housing for young athletes; (e) help(ing) them to find another job when their career or contract ends” (paragraph 6).

53. Apart from the Committee of Ministers, the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) has played a paramount role in the promotion of sport within the Council of Europe member States. Established on 11 May 2007 by [CM/Res\(2007\)8](#) of the Committee of Ministers for an initial period of three years, EPAS was later confirmed by Resolution [CM/Res\(2010\)11](#) of 13 October 2010. Its main activities revolve around three axes. Firstly, it develops standard settings on sport activities and advises States on sports policies, so that they are inclusive, safe and ethical. In this context, it takes into consideration the advice of representatives of sport organisations. Secondly, it monitors the application of Council of Europe relevant recommendations and the European Sports Charter. Thirdly, it undertakes actions within the framework of “Sport for All”.

54. Finally, EPAS fosters European co-operation by organising meetings at ministerial level. During its last Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport in Antalya on 25-27 October 2022, Ministers for Sport invited member States to “promote and safeguard human rights in and through sport, provide adequate financial and human resources, and to mobilise all key stakeholders to promptly address remaining and emerging challenges”, such as ensuring gender equality in sport, safeguarding child protection and fostering social inclusion of the most disadvantaged people. Besides, they called upon EPAS, *inter alia*, to “use sport as a tool for social integration of disadvantaged groups, such as migrants, refugees, persons with disabilities and senior citizens; develop a toolbox based on best practices for inclusion of disadvantaged groups in all aspects of sport and devise a communication plan to promote it widely”.<sup>50</sup>

55. Since its first adoption in 1992, the European Sports Charter<sup>51</sup> has been a milestone in the promotion of sports in every member State of the Council of Europe. Its main aim is to grant the right to sport to everyone and to provide States with advice on how to develop their sport policies, *inter alia*, to “ensure that the development of sport is inclusive” (art. 1(c) of the European Sports Charter). Regarding more specifically the human rights approach in sport with regard to vulnerable groups, the Charter states that “The human rights due diligence approach in sport requires respect for the human rights of those involved in or exposed to sport-related activities and should therefore: ... apply a policy of zero tolerance for violence and all forms of discrimination, paying particular attention to individuals and groups in a situation of vulnerability, such as children, migrants and persons with disabilities ...” (art. 6.2(d) of the Charter). During the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Council of Europe Ministers of Sport in Tbilisi (2018), a process for revision of the European Sports Charter was initiated and, on 13 October 2021, the Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2021\)5](#) on the Revised European Sport Charter, which calls upon States to design their sport policies according to the revised Charter and stakeholders to take into consideration the principles there enshrined.

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50. The text of the resolutions adopted at the 17th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport are available on the [Council of Europe website](#).

51. The text is available on the [Council of Europe website](#).

#### 4.3.2. UNHCR

56. In recent years, UNHCR has been particularly active in the promotion of sport as a tool for social inclusion of refugees as well. As a matter of fact, since 2020, 72% of 96 country operations have carried out sport-based projects.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, UNHCR has undertaken important steps for the promotion of sport as a tool to achieve positive social outcomes worldwide.

57. Adopted in December 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees has progressively become a paramount document for the social inclusion of refugees. The text calls upon States to undertake concrete actions in “burden- and responsibility-sharing to better protect and assist refugees and support host countries and communities”.<sup>53</sup> Recognising the role that sport can have for the social inclusion of refugees, the Compact invites UNHCR, States and other entities to develop partnerships to foster access to sporting activities and facilities, particularly in large refugee-hosting areas (paragraph 44). Within the framework of the Compact, as of 2 March 2023, States, sport organisations and civil society worldwide have pledged for 25 projects dedicated to social inclusion through sport and other recreational activities, 40% of which through the delivery of sporting materials or technical assistance.<sup>54</sup>

58. Through the Global Refugee Forum, UNHCR promotes dialogue and knowledge sharing among actors involved in spreading values enshrined in the Global Compact on Refugees. The first Forum was held in December 2019 and hosted 3,000 participants and 1 400 pledges were announced prior or during the Forum.<sup>55</sup> Two years later, a high-level official meeting was held to take stock of the progress achieved.

59. Furthermore, UNHCR, in partnership with the International Olympic Committee and Terre des Hommes association, published a toolkit to assist sport and humanitarian actors involved in the promotion of sport as a vehicle for protection, including increased social inclusion. The “Sport for Protection Toolkit – Programming with Young People in Forced Displaced Settings” aims at promoting social inclusion, social cohesion and psychological well-being of refugees and internally displaced persons, by bringing about positive changes in their lives through sport, with the aim of supporting an increasingly safe, rights-based society.<sup>56</sup>

60. Finally, in line with the recognition of the significant role that sport can play in refugee response, UNHCR recently published its first Sport Strategy “More than a Game” 2022-2026.<sup>57</sup> The overall vision of the strategy is improved well-being and opportunities through sport for the people UNHCR serves. More than this, the strategy outlines how, across five interlinked areas of work, sport can contribute to the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees and the High Commissioner’s Strategic Directions, whilst aligning with internal education, health, gender-based violence and child protection strategies.

#### 4.3.3. The European Union

61. Since the 2007 EU White Paper on Sport, the European Union has recognised the paramount role of sport “for social inclusion, integration and equal opportunities”.<sup>58</sup> In concrete terms, the White Paper mentioned the ability of sport in forging a sense of belonging and fostering intercultural dialogue. Therefore, it concluded that “making available spaces for sport and supporting sport-related activities are important for allowing immigrants and the host society to interact together in a positive way”.<sup>59</sup> Following this explicit commitment, the European Union has undertaken important steps for the promotion of social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.

62. According to the European Union Work Plan for Sport for the period from 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2024, the main objectives of the European Union in the context of sport are, among others, the strengthening of sporting activities founded on integrity and value transmission as well as the increase of sport participation as tool to foster social cohesion. Furthermore, the EU Work Plan draws specific attention to the Sport chapter of the Erasmus+ programme, which finances projects aimed at promoting European values and inclusion through sport.

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52. UNHCR (2022), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

53. Paragraph 5 of the Global Compact on Refugees. Further information on the Global Compact on Refugees can be found on its dedicated [website](#).

54. The full list of pledges is available on the [website of the Global Compact on Refugees](#).

55. Data are available on the [website of the Global Compact on Refugees](#).

56. UNHCR, IOC and Terre des Hommes (2018), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

57. UNHCR (2022), *op. cit.*

58. Paragraph 2.5. of the [EU White Paper](#), 11 July 2007.

59. *Ibid.*

63. In addition, the SHARE initiative aims at raising awareness of the contribution of sport to regional and local development. In fact, the European Commission acknowledged the impact investments in social cohesion and inclusion have on territorial development.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, SHARE collects data on sport-based projects for regional and local development so that member States and stakeholders can share best practices and knowledge in the domain.

64. Finally, the #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards acknowledge the importance of sport for social inclusion of the most disadvantaged people, including refugees and migrants and the fight against discrimination. Every year, the most innovative ideas are awarded with €10 000, according to three category prizes. In the 2022 contest, these were “Promoting gender equality in sport”, “Sport for Peace” and “breaking barriers in sport”.<sup>61</sup> The rationale of the project is to give visibility to innovative projects so that other sport actors can take inspiration for developing further programmes of social inclusion through sport.

#### 4.3.4. Other entities

65. Many other entities, be they international organisations, NGOs, civil society, have carried out sport-based activities for the inclusion of migrants. The impossibility of mentioning them all imposes a limited selection.

66. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has been at the forefront in the promotion of sport activities for refugees, including by creating the Refugee Olympic Team, which officially debuted in Rio 2016 marching under the Olympic flag.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the Paralympic refugee athletes at the Rio Games participated under the Paralympic flag, but not as an official team. Instead, the first Paralympic Refugee Team participated in the Tokyo games in 2021. Through “Olympic Scholarships for Refugee Athletes”, a dedicated programme created after Rio, Olympic Solidarity supported 56 promising refugee athletes from 13 countries. The IOC Refugee Olympic Team participated in the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, with 29 athletes competing in 12 sports. At the moment, 42 refugee athletes are benefitting from the IOC funds, trying to obtain qualification to Paris Olympics 2024.<sup>63</sup>

67. Furthermore, the IOC strengthened its longstanding co-operation with UNHCR through the launch of the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF) in 2017. The ORF aims at providing refugees and internally displaced persons with access to sporting facilities and participation in sport-based activities. At the moment, it is implementing programmes in Bangladesh, Colombia, France, Jordan, Kenya, Türkiye and Uganda.<sup>64</sup> In addition, the Foundation has reinforced its capacities by signing meaningful partnerships, such as the Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR.<sup>65</sup> The ORF, along with UNHCR and the Sport Foundation also co-convene the Sport for Refugees Coalition, a body of more than eighty sport, civil society, public and private sector organisations that pledged their mutual commitment to enhancing access to organised sport for refugees and internally displaced persons. In 2019 they committed to “promote and ensure access for all refugees, without distinction of any kind, to safe and inclusive sporting facilities; to increase availability and access to organised sports and sport-based initiatives for refugee and hosting communities, actively considering age, gender, ability and other diversity needs; [and] to promote and facilitate equal access to and participation of refugees in sporting events and competitions at all levels”.<sup>66</sup>

68. The European Olympic Committees organisation (EOC) regroups fifty European National Olympic Committees it works closely with by advising them during decision-making processes, organising events (for example European Games, European Youth Olympics Festival, etc) and spreading sport values across Europe. In preparation for the Tokyo Olympic Games, 21 out of 29 athletes of the Olympic Refugee Team were hosted by European National Olympic Committees. Furthermore, the support of the EOC has been particularly meaningful in the social inclusion of Ukrainian athletes who fled their country following the start of the devastating war of Russia against Ukraine. In this context, in partnership with the IOC and Olympic Solidarity, the EOC created a solidarity fund with an initial budget of US\$2 million in order to bear all the costs necessary for Ukrainian athletes to train and to participate in sport competitions. In April 2022, the EOC donated further US\$500,000 to the fund.

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60. For further information on the SHARE initiative, visit the [website](#) of the European Commission.

61. More information can be found on the [website of the European Commission](#).

62. More information can be found on the website of the [Refugee Olympic Team](#).

63. Paule Ignatio, meeting of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons of 7 December 2022.

64. The specificities of each programme can be found on [website the Foundation](#).

65. ORF, “[Olympic Refugee Foundation strengthens support to refugees worldwide](#)”, 25 October 2022.

66. UNHCR, “[A Sports Coalition joins UNHCR and the International Olympic Committee to help young refugees discover their potential through sport](#)”, 9 December 2019.

69. In June 2022, EOC signed an Cooperation Agreement with the European Commission. Within this framework, they committed to promote EU and Olympic values, as well as cultural exchanges, and to adopt long-term strategies to fight against, *inter alia*, discrimination, intolerance and gender inequality.

70. The UEFA finances a series of national association refugee support projects and staged in 2022 a new European tournament for refugees, the UNITY EURO Cup,<sup>67</sup> alongside UNHCR, with the aim to use the power of football to build a better future for refugees and displaced people in Europe. For this purpose, UEFA signed a co-operation protocol with UNHCR, supporting refugee access to sport and enhancing social inclusion in the context of UEFA's sustainability strategy, called Strength Through Unity. Since 2017, UEFA has also operated the Football and Refugee Grant Scheme, which provides funding for projects across Europe, with national association programmes receiving financial support to invest in their work with refugees. On 29 June 2022, for the first time, UEFA hosted a new tournament with eight mixed refugee national teams, competing for the inaugural UNITY EURO Cup. Each team was composed of 70% refugees and 30% non-refugee players, with the aim to demonstrate and celebrate football's power to strengthen ties between host communities and displaced people, breaking down barriers and creating a spirit of inclusion.

## 5. Recommendations

71. Although a large amount of local, regional, national and international sport-based activities have been carried out to promote social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons so far, several key areas need intervention, as highlighted in the report.

72. First of all, States and actors involved in sport-based activities should have due regard to the values and principles laid down in the European Sports Charter. In recommendation CM/Rec(2021)5, States are called to base their sport policies on the principles enshrined in the Sports Charter and all stakeholders to take them into account when designing their sport-based programmes. In this context, States are invited to accede to the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport for a better implementation of the European Sports Charter and for benefiting from a more effective international co-operation.

73. In addition, it is paramount that States adopt or ensure the application of legislation prohibiting any form of discrimination in sports due to nationality, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, or disability. Everyone should be granted the right to sport, and specific actions should be undertaken to guarantee that the most vulnerable people, including migrants, have proper access to sport facilities and activities. Training coaches to be able to detect migrants' vulnerabilities and overcome them should be promoted and assistance services should be in place to allow migrants to feel safe and protected in sport centres. Language courses could also be set up in parallel to sport-based programmes so that language differences are no longer a barrier to inclusion. In addition, policy makers should ensure that migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons are allowed to participate in sport competitions as any other non-migrant athlete.

74. Literature has demonstrated that structural and cultural barriers are harsher where migrant women, children, LGBTQ+ community members or disabled migrants are concerned. Therefore, it is necessary to develop specific targeted actions to promote their social inclusion in the receiving societies. In this regard, migrants or specific groups of them should be involved in decision-making processes so that solutions are adapted to tackle their vulnerabilities and provide targeted solutions. A wider media coverage of women sports would reach a larger number of young girls who are reluctant to enrol in sports due to cultural or psychological barriers. The image of migrant women athletes and champions could thus be a driver of change, as it could reduce stereotypes and discriminatory narratives in the receiving society. Furthermore, childminding services could be set up within sport organisations in order to enable women athletes to have their own time for sports practice.

75. Cases of discrimination have been registered against migrant LGBTQ+ community members and people with disabilities. It is therefore necessary that States and sport organisations develop awareness-raising campaigns and promote tolerance in order to deconstruct stereotypes and spread messages of inclusion. Targeted educational programmes for children or training of coaches could be useful means to attain this goal. Besides, wider media coverage of parasports could help towards greater inclusion.

76. The wider migration flows in European countries requires a strategic vision for the social inclusion of migrants. Long-term and sustainable projects should be privileged over short-term programmes, and States should also invest in cross-sectoral initiatives leading to further inclusion of migrants into the receiving societies, such as undertaking sport-based activities in parallel to educational programmes, especially for

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67. More information can be found at [World Refugee Day 2022: European football's widespread support](#).

migrant children. Greater State funds are an essential tool to achieve this goal and develop effective policies of social inclusion. Migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons should be granted free access to sport facilities and sport-based activities, including the supply of sport uniforms where required. Furthermore, given the healing effects of sporting activities, sport organisations should be properly equipped with psychological and social assistance available to all enrolled individuals, especially for migrants. Finally, further funds dedicated to the promotion of collaboration among sport and non-sport organisations are needed to set up co-operative mechanisms and cross-sectoral societal actions. Without any public funding, all these costs would be borne by sport organisations, risking that their excessive amount could push them to limit sport-based operations. Therefore, a larger public support for sport-based activities aimed at the social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons appears essential.

77. Ensuring public awareness of the benefits of sport as a tool for the promotion of social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons should be pursued. On the one hand, States and sport organisations could develop effective awareness-raising campaigns to highlight the importance of including migrants in societies, thus reducing cases of racism and discrimination. On the other hand, it is also paramount to effectively reach migrants through communication campaigns so that they are aware of specific projects aimed at their social inclusion.

78. Finally, the exchange of knowledge and experience, as well as the creation of databases are important tools to foster the development of sport-based programmes of social inclusion. In this framework, States and other stakeholders are encouraged to upload their projects on the Council of Europe sport migrant integration platform. Not only would they benefit from a wider visibility at the international level, thus increasing the possibility of reaching investors and migrants' participation, but they would especially share knowledge and best practices with other local, regional, national and international sport organisations so that a larger number of sport-based programmes for the inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons can be implemented.

## 6. Conclusion

79. Following the start of the devastating war of Russia against Ukraine, over 6 million of Ukrainians have found shelter in many of the member States of the Council of Europe. Actions for their inclusion have been taken on different levels and sport-based activities can play a crucial role in this regard.

80. In this context, the upcoming Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games of 2024 will be an important stage for spreading values of inclusion and tolerance. The Refugee Olympic and Paralympic Teams will participate in the Games and young migrant boys and girls will take inspiration from Olympic champions. However, social inclusion is to be promoted everywhere, at any level and at any time. Open and non-discriminatory access to sport centres and sporting activities is to be granted to migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons so that both the newcomers and the receiving societies can be enriched by the encounter of different cultures.

81. In this framework, several tools are at the disposal of the member States of the Council of Europe, ranging from the European Sports Charter to the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport or the Sport migrant integration platform. Further commitment is however still needed in funding resources, cross-sectoral interventions and international co-operation. It is therefore necessary to fill the structural gaps, overcome barriers and vigorously promote sport as a tool for social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.