

Resolution 2503 (2023)¹

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

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the universality of sport. It notes that sport 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 sport, which generates important positive values, 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 antisocial behaviour and increases community cohesion. In this context, the Assembly 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 the invitation to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), States and sports entities to sign partnerships to foster access to sports facilities, including in refugee-hosting areas. It hails the efforts of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to promote sports activities for refugees and to support the participation of refugee athletes at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games thanks to the Refugee Olympic Team. It also welcomes the launch of the Olympic Refugee Foundation by the 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, *inter alia*, 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, and 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, Türkiye, on 26 October 2022, during which the ministers called upon EPAS, *inter alia*, to "use sport as a tool for social integration of disadvantaged groups, such as migrants, refugees, people with disabilities and senior citizens; develop a toolbox based on best practices for inclusion

1. *Assembly debate* on 21 June 2023 (17th sitting) (see [Doc. 15786](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Ms Nigar Arpadarai). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 21 June 2023 (17th sitting).



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 on 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. accede 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 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 for non-refugee athletes through legal and practical measures;
- 7.5. ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to practise sports and undertake specific action to guarantee that the most vulnerable people, including migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, have proper access to sports 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, sports entities, the UNHCR and the IOC to sign further partnerships to foster access to sports facilities, including in refugee-hosting areas, to promote sports activities for refugees, to support the participation of refugee athletes at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games and to make the most of the Olympic Refugee Foundation launched by the UNHCR and the IOC.

9. Aware that structural and cultural barriers are more difficult to overcome for the most vulnerable groups of migrants, refugees and displaced persons, such as women, children, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) community or people with disabilities, the Assembly urges Council of Europe member States to develop specific targeted measures to promote the social inclusion of these groups in the receiving societies with their involvement in the decision-making processes.

10. As women can be prevented from practising sports because of prejudices and also for logistical reasons, the Assembly recommends:

- 10.1. the organisation of wide media campaigns and coverage of women's 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 deconstructing stereotypes and discriminatory narratives;
- 10.2. the setting-up of child-minding services within sports organisations in order to enable female athletes to have time to practise sports.

11. In order to fight against discrimination, notably against members of the LGBTQI+ community and people 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 and European Union project Combating Hate Speech in Sport.

12. The Assembly believes that the wider migration movements 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 sports 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 so that costs are not borne by sports organisations, as their excessive amount could push them to limit sports activities. As a result:

12.1. migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons should be granted free access to sports facilities and sports activities, including the supply of sportswear when required;

12.2. given the healing effects of sports activities, sports 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 sports and non-sports organisations with the aim of 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, which reduces 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 member States to upload their projects on the platform so that the projects can benefit from wider visibility at the international level but also to encourage local, regional, national and international sports organisations to emulate them for the development of a larger number of sport-based programmes to include 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 support these organisations financially. Furthermore, the Assembly strongly calls for national sports organisations and Olympic and Paralympic committees to be fully funded to support refugee athletes.