



Sport as a playground for integration

Information for Asylum seekers' centres
on collaboration with sports clubs



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1. Positive effects of sport and physical activities

Sports and physical activities contribute to meaningful daytime activities for occupants of reception centres. They offer great opportunities to create a number of positive effects for this target group, such as improving their physical and mental health (healthy lifestyle), breaking through isolation, promoting participation and social contacts, gaining skills and experience, remedying low self-esteem and negative image problems, and providing structure and direction to lifestyle and daytime activities. Engaging in sports and physical activities makes people more energetic and more motivated to undertake other activities. Sport and physical activities can also improve the atmosphere at the reception centre.

"Exercising has helped me deal with my problems and traumas. I am very grateful for that."

Quote by asylum seeker

2. Create capacity for policy and implementation

It is crucial to pay attention to sports and physical exercise in and around a COA centre. Sport and physical activities could be integrated into activation, health and/or integration policy. Special attention and efforts are required to motivate occupants to take part in sports activities. This requires a vision and policy focused on sports and physical activities, as well as a COA employee responsible for implementing this policy. Ideally this employee is a dedicated sports officer, or otherwise a housing officer or activation officer with sports included in their work package.

3. Make use of facilities in and around the centre

Many reception centres have playgrounds, small squares and grassy areas that can be used for low-threshold sports activities. Centres often also have fitness areas (sometimes quite small) and a few centres, have sports halls (usually also rather small). To create a suitable range of activities, you can also make use of local authority managed sports facilities or the facilities of local sports clubs, such as swimming pools, football fields and tennis courts. Find out what is possible by contacting the local authority sports officer or your community sports coach.



4. Organise activities with local sports clubs

To create a sustainable and varied range of activities we advise you to collaborate with sports clubs. Use the local network. This has the added advantage of meeting with new people from the neighbourhood or the village and therefore teaching them useful skills for navigating their way through Dutch society.

With the collaboration of the sports association and its trainers, low-threshold activities can take place at the reception centre. These may 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. They can also take part in matches, tournaments and sports events. Participation may involve a team of asylum seekers, but also a mixed team, in which asylum seekers mix with members of the club and/or neighbourhood residents.

5. Start by assessing needs

Before creating a range of activities you should perform needs assessment among the residents of the reception centre. A few additional questions during the intake interview will help you gain insight into their experience and wishes in relation to sports. Other ways of assessing the inhabitants' needs include

- Asking individual inhabitants
- Group-based assessments, for example during social activities for women
- Focus group interviews
- A weekly sports consultation
- Creating a sports council of asylum seekers

Dutch experience has shown that the wishes of the inhabitants 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 sports activities. It goes without saying that other sports activities are also possible, depending on the wishes of the target groups and what is available in the vicinity.



6. Invest in recruiting participants

In practice it turns out that there may be all sorts of reasons for irregular attendance of people from this target group, such as poor information, departure from the centre, not feeling well, more urgent matters demanding their attention, bad weather conditions, distance and transport to the sports club, 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. The sports officers at the centre can stimulate inhabitants themselves, or ask active inhabitants to do so. Using WhatsApp to communicate with participants also works. Any other promotional activities will work only in conjunction with the above.

7. Tips for organising sports activities

– Membership

Make clear agreements with the sports club regarding memberships (possibly flexible) for asylum seekers

– Dutch sports culture

Inform the target group of the culture (written and unwritten rules and habits) of sports clubs

– Membership fees

Discuss flexible payment plans with the association, such as paying per session, per month or per year, but also membership in exchange for volunteering at the club. Take the responsibility for membership payments by asylum seekers to the associations, and take advantage of discount options

– Transport

Preference goes to activities within walking or cycling distance. Organise transport with volunteers working at the centre, the sports association, the religious community or the municipality. Public transport is usually 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.

8. Successful collaboration between the reception centre and sports associations

Five tips for successful collaboration with sports associations.

- ➔ Create a sustainable sports policy at the reception centre, with enough implementation capacity and a fixed contact person for sports associations.
- ➔ Be aware that social developments (such as the atmosphere in the community and the inflow and through flow of refugees) may impact willingness on the part of sports associations
- ➔ Maintain good personal contacts with the contact person at the sports association (short lines of communication), make clear agreements in writing regarding distribution of tasks, and regularly visit the club and introduce new participants
- ➔ Provide the target group with information about sports in the Netherlands and provide the sports associations with information about the target group (expectation management)
- ➔ Make sure that the reception centre and the sports association have a common goal and that both see 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 sport clubs on collaboration with asylum seekers' centres



"Tomorrow or the day after he leaves for Nijmegen, to sign up at a kickboxing school. Clearly boxing here (at the reception centre) has helped him to take this step in Nijmegen more easily."

Quote by kickboxing trainer

"You can see the expression in their faces when they come back from sports activities, and then when you hear them..., they radiate energy! When they engage in sports activities, they aren't worrying about their asylum procedure, or the family they left behind in their country of origin, and that's so nice to see, it gives me energy too."

Quote by sports employee at a reception centre

Tip!

At www.allesoversport.nl all knowledge about sport and movement comes together.

© Kenniscentrum Sport: Project carried out in collaboration with NOC*NSF (main organisation in the Netherlands for organised sport) and Dutch Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), July 2017

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