



## FINAL CONCLUSIONS

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# IMPRESSUM

## Impressum

ASPIRE Final Conference Conclusions

## Publisher

ASPIRE Project Consortium

Coordinator – European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO)

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## Acknowledgements

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The Project ASPIRE – Activity, Sport and Play for the Inclusion of Refugees in Europe is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

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Activity, Sport and Play for the  
Inclusion of Refugees in Europe





# OPENING ADDRESS

Dear readers,

"Sport has the power to change the world", as everyone knows, latest after the famous speech of Nelson Mandela in 2000. Yet unfortunately, not everyone has equal access to sport. Sport plays multiple roles in today's society, and being a language that anyone can speak, sport can open up doors to a healthier lifestyle, friendships, learning opportunities and much more.

Across all societies, refugees and migrants often have fewer opportunities. Recently arrived refugees are amongst some of the most vulnerable groups, many of them suffering from trauma caused by losing their homes and near ones, facing war and persecution, and going through a long and possibly dangerous journey.

Until today, sports organisations don't necessarily see the full potential of sport in as a tool. Sport has a value of its own, but it could indeed be used more also as a tool for the inclusion, integration and empowerment of refugees. However, the positive impact doesn't come automatically – it takes commitment, policies, research, leadership, collaboration, training and resources. The ASPIRE project sought to provide solutions and incentives for a range of target groups and to provide guidance for practitioners and stakeholders ranging from local to international level.

Summarising the journey that we started in 2017, up until the ASPIRE Final Conference on 14 June 2019, some aspects – which make the project and its success special – are worth mentioning.

First, ASPIRE provides us with valuable knowledge about sport for inclusion, which

help us to build our actions on sound evidence. Second, with ASPIRE, we have been able to raise awareness on the importance of these issues, putting them on the agenda. Third, this project has made us understand that we need to cooperate. Not only during the 2,5 years duration of the project, but on an ongoing basis to solve challenges together. Fourth, having seen so many engaged people in the project, I feel positive. Positive about the possibilities we have, positive about the dedication and will power of many, and positive that the challenge of including refugees is one that can be solved. Lastly, I was impressed by the warm, dynamic and friendly working environment of the ASPIRE Final Conference. Our ASPIRE project staff and the whole project team and partnership had worked hard to make the event memorable, and it makes me feel proud that our contributions have been useful and welcome.

In this document you will find the conclusions of the ASPIRE project, from the research that serves as basis for the project, up until the final conference. We want to address a multitude of target groups from coaches to sports leaders and decision makers at different levels. The practitioners on the field and in the local neighbourhoods, the local authorities, sports clubs and coaches, as well as refugee and social organisations are all vital stakeholders that are needed in order to address the inclusion of refugees. Cooperation and dedication are needed at all levels. It is my pleasure and honour to invite you to the conclusions of this successful project and wish you a joyful read.

**Stefan Bergh**  
ENGSO President

# PRESENTING ASPIRE

## Activity, Sport and Play for the Inclusion of Refugees in Europe

Sport has unique power to bring people together, to help them connect and to learn new skills – it is one of the most potent community-building tools we have at our disposal. Migration has been a constant force driving the development of human cultures and societies forward from our very beginning. Since the past years and especially the events in 2015, many European villages, towns and cities are home to new groups of people that have a different background from “ours”.

Helping these people become part of our communities requires work, and a conscious journey towards inclusion. That journey requires challenge and change, but its reward is communities that are enriched with diversity, with strong social bonds and with sports clubs at their centre. Making change towards inclusion can feel daunting. But change starts with individual actions, which can then grow into organisational ones.

In the big picture, sports clubs can make a difference in society, but there are also clear advantages to making one's sport or organisation more inclusive. The benefits range from increasing one's membership to attracting new talent and pulling in new sources of funding. However, the biggest advantage of all is possibly strengthening the acknowledgement of sport as a force for positive change, for innovation and for friendship. ASPIRE was a European project, focused on the social inclusion of people who are at risk of exclusion, especially refugees. The project was co-financed by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and led by ENGSO, the European Sports NGO, in 2017–2019.

ASPIRE sought to establish how sports clubs can support the inclusion of migrants and refugees by creating opportunities to participate in sport activities and community life through sport. To achieve this aim, a specialised Training Module for people that wish to make their sport or their sports setting more inclusive to people from different backgrounds.



The project kicked off with research undertaken by the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE), in order to ensure the project activities are evidence-based, and to gain a better understanding of the context and needs of refugees and sports organisations.

The Training Module gives a general description of the situation regarding migration, talks about the benefits of conscious conversations between cultures, and describes some of the psychological issues that refugees may face and how sport and sports settings can help them deal with those issues. Finally, the module presents how sports clubs and organisations can start the journey towards being more inclusive. The manual consists of practical tips and exercises, along with basic facts and theory.

Although primarily aimed at making sports clubs and programmes more welcoming to refugees, many of the lessons and tips described in the training module are equally applicable to improving access to people from other under-represented groups. After having been tested by the project partners, the Training Module was implemented through National Training Sessions in 9 European Countries – Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Serbia, Spain and Sweden. The trainings included hands-on learning opportunities and introduction to the main areas of the training module. Training session topics were migration, intercultural dialogue, psychosocial support and accessible sport organisations, targeting people involved in sport, such as instructors, coaches, volunteers, project leaders, administrators and officials, as well as physical education teachers, social and aid workers and refugees with a background on coaching or physical education. The aim was that the participants can develop their competences as facilitators that empower participants of sporting activities.

The final event of the ASPIRE project was the Final Conference, organised in Frankfurt on 14 June 2019.

Further reading: [www.aspiresport.eu](http://www.aspiresport.eu)





# ASPIRE PARTNERS

## European and international organisations

- ENGSO – the European Sports NGO
- ENGSO Youth
- European Lotteries
- International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE)
- Council of Europe / Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS)
- European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE)

## National and regional sports organisations

- Bulgarian Union for Physical Culture and Sports (BUPCS), Bulgaria
- Catalan Union of Sports Federations (UFEC), Spain
- Finnish Olympic Committee, Finland
- German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB), Germany
- Serbian Olympic Committee, Serbia
- Swedish Sports Confederation (RF), Sweden

## Refugee organisations

- Caritas akademie, Austria
- Minor-Ndako, Belgium

## National governments and agencies

- Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sport (General Secretariat of Sport), Greece
- Sport Vlaanderen, Belgium

ASPIRE was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.



# RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE-BASE

## on the potential of sport as a context to helping the social inclusion of migrants and refugees

Sport has been proposed as a possible way of helping immigrants deal with different challenges. The social integration of immigrants depends on two core strategies: firstly, the attitudes and actions of the immigrants, themselves, especially about their group characteristics – age, gender, educational level, and most importantly, their origin and generation – which determine the possibilities and efforts made to adapt to new surroundings; and secondly, the receiving society, and the steps it takes to incorporate the different cultural groups. Both forces can result in either hostility or hospitality.

Many refugees experience trauma, possibly leading to psychosocial disorders and mental health conditions, difficulties with social integration and inadequate schooling. The trauma and involuntary displacement that refugees experience can also create barriers for getting accustomed with their new surroundings – they may find it more difficult to adapt their behaviours, attitudes and values to different societies. Luckily, there are ways to help people by using psychosocial support.

Sport is, despite its limits, most effective for encouraging participation of diverse groups. From science we know that sport also helps to cope with acculturative stress, creates ethnic strength and personal benefits. Sport participation can foster general enjoyment, feeling a sense of belonging, and learning transferable skills to daily life such as respect, teamwork and leadership. Sports participation in multi-ethnic groups can also help make “clan boundaries” disappear. We also know that sport helps to partly substitute thoughts of loss of previous life and help define a new identity. Sport can help develop skills and characteristics such

as trust, empathy, personal responsibility, and co-operation. Sport can overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, as it's “a language everybody speaks”. Sport can also be an activity of shared interest to diverse people, often referred to as ‘social glue’. Sport empowers individuals and communities: it promotes self-determination and autonomy of young people and especially young women, can change social norms about one's roles and capabilities in society, and opens new community affiliations and more equal access to society.

Sport needs to be steered to achieve these aims – it requires active input. Sport can also have negative effects such as social exclusion, racism and cultural resistance. Sport is not automatically a road to inclusion and integration – simply participating in sport is not sufficient.

Barriers that stop people from taking part can be structural (poverty, lack of information, suitable opportunities or access, etc.), mediating (sport providers can be non-inclusive, culturally insensitive and lack flexibility; use of alcohol or racism and discrimination in club culture; perception of sport as violent, etc.) or personal (lack of time and money).

The ways in which sport and physical activity might mediate these challenges, and foster and facilitate positive outcomes for all, are discussed in the ASPIRE Scientific Report, which explains findings of the research review. The process revealed areas where there are the greatest needs for support for those using sport with refugees, summarising them in 13 strategies.

### 13 strategies to support people working with sport and refugees

- Including refugees in project development planning and delivery
- Education and support for sports coaches and trainers
- Planning for sustainability
- Cultural sensitivity and openness to diversity
- Principles of inclusion in sport and physical activity
- Listening to refugees
- Collaboration between organisations and agencies
- Collaboration between areas of expertise
- Breaking down stereotypes about refugees
- Child protection
- Understand the cultural and historical backgrounds of refugees
- Funding and financing programmes
- User-friendly information sharing

### Key takeaways

- Sport can help hosting and immigrating communities to overcome differences and familiarise themselves with each other in two-way processes.
- Sport programmes need to be designed, structured and implemented intentionally to the needs of the participants. Conditions such as trauma or potential for further exclusion need to be taken into account by the coach. E.g. if two homogenous teams of different origins play against each other, this can highlight the differences between them, lead to conflict and increase marginalisation.
- Integrative sport should rather be learning-oriented to promote co-operation, respect and mutual understanding, than performance-oriented. Coaches should create a motivational environment.
- Evidence suggests positive effects of psychosocial interventions with adolescents, health care providers and sport providers should work together in designing the programs.
- Implement after-school and athletic programmes in accessible manner e.g. in areas with high-refugee density to reduce transportation and other barriers.
- Individual support, one-to-one mentoring as well as social support e.g. peer groups to increase quality of life, self-efficacy, self-esteem and well-being.
- Families are an important safety network, counselling and teaching can be of help as well.

Further reading: **ASPIRE Scientific Report** and **Chapter 1 of the ASPIRE Training Module**



# CAPACITY BUILDING

## on offering and sustaining suitable participation opportunities for migrants and refugees

When preparing to offer sports activities for groups of refugees, it's often good to start with basics such as terminology. What is the difference between a migrant, a refugee and an asylum seeker? What is the difference between inclusion and integration?

Inclusion assumes everyone is different and the person is welcomed to bring his/her special contribution to society. Integration assumes a one-way process and no effort of the mainstream society at all. Simply inviting someone to a group is not enough, as sub-groups are likely to form. Preferably, we are aiming at inclusion – both in clubs and society – but for this purpose, sports clubs and coaches need to do some things differently.

It's vital that clubs and coaches understand, that in order to welcome refugees, they might need to have a critical look at their offerings – often the most popular sports in a hosting community are not the same as within a refugee population.

Finally, coaches need to be aware of the personal challenges of refugees, such as trauma, loss and grief, and their coping process. Aggressive behaviour of their sports participant may be a sign of post traumatic stress disorder, but it could also be their (negative) way of coping with grief. Coaches should be trained to understand their potential to help, as well as their limits.

Through specialised training, coaches can also learn to use sport for psychosocial support, providing interventions that assist in recovering from trauma and helps prevent post traumatic stress disorder. The ASPIRE Training Module gives tools to people who wish to make their sport or their sports setting more inclusive to people from other backgrounds.

### Key takeaways

- Facilitators of sport at all levels should be sensitised to inclusivity. Helpful exercises are presented in the ASPIRE Training Module.
- Coaches and other facilitators should work with a combination of theory (reflections) and exercises (games) to manage interculturality in work.
- In general, an open, tolerant communication with active questioning and listening in your sport environment will help to deal successfully with interculturalism
- Competitive character is natural in sport and can cause exclusive behaviour. Therefore, facilitators should be qualified and equipped with tools to create inclusive sport.
- Sport potentially leads to conflicting situations. This brings potential for the coaches to make participants reflect and learn how to cope with these situations e.g. through teaching empathy and objective thinking.
- Coaches can implement the five Hobfoll-Principles in their sessions (more details in summary of scientific report). The training module gives practical examples of exercises for each principle.
- Coaches need to understand their own limits and capacities – professional as well as personal. Working with these contexts can be mentally stressing and result in physical, emotional or behavioural consequences for the coach. Coaches should be sensitive to their own symptoms and seek help when needed.

## Recommendations for people coaching refugees and migrants

- **Plan** – effective sessions are well-planned and well-prepared, so that all activities are appropriate to the needs of migrants and refugees, and there is progression and continuity between sessions.
- **Motivate** – participants may need encouragement, especially at the beginning of programmes, so the coach needs to be positive and attentive to their needs.
- **Be a role model** – an effective coach does not just teach sport, but embodies the values and attitudes of appropriate psychosocial support, such as calmness, social interaction, and hope.
- **Communicate** – the benefits of an effective sports programme do not just come from the physical activities. Time before, after, and during breaks in sessions can be just as important in building trusting relationships, and sharing a revision of the programme.
- **Be a friend** – some people find it easier to talk to sports coaches about their problems and anxieties than other support workers. An effective coach invests time and energy into building strong relationships

Further reading: Chapters 2 and 3 of the ASPIRE Training Module



# LEADERSHIP

## on developing sport for refugees within sport organisations

In addition to coaches, inclusive sports clubs and federations also need leaders that are committed to opening doors to new target groups. Leading the change begins with being informed and aware.

Sport also has its limitations and risks – as every other part of society, it is built on norms. Being aware of and reversing norms is an efficient way of challenging one's own thoughts and creating change.

A norm is an unwritten rule assigning power between people and defining, what is expected and acceptable. To make sport inclusive, we need to understand its underlying norms and reflect on them. Norms are not easy to spot, when you are white and well-to-do. Awareness of how the organisation is perceived from the outside is needed. How do persons of another gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or mental and physical ability see your organisation? Will they feel excluded or insecure?

Club leaders can also reflect on what barriers there are to the participation of refugees and other underrepresented groups, including physical barriers (lack of facilities and sport offerings in certain neighbourhoods), structural barriers (training times and holiday schedule determined upon generalisations), mediating barriers (language barriers or cultural insensitivity) and personal barriers (time, knowledge about activities, financial capacities, sport as a taboo).

Engaging minorities is easier, when they see relatable figures welcoming them to the training or coaching them. Adapting job portfolios and volunteering opportunities can help refugees to engage in multiple roles, creating more equal opportunities, empowering individuals and communities, fostering responsibility and ownership, and increasing the impact of your activities.





## Examples of norm-related issues in sport

**Training/Competition:** Does the setting facilitate the participation of someone that's not so competition-oriented? Can a person wearing a hijab participate?

> Make rules and activities more flexible and accommodating to different needs

**The locker room/meeting place:** Are girls expected to be feminine and boys to be aggressive? What kind of behaviour is accepted/encouraged?

> Observe the dominance of individuals and dynamics in groups, and reinforce teamwork

**Sport organisations board/committee:** Who are the people leading your organisation, and what kinds of norms and values do they manifest? Outdated norms can be dominant, and they are hard to change. The people following the norm best usually have the highest power. It's important to be aware of the history of sport organisations and not take status quo ( e.g. male governed, traditional gender stereotypes, war-related values) for granted)

> Sensitise board members through qualification workshops or reflective exercises.

## Key takeaways

- Reflect the structures in your club and be honest with yourself about potential barriers and biases you may have. Reflect norms and identify your own privileges – one tool to find this out is the “Teflon Test “(p.63 of the ASPIRE Training Module).
- Identify support and resistance within your organisation about potential changes.
- Identify gaps in knowledge. Reach out to universities and science institutions for data and evidence. If you have the resources or possibilities, actively conduct research.
- Define your target group and think about how you may address them. Useful tools for this are provided in the ASPIRE Training Module.
- Don't assume – consider people as individuals. Re-evaluate your training times and holiday schedules, consider adding new sports, increase flexibility and remove thresholds.
- Create an action plan.
- Be visible where your target group is located, e.g. actively visit asylum housings. Be active on social media and websites/groups.
- Ensure diverse competence in the management team, and involve a diversity of people in decision-making processes. Co-create the rules with your target group.
- Seek cooperation: build a relationship with parents. By including them in processes, their knowledge and trust in the club, coaches, etc. likely increases. Studies suggest that sport is effective assistance to learning a new language.
- Think of partnerships with other organisations who have earned credibility within the target groups such as Red Cross, Save the Children etc.

Further reading: **Chapter 4 of the ASPIRE Training Module**

# COLLABORATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

**on sharing tools, experiences and creating opportunities to exchange and on sustainable support to sport organisation to include migrants and refugees into their activities**

In order to create a sustainable impact, it's vital to take active ownership and leadership: connect with other stakeholders, cooperate and share best practices with them, raise awareness, inform and educate within your own ranks and the wider population, involve and empower the concerned populations, such as refugee communities, and advocate for support, funding and recognition of the work that has already been done. Finally, be analytical about your own work and ready to change course, if your activities are not yielding the wanted results. The ASPIRE final conference, organised on 14 June 2019 in Frankfurt was a great opportunity for people engaged in sport that fosters tolerance and inclusion to network, learn and share experiences.

## From ASPIRE to SPIRIT

Building on the lessons learned during the ASPIRE project, ENGSO is leading another project in 2020–2022, funded from the Erasmus+ Programme. SPIRIT (Sport & Psycho-social Initiative for Inclusive Training) aims at making sports clubs more accessible by developing a framework for humane, inclusive and empowering coaching that nurtures good mental health. Basing on the collection and analysis of evidence-based research and best practice, a set of recommendations will be developed to push for change top-down, targeting stakeholders responsible for coach education at the highest level. In order to transform sport at the grassroots level directly, a handbook for inclusive coaching will be developed. For maximum impact, an online learning tool will provide innovative and easy-access training for coaches. Thirteen national and international events will be organised in the course of the SPIRIT project.



## Key takeaways

### Cooperate, network and share

- Team up with stakeholders, public, private and not-for-profit, also outside of sport! Who could e.g. help you reach refugee communities or get additional funds? Who could need your help?
- Cooperation between different sectors is key to create synergies between expertises, networks and approaches to problems – for example social, youth, development sectors and sport.
- Create opportunities for stakeholders at different levels to share best practices (e.g. study groups)
- Create synergies: sports federations can provide funds and local organisations "on the ground" expertise.
- Enforce capacity building between humanitarian and sport organisations to create synergies (e.g. Sport for Protection Toolkit)
- By enlarging the network around your organisation, you are also facilitating wider networks for your sports participants.
- Example: Language training can be combined with sports activities, e.g. through partnerships between local sport clubs and language course providers, reducing barriers to language training and making sport more attractive.

### Communicate, educate and sensitise

- Take leadership in creating a more inclusive society
- Train your own staff and volunteers to be aware of prevailing norms and how they impact their thinking and behaviour, as well as your organisations' structures, processes and activities. Engage and support coaches and other leaders as role models that promote inclusive sport!
- Ensure appropriate and adequate training for trainers working with refugees
- Increase the knowledge and the evidence base about sport offerings that promote inclusion
- Collaborate with journalists and media to combat fake news with real information
- Promote Social media visibility and successful inclusion projects. Share inspiring success stories, keeping in mind that most people want to be seen as their own person – not a representative of a minority or group they belong to.
- Anchor public awareness campaigns on existing frameworks, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

### Involve and empower

- If you want to get refugees active, ask them, what they would like and need! Involving your target group from day 1 not only helps in creating attractive activities, but also foster ownership and deepen the engagement.
- Convince the community of the benefit of sport to complement other non-formal activities.
- Engage families, leading figures and young people in different, active roles.
- Take deliberate steps to recruit people that are different from you! Find and create opportunities to engage refugees as staff and volunteers, at different levels and intensities, close to their homes.
- Example: create a training programme for young refugees to become coaches, referees, facilitators or officers.
- Example: to reach young girls and women, focus on a safe space, work with families and community leaders, and local governments

### Advocate

- Promote funding opportunities and other public support that match the needs of organisations working with sport and refugees.



- Know your context and target group, and adjust your arguments. What are the benefits of increased inclusion and physical activity for e.g. local authorities, companies or sports club leaders? For example, multi-ethnic sport clubs can provide a sense of belonging to the community. The private sector benefits from investing in sport as their employees as employees are likely more productive and satisfied. Healthy and active newcomers can bring a much needed economic and cultural boost to your region or neighbourhood!

### **Reflect and evaluate**

- Throughout, evaluate and reflect your process. What works and what does not?
- Support sports organisations and coaches to avoid overburdening. Ask your staff, what tools and support they need.
- Ensure that your offerings are attractive and of high quality. Ask your participants, if they are satisfied?



# CONCLUSIONS

## & closing remarks

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Sport is an important part of society, and part of our identities. Although sport has value in itself, one must not underestimate the social and societal value of sport. Sport can be a key factor in promoting health, take control of one's own life, build social capital and support networks, skills and competences, learn team work, leadership skills, creativity, and receiving and giving feedback. Sport can be used as a tool to fight inequality, discrimination and oppression. It brings people together in spite of their differences and builds bridges. It can grant access to basic information for citizens.

Sport clubs are often unaware of these possibilities, and even more so of the potential benefits they could reap for the clubs themselves. Diversity develops and enriches sports clubs, and provides new target groups – as participants and volunteers alike! Clubs working at a local level reach out to refugees, collaborate with organisations from other sectors and encourage local authorities to provide support.

During its lifetime, the ASPIRE project served as a European network for organisations interested in working with sport and refugees. ASPIRE strengthened the evidence base of and provided training and educational material with practical examples for people that want to work with sport and refugees. The project was a good start in capacity building and the exchange of international experience and exchange between sports and other non-governmental organisations from across the continent.

In this report, we are proposing solutions that help unleash the full potential of sport for fostering social inclusion – in particular, how clubs, federations and other sports organisations can open their doors to refugees.

### Key takeaways

#### For decision-makers

- See the opportunities – not only threats! The inclusion of refugees in society is a challenge that can be tackled and turned into an asset. Let's work together!
- Provide support – e.g. political and financial – at all levels for sport as a tool for social inclusion.
- Provide support for vulnerable groups to engage in sport – vouchers for participation, free public transport, etc.
- Facilitate the cross-sectoral approach between e.g. the sports, youth, social, health and refugee organisations. Work across silos in your own organisation and encourage partnerships between NGOs, companies, etc.
- Create sports programmes that are led by refugees themselves.
- Facilitate the creation of networks for collaboration and sharing best practices at local, regional, national and European levels.

#### For sports leaders

- Coaches are the key. Provide training and support for coaches, instructors, facilitators and

educators working with sport and refugees.

- Create opportunities for refugees to be active participants, but also as volunteers, coaches and leaders.
- Reach out to networks outside of your traditional scope – create alliances with e.g. youth, social and educational organisations.
- Speak up and raise awareness on the importance of creating an inclusive society and sport's potential in fostering inclusion

### **For clubs and coaches**

- Determine your target group (e.g. young refugee men, school girls, or stay-at-home mothers) and design and create your activities for them, with them.
- Ensure you are basing your activities on evidence and take into account the psychosocial aspects of working with refugees – use e.g. the ASPIRE Training Module as a tool.
- Provide a fun, safe and supportive environment, facilitate easy (physical) access, and remove costs when you can. Include playful activities and highlight positive outcomes even if they are only small gains.
- Encourage meaningful relationships amongst participants and with facilitators.
- Plan for long-term sustainability and continuity of programs. Create a routine, but also keep activities fresh and exciting so participants have something to look forward to.

