

“Equal access for migrant volunteers to sports clubs in Europe” (Summary)

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Abstract: The baseline study “Equal access for migrant volunteers to sports clubs in Europe” focuses on sport and shows examples of sport clubs and initiatives across Europe working in the field of sport and inclusion. For this study, pan-European surveys and national surveys on sport and volunteering were analyzed, and ten interviews with experts from seven countries as well as three case studies of sport clubs in Italy, Hungary and Germany were conducted. The study investigates barriers preventing equal access to sport clubs for those who are at risk of social exclusion. Successful strategies and good practice examples from different European countries are described and research-based recommendations for sport clubs are given. The study was conducted by Camino within the framework of the ESPIN network (www.sportinclusion.net).

Results: Volunteering is one of the cornerstones of European grassroots sports, even though significant differences in the extent of volunteering between European Countries persist. On the one hand, volunteering brings certain benefits and advantages for everyone, irrespective of their origin. These include the development of social and professional skills, personal growth, new contacts and friendships, access to certain resources and supportive networks as well as gains in terms of social recognition and appreciation. On the other hand, migrant groups and minorities, no matter how different from each other, generally have one thing in common: They share experiences of exclusion and discrimination. This means that they can benefit to a far larger extent from the social recognition and appreciation that volunteers receive for their commitment – provided that sports clubs manage to ensure the latter. Focusing on volunteering of migrants and minorities in sports may lead to a shift of perspective: migrants appear not only as target groups for sport offers, but as active members of a sports club.

Even though data from only a few European member states is currently available, we can assume that there are a number of barriers which restrict the equal access for migrants and minorities to the structures of organized grassroots sports both as players and as active volunteers. The study discusses legal and administrative barriers (such as quota regulations), social barriers due to a less privileged social status, language barriers, barriers due to differences between national sports cultures, gender-specific barriers (such as sexist attitudes, male dominated club structures and traditional gender roles), barriers due to club culture (such as the practice to fill volunteer positions from the ranks of club members), and barriers due to discrimination (such as biased attitudes and biased club structures).

Sports clubs and sports associations have developed different strategies to reduce these barriers and to recruit more migrant volunteers, such as pursuing intercultural openness in sports clubs, networking and cooperation at the local level with migrant associations, assistance from key migrant players and mentors, qualification and education of volunteers and intercultural sport days and events.

By analyzing the case studies from Hungary, Italy and Germany, recommendations for the inclusion of migrant volunteers are given. These are inter alia: promoting the club's intercultural openness in public relations activities, identifying the cultural particularities of all members, appointing volunteer officers and mentors for new volunteers, avoiding excessive demands on volunteers, clearly delimiting tasks and furthering the recognition of volunteer work, training migrants as coaches, and training supervisors and referees. Furthermore, special recommendations for the inclusion of refugees were developed, such as consulting the refugees and developing special offers based on their requirements, avoiding paternalistic attitudes and treating refugees as equal members, combining sports with educational opportunities and promoting inclusion both inside and outside the club in order to avoid rivalries between different social groups. The latter is especially important in the face of growing right-wing tendencies in European societies.