

## Integration through sport for newly arrived migrants

Since 2010, there has been an exponential increase in the number of migrants entering Europe via the Mediterranean and the Balkans from Africa, the Middle East and southern Asia (mostly Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis, Eritreans and Pakistanis). However, since spring 2015, Europe has been having to cope with a crisis of unprecedented scope.

In most cases, economic conditions have forced these migrants to leave their countries and their families. Others, however, are fleeing war, ethnic or religious conflict, violence or infringements of their basic human rights. In such cases, they are entitled to refugee status under the UNHCR Convention of 1951. Nonetheless, it is often the same countries in which economic problems and human rights infringements are found together. In this context, the question is how to cater for the diverse range of situations, deal with these newly arrived migrants in a dignified manner and facilitate their integration.

In 2015 Europe faced one of the largest migratory movements since the Second World War and yet it failed to adopt a joint policy of mutual aid and reception. Despite strong misgivings, a number of countries did, however, set up institutional reception facilities. Alongside this, steps were taken by civil society to help new migrants to integrate in fields as diverse as education, employment, active participation and social inclusion. Sports associations and NGOs proposing sports activities instigated a whole range of activities open to migrants. This is not something new, as it was the case throughout the 20th century that many foreign nationals were able to integrate into their host community through associations including sports clubs. However, until recently, most migrants came from southern Europe (Italy, Portugal, Spain) and from the former empires and colonies (particularly Africa). They were mainly integrated into their host country through their work (Europe was in the middle of a process of reconstruction) but also through school (for their children) and through activities outside working hours such as sport. Today, circumstances have changed but where it comes to intercultural dialogue and integration, sport is still an indispensable tool.

Integration through sport still enables migrants to gain access to human communities, to get to know them better and to share a number of their values. This mutual adoption/adaptation is a two-way process between migrants and the residents of the host country. Could we not aim therefore to identify practices which have already been tested out in various contexts and schemes for integration through sport which could be applied in all European countries? The Council of Europe platform proposes to catalogue the full range of practices implemented throughout Europe, and to promote and highlight them.

William Gasparini, Professor at the University of Strasbourg