

# SPORTPSYCH WORKS

Volume 6: Sport and Social Justice Through a Socio-Cultural Lens Issue 3: Sport and Refugee Populations

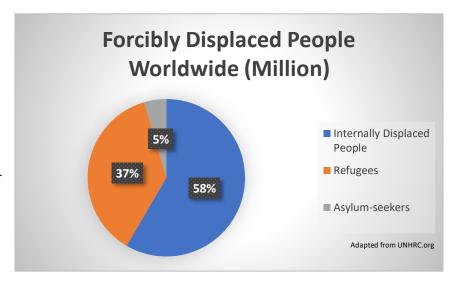
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#### **Refugees in Sport**

Sport practitioners are in a unique position to support refugees though involvement in sport. A **refugee** is someone who has been forced to flee their home because of persecution, violence, or war. Refugees have a well-founded fear of persecution due to a social identity or membership in a particular group. These identities can include race, religion, nationality, gender, or political party (UNHCR, 2018). Internally Displaced Persons are those who seek safety wherever they can find it and normally do not cross international borders. Reasons for why individuals become Internally Displaced

Persons include natural disasters, financial costs, laws and policies, or the psychological toll of leaving your home.

The persistent hardships faced by refugees and Internally Displaced Persons are challenging to overcome, but sport is one avenue through with these individuals can gain a sense of inclusion in unfamiliar contexts. Quality sport participation can lead to health-related and psychosocial benefits for athletes of diverse levels, sport types, and ages. Additionally, social inclusion with teammates, coaches, and the larger community is a potential benefit of sport involvement for the refugee population (Amara et al., 2005). However, a sense of



belonging one may gain from participating in sport is not inherent and has the means to enhance difference and potentially lead to exclusion (Spaaj, 2013). Therefore, it is important to consider the challenges accessing sport as well as the sport environment created for these athletes.

## Benefits of Sport

- Improve fitness
- Decreases risk of chronic diseases
- Builds self-esteem and social cohesion
- Opportunity for social interaction
- Breaks down cultural barriers and stereotypes
- •Site for trust building between communities
- A diversion strategy
- •Site for transitional support

# **Challenges Accessing Sport**

- Language, cultural, and religious barriers
- Reaching women and girls
- •Legal status
- Anti-migration sentiment
- •Lack of resources, transport, and equipment
- Uniform regulations
- Previous traumatic experiences
- Different experiences and expectations

"These refugee athletes will show the world that despite the unimaginable tragedies that they have faced, anyone can contribute to society through their talent, skills and strength of the human spirit." Thomas Bach IOC President

### **How can I Support Refugee Athletes?**

Build Awareness

Cultural Competence

Meet Them Where They Are

Implement Strategies to Overcome Barriers

Implement Sporting Days

- •Learn about policies and laws within your state or country that restrict or encourage refugee participation in sport.
- Have conversations with other people in the field who may have more experience.
- •Be willing to listen, develop, and learn other varying identities and views.
- •Be aware participation in sport does not result in immediate inclusion.
- Create positive and quality experiences for refugees based on their needs.
- Allow for opportunites to learn about and experience aspects of other cultures.
- •Build awareness of your own identities and views.
- •Do not assume you know what is in the best interest of the person
- •Listen to needs of people, and use that to develop programming that limits the challenges they face.
- Take feedback regularly to keep the best practices
- •Create focus groups to learn about barriers faced by refugees in your area.
- •Allow for modifications to uniforms for religious or cultural reasons.
- Provides opportunities for community members and refugees to connect through sport and physical activity.
- We Are One Team, a student run organization at Bowling Green State University implements sporting days to bring atheltes and the international community together.
- •Play sports that represent the diversity of the individuals present at the events.

## **Organizations Working to Help Refugees**









## Where can I learn more about Refugees in Sport?

Amara, M., Aquilina, D., Argent, E., Betzer-Tayar, M., Coalter, F., Green, M., & Taylor, J. (2005). The roles of sport and education in the social inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees: An evaluation of policy and practice in the UK. *Loborough: Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy, Loghborough University and Stirling University.* 

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Waardenburg, M., Visschers, M., Deelen, I., & van Liempt, I. (2018). Sport in liminal spaces: The meaning of sport activities for refugees living in a reception centre. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 1*(19).

 $We \ Are \ One \ Team \ (WA1T; n.d.). \ WA1T \ sporting \ days. \ Retrieved \ from \ \underline{https://www.bgsu.edu/bgsucares/WeAreOneTeam-BG/wa1t-projects/wa1t-sporting-days.html}$ 

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