

# Right in the middle instead of being left out:

Five recommended actions for more participation of refugees in sport



Sport, and football in particular, is considered to have great potential for integration. Over the last few years, numerous professional and amateur sports clubs, sports associations and civil society organisations have initiated programmes that promote the social participation of refugees in and through sport. In the workshops “Mittendrin statt außen vor” (“Right in the middle instead of being left out”) of the programme “Willkommen im Fußball” (“Welcome to Football”), 20 women and men with refugee backgrounds evaluated their experiences with these offers within and outside of the programme. They systematised their experiences and drafted core concerns for more participation of refugees in popular sport.

The workshops made it clear: Firstly, that for many refugees, sport can be important, enriching and a positive point of reference in a precarious life situation. Secondly, it is not a matter of course for refugees to be “part of it”. Neither as participants nor as volunteers. To change this, resources, information, flexible offers, active confidants and a safe and open climate are helpful.

Potential challenges can be overcome if associations and clubs look at sport from the perspective of refugees. Such a change of perspective offers more opportunities for everyone to participate in sport. The programme “Willkommen im Fußball” summarises the main concerns of the participants in five recommended actions, which are aimed in particular at associations and clubs.

## 1 Recognising the limits of sport.

**Because: Sport is a luxury that is not equally accessible to all people.**

Clubs sometimes report disappointment when planned activities are not accepted as hoped. Here, the lack of commitment on the part of the participants is often complained about. Refugees, on the other hand, state that they do not always have the resources and energy to participate in regular club activities – even if it would be important to them. This is where a realistic assessment of sport can help: What are the life-determining issues of the target group? What significance can sport have? How can a suitable offer be designed under these conditions?

*In the first years in Germany, sport was not something I could think about. My main task was to find day-care places for my children and to learn the basics of German, so that I could somehow take part in society.*

**Amenah, 34, Saarbrücken**

## 2 Sharing information.

**Because: Lack of information about the complex system of clubs and associations is an obstacle on the way into sport and voluntary work.**

In many cases, the support of people who can be trusted and who can be contacted, e.g. from schools, community centres or counselling centres, is necessary to find the right sports programme or voluntary work. General knowledge about why and when sport can be beneficial, where to find which offers and how to register could be helpful here in providing the right support. For this purpose, clubs and associations could communicate to the contact persons and institutions outside sport how life-changing sport can be for the participants. This can be done through stronger networking with local structures, simplifying the written registration processes and explaining the procedures in simple language or in educational videos.

### 3 Being self-critical and willing to learn.

**Because: Racism and prejudice are also widespread in sport. And even in places where people are “well-intentioned”.**

Refugees' equal participation can be made more difficult if clubs and associations are not aware of their own possible prejudices. Some refugees report racist statements made by other committed persons that remain uncommented because they are not perceived as racist by third parties. Acting in a prejudice-conscious way is a matter of practice and difficult without actively dealing with the deeper issue. Further training on the part of the associations, e.g. in cooperation with anti-racism organisations, can help here. They could supplement basic courses and technical training content as a basis for successful training. Clubs and associations should also examine their own structures and set an example of how to deal constructively with discrimination.

### 4 Recognising competences.

**Because: Young refugees are often required to obtain qualifications. At the same time, their existing skills are not always recognised.**

Compared to people without a refugee background, some refugees feel that they have to provide more proof of performance in order to be recognised as coaches in the club: While locals lead trainings without a licence, refugees are more strongly encouraged to obtain formal qualifications. It would be desirable to have the same standards for all. At the same time, it is equally important that associations recognise the skills that have already been acquired outside German sports structures. What is already working in some associations should be implemented comprehensively: In cases where certificates have been lost, personal interviews, practical tests or internships can help to verify knowledge and experience.

### 5 Promoting diversity.

**Because: A club in which voluntary work has no different facets is less attractive for newly arrived refugees.**

Having a diverse club environment is enriching for all (potential) members and has a particularly encouraging effect on people who themselves belong to under-represented groups. Sports structures should become noticeably more diverse not only at the level of participants, but also in committees, among coaches and at other levels of organisation. Short-term offers, such as holiday camps, can be good entry models for new interested people to become acquainted with and participate in the club.

*Despite the fact that we are motivated and contribute with modern perspectives, us young refugee coaches tend to be expected to qualify first before we are allowed to work as coaches. Other people, no matter how long they have been in the club, enjoy being a coach without further qualification.*

**Monir, 30, Berlin**

# Imprint

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