

# Sport as a playground for integration

Information for sport clubs on collaboration with asylum seekers' centres



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#### Social function of sport clubs

Sports clubs are a meeting place for people with very different backgrounds. Sport has a low threshold and uses a universal language, it connects people. Sport therefore has a social function. By collaborating with reception centres, sports providers in the vicinity of a asylum seekers' centre can contribute to the smooth integration of asylum seekers and refugees in society. This is in line with the desire of many sports organisations to make a social contribution.

#### Win-win-win

Both sports clubs and refugees benefit from collaboration between sports clubs and a reception centre.

On the one hand this target group enriches the clubs' culture, allows it to retain teams for competition thanks to the influx of new members, and even strengthens these teams with talented athletes. It also attracts new volunteers, and the refugees themselves can do volunteer work. In short, the new members bring new life to the sports club.

On the other hand sport and physical activities have a positive effect on the newcomers. Such activities are known to improve physical and mental health (healthy lifestyle). They offer structure and therefore direction to a person's lifestyle and daily activities. By engaging in sport and exercise and/or in volunteer work at sports associations, refugees also develop social contacts outside the reception centre and acquire skills that are useful to them in society. Therefore collaboration between asylum seekers' centres and sports clubs also offers social benefits!

#### 1. Initiate collaboration

Collaboration is a human process! For collaboration between the sports association and the reception centre it is important that both organisations put forward a motivated and enthusiastic employee. At COA (Dutch Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers), sports and physical activities are part of the activation and integration policy. Per location a set budget and time is assigned for sports and physical activities. Some locations have a designated sports officer, while at other locations the sports policy is implemented by activation officers, housing officers and/or volunteers. For a sports club, it is important to come into contact with the right employee at the reception centre. In practice, this is not always easy. If it is not immediately clear who is responsible for sport and physical activities at the centre, please contact the location manager responsible for the centre's sport activities.

#### 2. A good match

Before organising an activity, try to gauge the current situation. Find out about the centre's sports policy, available hours, and the support base at the reception centre. What activities are organised already, and for which target groups? What works and what doesn't?



Try to find out whether the needs of the asylum seekers have been assessed, and what the results of this assessment were. By speaking with members of the target group, listening to them and really making contact, you will obtain a better idea of their backgrounds and needs. Dutch experience has shown that the wishes of the refugees tend to centre on football, fitness, volleyball, basketball and swimming. Women often mention dance activities and Zumba. Biking and lessons are also frequently organised and are very useful as a means of transport to other sports activities.

But this clearly differs per location and target group. Sports such as chess, boxing and horse riding are also sometimes offered. Together with your key person at the centre, try to find out how your sports club can be of added value and tie this in with what is already happening.

### **3. Variations in sports on offer**

With the collaboration of the sports club and its trainers, low threshold activities can be organised at the centre. These can include cycling, walking and hiking groups and activities for women/girls and children. Introductory (one-off or temporary) activities can also be organised at the centre, in order to continue these activities at the club.

Asylum seekers can take part individually in regular training groups at the sports club and even in competitive matches. Residents can also take part in matches, tournaments and other sports events. Participation can involve a refugees team, but also a mixed team, in which inhabitants from the reception centre mix with members of the club and/or residents from the neighborhood.

### **4. Invest in recruiting participants**

Be prepared for an irregular attendance on the part of inhabitants. Experience has shown that there may be all sorts of reasons for an irregular attendance in this target group, such as poor information, departure from the centre, not feeling well, more important problems demanding their attention, bad weather conditions, distance, transport, etc. This means that activities have to be consistently promoted at the reception centres. What works best is to repeatedly address people on a personal level. Also just before the start of an activity. Make clear agreements on this with the sports officers at the reception centre. They stimulate inhabitants to participate in sports activities, or ask active inhabitants to do so. The trainer of the sport club can use WhatsApp to communicate with the inhabitants. Any other promotional activities will only work in conjunction with the above.





## 5. Tips for organising sports activities

- **Membership**  
Investigate options for creating flexible memberships for asylum seekers and make agreements to this end with the sports officer at the reception centre
- **Dutch sports culture**  
Inform all newcomers about the culture (formal and informal rules and habits) and expectations of your sports organisation. Most refugees are not used to participating in a sport club.
- **Membership fees**  
Discuss flexible payment plans with the sports club, such as paying per session, per month or per year, but also membership in exchange for volunteering at the club. Make the reception centre responsible for membership payments by their residents and take advantage of discount options.
- **Transport**  
Preference goes to activities within walking or cycling distance. Organise transport with volunteers working at the centre or volunteers from the sports club, religious community or municipality. Public transport is usually not a good alternative because it tends to be too expensive.
- **Planning**  
Take into account religious and cultural holidays and practices. It's better to start activities in the spring or summer. Cold and rain may form an additional threshold.
- **Clothing**  
Point out to the inhabitants that they can purchase cheap sports clothing and equipment from a charity shop. Organise collection campaigns at the sports association.

## 6. Volunteer work

Many sports clubs face a shortage of volunteers. At the same time, asylum seekers and refugees at the reception centres spend a lot of time just waiting. Two problems can be solved at once and in which the municipality can play an important role. Please read

the brochure entitled "Handbook on Volunteering of Migrants in Sport Clubs and Organisations" of the Sport Inclusion Network with tips and focus points for a successful collaboration with asylum seekers at the sport club.

## 7. Successful collaboration between sports organisations and reception centres

Five tips for successful collaboration with reception centres:

- ➔ Work on creating a support base for collaboration with the reception centre at the sports organisation. Make use of positive experiences and good practice.
- ➔ Be aware that social developments (such as the atmosphere in the community and the inflow and through flow of refugees) may impact the support base for sports activities within the reception centre and the inhabitants' willingness and ability to take part in sports activities.
- ➔ Maintain good personal contacts with the contact person at the reception centre (short lines of communication), and make agreements in writing regarding distribution of tasks.
- ➔ Inform the target group of sports activities in your country and ask the reception centre to provide you with information about the target group and how best to approach it.
- ➔ Make sure that the sports association and reception centre have a common goal and that both endorse the added value of collaborating. If necessary organise mutual support for the staff involved.

This series also includes the following:

- Information for municipalities and community sports coaches on collaboration between Asylum seekers' centres (COA) and sports clubs
- Information for Asylum seekers' centres on collaboration with sports clubs



*"We also learn from them: about other cultures and their incredible hospitality. They know what goes on in their countries of origin and what they have gone through. They are incredibly grateful to our village. And this leads to beautiful friendships."*

Quote by sports club employee

*"It sounds so simple 'training with the refugees', but it isn't. Most of the inhabitants feel uncomfortable, and that's putting it mildly. What they need most is someone to listen to their stories. To give them time and attention. This helps them process all the suffering they have had to endure. I was an asylum seeker myself and I know what it feels like. And this requires us to be like chameleons, able to adjust easily. Because there are so many different types and cultures. We have a lot of experience, me as a refugee and both of us as district sports coaches here in the area. This is why our supervisor has chosen us to work here."*

Quote by municipal district sports coach

**Tip!**

At [www.allesoversport.nl](http://www.allesoversport.nl) all knowledge about sport and movement comes together.

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