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ENLARGED PARTIAL AGREEMENT ON SPORT (EPAS)

Diversity Conference

Inclusion of child migrants and refugees in and through sport

29 November 2023 - morning

Schaan, Liechtenstein, and online

Preceded by: 28 November workshops - afternoon

Concept note

Co-organised by EPAS and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Education and Sport of the Principality of Liechtenstein within the framework of the Liechtenstein Presidency of the Committee of Ministers

Introduction

The number of child migrants and refugees worldwide has been increasing drastically in recent years. Sport has been recognised as a powerful tool to promote social inclusion, physical and mental health, and youth development. Therefore, ensuring that child migrants and refugees have access to sports activities is crucial for their well-being and integration into their new communities. While this is an important objective, they nevertheless often face multiple barriers to accessing sports activities.

Addressing the barriers to sport

Child migrants and refugees face numerous challenges, including language barriers, limited access to education and healthcare, social isolation, and discrimination. In addition, newly arrived migrants can experience difficulties in integrating into the host community and are at risk of being marginalised.

Many child migrants and refugees come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and their families may struggle to meet their basic needs, including the cost of sports equipment, fees and transportation to sports facilities.

Child migrants and refugees may not be aware of the available sports programmes or how to access them. This lack of information can prevent them from participating in sports activities.

Child migrants and refugees may also face discrimination and social exclusion, which can affect their confidence and willingness to engage in sports. They may experience cultural or language barriers within sports organisations or encounter prejudice from their peers.

Recognising these challenges, various international institutions, national governments and non-governmental organisations have taken initiatives to promote the inclusion of child migrants and refugees in sporting activities. These initiatives involve addressing the barriers and providing opportunities for participation, such as offering financial support, creating inclusive sports programmes, providing language support, organising awareness campaigns, and engaging in advocacy efforts. The aim is to create inclusive and welcoming environments where child refugees and migrants can access the benefits of sport and experience positive integration into their new communities.

Objectives of the conference

The 2023 Diversity Conference, organised within the framework of the Liechtenstein Presidency of the Committee of Ministers in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Education and Sport of Liechtenstein with the support of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migrants and Refugees, seeks to draw attention to the challenges, and the work being done throughout Europe on how sport can be used as a tool for the inclusion of child migrants and refugees.

The Diversity Conference will aim to showcase best practices and initiatives undertaken by policy makers, public authorities, sports organisations, migration and inclusion specialists,

non-governmental organisations and athletes themselves; outline the various challenges in implementing these practices; and work towards some key initiatives.

One of the conference aims will be to lay the foundations for the preparation of a handbook to be shared with all stakeholders to better address the inclusion of child migrants and refugees through sport.

Speakers and target audience

The conference will bring together stakeholders from various sectors including:

- Council of Europe and public authorities;
- representatives from the organised sport movement including the Olympic Refugee Foundation, Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), and other CC member organisations;
- UNICEF, UNHCR and other NGOs;
- Athletes, referees, and sports journalists; stakeholders who want to learn more about how to use sport as a tool to include child migrants and refugees within their host communities.

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to the promotion of sport as a tool for inclusion. Most recently, in 2022, the inclusion of child migrants and refugees in and through sport was the focus of a side event which took place following the 17th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport held in Antalya, Türkiye.

In the Conference Resolutions Ministers responsible for sport, invited all 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 safeguarding child protection and fostering social inclusion of the most disadvantaged people.

They also called on the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) to: “use sport as a tool for the social integration of disadvantaged groups such as migrants, refugees ...”.

This side-event was organised in the framework of the Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the context of migration and Asylum in Europe (2021-2025), which foresees activities contributing to the inclusion of refugees and migrants in and through sports. Coordinated by the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, the Action Plan include activities related to the protection of the rights of migrant, refugee women and girls, the safeguarding and inclusion of children, the provision of support to young refugees in the transition to adulthood, the protection of children and young athletes from the dangers associated with migration and the development of migrants’ linguistic competence.

Central to EPAS' vision is the European Sports Charter revised in 2021 which calls upon States to design their sport policies according to the revised Charter and stakeholders to take into consideration the principles enshrined therein. Specifically, Article 6.2(d) of the Charter calls for all stakeholders to “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”.

At its 2023 summer session on 21 June, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a report prepared by Nigar Arpadarai (Azerbaijan, EC/DA) on the [social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons through sport](#). The Assembly called on member States to adopt legislation prohibiting discrimination in sport and provide equal opportunities for the “most vulnerable people, including migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, to have proper access to sporting facilities and activities” considering factors like finances, age, gender, and ability.¹

In addition, the Council of Europe European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) issued a General Policy Recommendation on combating racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport (GPR No. 12). This Recommendation aims to help member States of the Council of Europe combat racism and racial discrimination in all types of sport, including professional and amateur sports, individual and team sports, as well as all activities related to sport in and outside sports grounds².

European Union (EU)

In publishing the EU White Paper on Sport and then later developing the EU Work Plan for Sport, the EU has demonstrated a commitment to the role of sport as a form of “social inclusion, integration and equal opportunities.”³

The European Union Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024) outlines the EU priorities and actions in the field of sport. It focuses on four main areas: good governance, social inclusion and equal opportunities, economic potential, integrity. While not specifically a white paper, the EU Work Plan for Sport provides a framework for EU member states sport organisations and stakeholders to work together on common objectives and initiatives related to sport. It helps guide EU policies, funding programmes and cooperation in the field of sport.

UNHCR

In its first Sport Strategy “More than a Game 2022-2026”, the UNHCR outlines five interlinked areas of work:

¹ <https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9154/promoting-social-inclusion-through-sport-pace-highlights-the-role-of-sport-in-empowering-vulnerable-groups>

² ECRI General Policy Recommendation No 12 on combatting racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport, adopted on 19 December 2008 k

³ EU White Paper on Sport, 11 July 2007

- Bringing people together and strengthening communities through sport- and play-based programming;
- Ensuring that refugees with elite sporting talent can fulfil their potential by participating in training opportunities and competition at the highest level;
- Using high-profile and other sporting events to raise awareness of displacement issues;
- Raise awareness of refugee issues and advocate for the support, protection and inclusion of people who have been forced to flee;
- Strengthening partnerships with the for-profit sports sector to raise funds to meet ever-growing humanitarian needs and fund sports projects for displaced and stateless people.⁴

The UNHCR Global Refugee Forum promotes dialogue and knowledge sharing among actors involved in spreading the values enshrined in the Global Compact on Refugees. The Compact has since 2018 progressively become an essential document for the social inclusion of refugees. It constitutes a unique opportunity to transform the way the world responds to refugee situations, benefiting both refugees and the communities that host them.⁵

IOC

The IOC has developed numerous initiatives to support the sport activities of refugees, among them the Refugee Olympic Team, which officially debuted in Rio 2016, and the Olympic Refugee Foundation, created in partnership with UNHCR in 2017, which aims to grant access to sports activities and sports facilities for all refugees.

UEFA

In partnership with UNHCR, UEFA launched the UNITY EURO Cup to use the power of football to build a better future for migrants and refugees. In addition, UEFA has developed the Football and Refugee Grant Scheme which provides funding to national associations to support their work with refugees.

⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-sport-strategy-more-game>

⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/global-compact-refugees>