



More than a game – Football including refugees

National Conference

Headquarters of the Deutscher Fußball Bund - Frankfurt

Thursday 9th February 2023

The “**More Than a Game**” conference is one of the four national conferences organised in the framework of the **Further Football Including Refugees in Europe (FIRE+)**, a project funded by the Erasmus + programme of the European Commission. The FIRE+ project aims to promote the use of football as a lever for social inclusion refugees and migrants’ populations in their host communities.

The conference in Frankfurt gathered local and national actors involved in the promotion of football as a tool for social inclusion, representatives of organisations from the civil society working along the target group as well as experts of the topic.

After a presentation of the DFB Stiftung Egidius-Braun activities and of the EU-funded project FIRE+, two speakers intervened to present their actions and their engagement in favour of the inclusion of refugees through sport and especially through football. Those interventions aimed to promote good practices towards other grassroots organisations and to testify of the success of the programmes to include refugees in the society thanks to football. Moreover, it allowed to identify the obstacles encountered by the actors involved and to think about the future, the improvement and the sustainability of such projects and programmes.

Those enriching presentations led to a series of exchanges and questions between the participants of the audience and resulted in a fruitful time of debate. Thus, the conference enabled each of the participants to get to know each other initiatives and ideas on the topic of inclusion of refugees and migrants’ population through football.

The following report summarises the exchange that have taken place and highlights ideas and solutions that can be put in place to overcome the barriers identified by German stakeholders.

Disclaimer: This report reflects only the authors' view. The European Education and Culture Executive Agency and the European Commission are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

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Programme

9: 10 – 9: 20: Welcome words

Steffen SIMON, *DFB Director Public & Fans and member of the Foundation's Board*

9: 20 – 9: 30: Introduction to the FIRE+ project

Laura SCHÜTTLER, *DFB-Stiftung Egidius Braun*

9: 30 – 10: 15: Best practice presentation on the topic: Integration of refugees into voluntary work

Ulf KRÖMER, *FC Motor Süd Neubrandenburg, participant of the DFB-Stiftung Egidius Braun Leadership Programme*

10: 15 – 10: 45: Impulse lecture on the topic: Women's and girls' inclusion through football– Nia KÜNZER

Nia KÜNZER, *former national player, world champion and vice-chairwomen of DFB-Stiftung Egidius Braun*

BREAK

11: 00 – 12: 30: Exchanges and debates

Introduction:

Settled in the press conference room of the DFB new headquarters in Frankfurt, the 'More Than a Game' Conference was hosted by Laura SCHÜTTLER, executive officer at the DFB – Stiftung Egidius Braun. This foundation is one of the eight partners of the FIRE+ project as an organisation focusing on the promotion of social inclusion and diversity through football. In this regard, the DFB – Stiftung Egidius Braun led several programs such as “1:0 für ein Willkommen”, “2:0 für ein Willkommen” (literally, “for a welcome”) and more recently a program addressed to Ukrainian refugees to promote the value of football as a lever for social inclusion.

After welcoming words from Steffen SIMON, DFB Director Public & Fans and member of the Egidius-Braun Foundation's Board, Laura introduced the project FIRE+ to the assembly to set the tone on the topic of the conference. Indeed, this was an opportunity to recall that the FIRE+ project had the ambition to mobilise the world of football to face the crisis of reception and inclusion of refugees and migrants' populations experienced by the European Union since 2015. The football club is an interesting social circle in which locals and newcomers can meet, get to know each other and share things. The FIRE+ project aims to support amateur football clubs, sports staff and all organisations that want to use football to participate in the social inclusion process of refugees and migrants' populations.

Part 1: Interventions of Ulf Krömer and Nia Künzer

Presentation of FC Motor Süd Neubrandenburg and its actions toward the inclusion of refugees and migrants through football

After a few words to introduce the activities of the Foundation and the FIRE+ project, the floor was given to Ulf KRÖMER, president of the FC Motor Süd Neubrandenburg. This football club from Northern Germany has an important role in promoting refugees' inclusion through football. In 2013 the club welcomed the first refugees among its teams.

As a coach, Ulf KRÖMER had several experiences with football clubs in Northern Germany but it is at the FC Motor than he had to train for the first-time youth from different nations, countries, and backgrounds. Although he mostly worked with children and teenagers, the current president of the FC Motor is confident that his work "*can be translated to working with adults*" according to his words. Something that had its importance regarding the role of the club in the process of inclusion of refugees and migrants' populations.

Indeed, one of the core elements to favour the integration of refugees among a football club lies in the ability to **build a group** and therefore to establish a **social space** where they will be able to meet other people and achieve things all together. In this regard, Ulf KRÖMER highlighted that, "*player should be interested in their fellow players*". There must be a feeling between the players so that they can cooperate and play together whatever their background is. Yet, the group does

not build itself up only on the pitch, sometimes it also involves outside processes. For instance, some refugees and migrants' parents do not have a car to drive their kids to the football games. Therefore, German parents might have to drive them when there is no public transport. Then, it becomes essential according to Ulf KRÖMER that **all parents understand what a team is, a group and that no one should be excluded** because he cannot attend the game. The football team might be about the kids, but **the parents also play a part in the integration and the inclusion of refugees**. To insist on this aspect, the club organises an “international barbecue” to gather children and parents at the same time within the club facilities.

Another challenge lies in the mother's attendance to the trainings. If the fathers come, it is not the case of the mothers. In this regard, Ulf KRÖMER explained that his club “*manage to find some tricks to make the mothers coming to the trainings*”. **The application of the child to play in the club indeed required to be signed by both parents, in the club facilities**. The trick's purpose was meant to encourage the mothers to come out of their “confined space” according to the FC Motor's president.

However, the FC Motor is not only active on the football field. The club also invested a lot **to bring advice and to support refugees in their seek of asylum, employment, or housing**. Football serves as the first contact between the refugees and the host communities. However, to help them to integrate in the country, there are more to be done. Unaware of the legal framework but desirous to support and help the refugees in their legislative procedure to obtain asylum, **members of the club educate themselves on the current legislation and tried to reach the foreigner registration office**. Moreover, the FC Motor looked out for lawyers who might provide them with advice and recommendations. For Ulf KRÖMER, the challenge was **to make sure that the refugees have a legal voice to represent their interests**. More than offering football trainings, **the club is standing and legally speaking for the refugees and migrants' families**. Nevertheless, it takes time and money to produce such efforts, two aspects that it is even harder to deal with when most of the workers of the clubs are volunteers. Indeed, **the lack of outside funds prevent the FC Motor to recruit paid staff**.

Another factor of integration described through the presentation was the **importance of speaking German**. Ulf KRÖMER noticed that “*the parents often did not speak German at first, nor*

learned it, they stayed at home watching their national TV channels, whereas the child went to schools". According to him, even though they don't have the money nor the time: "people who comes to the country should be able to learn German with German courses as soon as possible". However, this is not a service that a grassroots organisation can offer or provide in its small structure.

Furthermore, **the FC Motor Süd Neubrandenburg also tries to involve refugees and migrants in other part of the club's structure.** For instance, the FC Motor trains referees. On the past year, one woman passed the referee seminar who was part of the Ukraine women's team. Currently, 4 squads of the club are coached by coaches from 6 countries. The board of the club showcases a variety of nationalities. On the pitch, four teams are coached by coaches from six countries.

In 2022, the FC Motor Süd Neubrandenburg was conveyed to play in the first edition of the [UEFA Unity Cup](#), a competition gathering eight Europeans teams made up of refugees and national players for a mini tournament. As representative for Germany, FC Motor [won the tournament against Switzerland in the final](#). Yet, **the venue to this competition highlighted obstacles that still raise in front of the inclusion of refugees.** For instance, the FC Motor was told by UEFA that they had no idea on how 3 of their players would be able to cross border as some of them didn't have the required documents. **An administrative barrier that echoes to another kind of absurdity of the authorities regarding the integration of refugees and migrants' populations.**

Nia Künzer's impulse lecture: Refugee women and refugee girls in football

The floor was then given to Nia KÜNZER, winner of the 2003 Women Football World Cup with Germany and former player of Frankfurt women team. Currently, Nia KÜNZER is also the Vice-president of the DFB - Stiftung Egidius Braun's Board.

With a family working in the development aid sector has she was growing up, Nia KÜNZER explained that she was surrounded with this spirit of providing help and caring for disadvantaged people. More specially, through her scholar cursus she began to specialise on women and girls. Indeed, for her university thesis she worked on the topic of integration of girls with a migration background. The purpose of this thesis was to study the actions and strategies which could help

and support girls to integrate in their host communities. Since 2008, Nia KÜNZER had the chance to reflect on the solutions that the football world could bring to the issues which women and girls with a migration background encounters regarding integration. During her contribution, she specifically highlighted two main area of focus, trying to identify the challenge and to propose or illustrate a good practice which could solve it.

To begin with, the participation of women and girls into activities such as football represents probably the biggest challenge according to Nia KÜNZER. **The first difficulty lies in the accessibility to clubs or structures which can offer sport and physical activities for this group of women and girls with a migration background.** To face this limited access, one solution could be to bring them such activities onto places where they are and where they spend time, notably the schools. As said by the former player: *“sport on the one hand is a vehicle to reach our target group”*. It is essential to organise a strategy so that the latter at least can engage in sport and to discover it. Besides, Nia KÜNZER emphasised a relevant element on the idea that sport should also be considered as *“a safe space for girls and women”*. To increase their participation, it is important to make them aware of the benefits that sport for their integration in their host communities as well as for their own well-being. Among those benefits, it should be promoted that **competences can be taught through sport**. This learning perspective offers a valuable aspect to the participation in sports, something that could be a first step to convince parents and children to engage in sport and especially football. At the end, the question of the participation matters because Nia KÜNZER strongly believes that sport stands as an important tool for the empowerment of girls and women with a migration background.

In this regard, the second main area of focus emphasized referred to **strengthening the personalities of children, coaches, women, and girls**. More than just a step to favour integration, football, and sport in general, can **reinforce individuals** like refugees and migrants who might be confronted to abusive situations. As promoted by Nia KÜNZER, the ‘Kicking girls’ project, developed in Germany, aimed at the social integration of disadvantaged girls through football. One of the goals was to **teach them competences through sport** and at the same time to open opportunities so that the girls involved would have to assume responsibilities themselves by working as a coach or by taking care of younger children for instance. Giving responsibility to those women and girls through football is also a way to make them aware of what they are capable

of and that they are allowed to be ambitious about their future. For the youth it is even more crucial in the sense that, kids and teenagers are building up their own personalities but sometimes are lost. Youth sport can therefore act as *“a tool to create the right framework to allow those children to flourish”* according to Nia KÜNZER.

Finally, while encouraging participation and reaching out to girls and women, the importance of role models and more particularly **“good role models”** is essential. Having people to whom you can identify yourself is a main feature for motivation and hope. However, it was noticed that *“a repertory of model as diverse as possible”* should be established to consider the diversity of backgrounds.

Part 2: Open discussions between the participants

To start with the open discussion, Des TOMLISON from the FAI¹ raised a question about the capacity of sport to “win out”. Indeed, he expressed concerns regarding the use of sport in an abusive manner such as to serve a certain ideology. It implies to know whether the social aspect of sport might prevail in front of those interests. Nia KÜNZER reminded that negative issues can never really be eliminated.

Nia KÜNZER was asked about her strategy to overcome obstacles she might encounter in her daily work while trying to promote the social aspect of sport, notably toward the inclusion of refugees and migrants into football clubs. According to her, to face those barriers one will need to have a little level of frustration as the room to manoeuvre is limited. As a rebound, the Britta Coy, executive director of the [JUNO Association](#), which has been working with women refugees since 2015, was wondering about the very little financial funds dedicated to this type of work as well as the existence of structures. She reminded that women encounter more difficulties in their integration than men and boys. **The lack of solutions and innovative ideas was highlighted.** However, it was noticed that one of **the main challenges is to get in touch with those women and girls and then to get them on board.** One of the participants explained that to deal with it, they organise **“women meeting”** in which they will sit around a coffee and chat. The idea was to try to

¹ Football Association Ireland.

get them on board, to enable their attention with something they would enjoy. As mentioned earlier by Nia KÜNZER in her contribution, **participation of women and girls, specifically the ones with a migration background must be the first issue to address.**

Another challenge which came back multiple times during the exchanges was about the scale of the discussion. Indeed, it appears that the local or national level is not relevant enough to make a difference and to guarantee the impact of the actions as well as its sustainability. To elevate it at **the European level was pointed to expand the good practices learned at a national level** such as the experience of the FC Motor Süd Neubrandenburg. Sophie Lopez, from the European Think tank Sport and Citizenship highlighted that **this European dimension was one of the main interests of the Erasmus + project FIRE+.** **Spreading the network and the influence of the topic will result in a gain of strength and consideration from policy makers. It would also give more credits to grassroots organisations** and help for the sustainability of projects and programmes.

Ulf KRÖMER from the FC Motor explained the need to **convey other values and to try to get educational authorities on board. The educational aspect must be present in what the club can offer.** Besides, the club must become active on the social level of the integration and inclusion of the refugees and migrants in the host community, **it must not only limit his action to football.** In this regard, it is first the managers who should become active and then to seek has many opportunities as possible.

The participants also made remarks about the challenge to measure the social impact of such programmes. For instance, how do you measure self-confidence through sport? How can we prove with hard facts and figures that we've done good for society as a whole? Those are issues that must be addressed, notably to convince people from the sport sector that it makes sense to integrate newcomers.

Conclusions:

To sum up, the cultural sensitivity of the target group must be taken into consideration to have an impact on them. The focus must not be put only on the individuals which come to the football training. Secondly, the language dimension is important. Learning the local language is key in the social inclusions of refugees. **Finally,** being able to reach out to the refugees and migrants'

populations and to women and girls is a central element. The football, grassroots or professional should have the tools to identify and then to target the needs of the refugees and migrants' populations.

Solutions and ideas to overcome the difficulties were mentioned and should be kept in mind. As advocated since the beginning of the FIRE+ project, there is a real need to include a “more than football” component in grassroots football clubs.

Although playing football and doing sport is important, the football clubs must have other social missions. **Football practiced in grassroots football clubs must convey values.**

The testimonies given proved that a socially invested club generated positive impacts on both local and refugees' populations. However, **the clubs must be given the means, especially in terms of funds, to organise activities beyond the football aspect.** Languages courses within the football club is a nice idea.

Finally, the public “women and girls” is a very specific one. Specific means should be used to “attract” them to the pitch so that they can benefit from football and be included in their host community. A solution is to **organise encounters**, for example over a cup of tea, before organising football activities **so that women can meet and gradually become comfortable in their group.** They can then decide together on their “football programme” to get the most beneficial experience at all levels.



FIRE⁺

FOOTBALL INCLUDING
REFUGEES IN EUROPE