

# What a difference a game makes!

2023

## Survey on football and the inclusion of refugees in Europe



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

**Sport and  
Citizenship**  **Sport et  
Citoyenneté**  
Sport serving society Le Sport au service de la société

  
DFB-STIFTUNG  
EGIDIUS BRAUN

  
**ESSCA**

**acff**  
association des clubs francophones de football

**network  
fare**

  
**FAI**

**sportanddev.org**

  
**LIBER**

  
**ODTÜ  
METU**

# Table of content

<b>1. Introduction: the background and objectives of the FIRE+ survey</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Terminology: key concepts and typologies used in the report</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. The survey design</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. The principal target public of the survey</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5. Analysis of survey findings</b>	<b>12</b>
5.1 – Observed impact on refugees – quantitative findings	12
5.2 – Types of refugee interactions – qualitative findings	13
5.3 – Observed impact on volunteers/project	15
5.4 – Observed impact on the local community’s perception – qualitative findings	16
5.5 – Successful scenarios	18
5.6 – Mapping the Refugees’ Journey	20
<b>6. Recommendations</b>	<b>21</b>
6.1 – Staff	21
6.2 – Funding priorities	21
6.3 – Gender	22
<b>7. Conclusion</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>8. Appendices</b>	<b>24</b>
Appendix 1 : Ethics approval – MTU Human Subjects Ethics Committee	

The research and authorship was conducted by

Derya Göçer, Middle East Technical University, Ankara.

Özgehan Şenyuva, Middle East Technical University, Ankara.

Albrecht Sonntag, ESSCA School of Management, Angers.

# 1. Introduction: the background and objectives of the FIRE+ survey

Since 2015-2016, when the European continent underwent an unprecedented peak in demands for asylum, the reception of refugees has consistently remained present in the minds of policymakers, media, and public opinion across all member-states, whatever their respective governments' attitude and policies in the field. Over the last two years, the sudden need to welcome millions of refugees fleeing the Ukrainian territory following the Russian aggression, has further increased the salience of the issue.

Given the numbers of individuals asking for asylum and protection, many governments, however well-meaning and organised they may be, are overwhelmed with the burden, and strongly dependent on the reactivity, good will, and humanist values of civil society when it comes to initiate and accompany the integration of the newcomers in their new environment.

One of the most widespread and visible components of organised civil society, whether in city centres, suburban districts, or rural areas, are football clubs. When the great anthropologist Desmond Morris, at the end of the 1970s, set out to describe *The Soccer Tribe*<sup>1</sup>, he jokingly wondered what the pilot of an alien spaceship would make of all the rectangular green patches spread across the European territory. Their omnipresence is, of course, due to the immense popularity of the game, which has made football, and most of all the clubs that organise its practice locally, an integral aspect of cultural and social life.

In recent years, football clubs and the volunteers who drive them, have responded with remarkable motivation and perseverance to the challenge of offering refugees a place of first contact with their new host society outside state administration and bureaucracy. To no one's surprise, it turned out that football's popularity and simplicity, as well as its accessibility without significant language skills and the

emotions of pleasure and joy that are associated with the game, were conducive to a large variety of initiatives, some of which were actively (and financially) supported by federations or public authorities, others entirely shouldered by the clubs themselves.

<sup>1</sup> Desmond Morris, *The Soccer Tribe*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1981.



Today, both policymakers and civil society actors, as well as the football community in its largest sense, have formed a consensus on the potential of football for facilitating the integration of newcomers in their host society. There is widespread agreement that football has “the special power of bringing together people across cultural differences and thus strengthen social cohesion”, as Aydan Özoğuz, Commissioner for Immigration, Refugees and Integration at the German Chancellery between 2013 and 2018, summed it up<sup>2</sup>. CSOs like Sport and Citizenship or the FARE network – both founding members of the FIRE and FIRE+ projects – regularly insist on the use of football as a powerful “vehicle” or “tool” for social inclusion<sup>3</sup>.

This shared assumption on football’s social potential does of course not come out of the blue. It is based on a multitude of grassroots success stories, often collected in reports of “good practices”<sup>4</sup> and underpinned by numerous testimonies from volunteers and beneficiaries alike. It is also based on collective memory, especially in Western Europe, where the waves of labour migration since the 1960s have repeatedly revealed that the local football club was one of the major fields of everyday culture in which such integration could be successfully negotiated over longer periods of time<sup>5</sup>. Finally, there have been some sociological or ethnographical approaches that have credibly identified the benefits<sup>6</sup> and limits<sup>7</sup> of football activities for refugees<sup>8</sup>.

Concerning the recent migration waves to Europe, however, most of the evidence is anecdotal. What is absent from the literature is a scientifically robust, policy-relevant survey that allows an evidence-based evaluation of the impact different local initiatives have had on both the beneficiaries and, equally important, on the grassroots organisations themselves.

This is where the FIRE+ survey comes in, with its attempt to move from intuitive beliefs and anecdotal evidence – as credible as they may be – to a meaningful analysis of the perception that grassroots football actors themselves may have of the impact of their own volunteering activities.

2 Deutscher Fussball-Bund (DFB), [Willkommen im Verein! Fussball mit Flüchtlingen](#), Frankfurt:2016, p. 3.

3 See for instance Fare network, [Inspire toolkit to working with refugee women through football](#), London: 2017, p.3, or the numerous occurrences of the term “tool” in the Sport and Citizenship Review No. 56 (June 2023). In the UNHCR Sport Strategy 2022-2026, entitled “More than a Game”, the term “tool”, in its singular and plural form, occurs 28 times (<https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/our-partners/sport-partners/unhcr-sport-strategy-2022-2026>).

4 A significant number of these reports is quoted in FIRE Project, *Football Including Refugees in Europe – State-of-the-Art*, 2019, retrieved under [https://footballwithrefugees.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/brochure\\_28p\\_the-state-of-the-art\\_fire\\_web.pdf](https://footballwithrefugees.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/brochure_28p_the-state-of-the-art_fire_web.pdf)

5 See for instance Dietmar Hüser and Ansbert Baumann, “Fußfassen durch Fußball in der Fremde? Arbeitsmigration und Amateurfußball im Frankreich und Westdeutschland der langen 60er Jahre”, *Lendemains*, Vol. 41, No. 161 (2016), pp. 7-18; or Daniel Huhn and Stefan Mezger, “Von Kuzorra bis Özil. Der Ruhrgebietsfußball als Aushandlungsort von Zugehörigkeit”, *Lendemains*, Vol. 41, No. 161 (2016), pp. 38-50. See also Diethelm Blecking, “Integration through Sports? Polish Migrants in the Ruhr”, Germany, in: *International Review of Social History* Vol. 23 (2015), pp. 275-293, and in the same publication, Marion Fontaine, “Football, Migration, and Coalmining in Northern France, 1920s-1980s”, pp. 253-273. For the importance of football fandom for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation migrants, see Nina Szogs, *Football Fandom and Migration. An Ethnography of Transnational Practices and Narratives in Vienna and Istanbul*, London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2017.

6 See for instance Chris Stone, *Football – A shared sense of belonging*, Sheffield: 2014. See also, of the same author, “Utopian community football? Sport, hope, and belongingness in the lives of refugees and asylum-seekers”, *Leisure Studies*, 2018, vol. 37, no 2, p. 171-183, as well as Brent McDonald, Ramón Spaaij & Darko Dukic, “Moments of social inclusion: asylum seekers, football and solidarity”, *Sport in Society*, Vol. 22, Issue 6 (2019), pp. 935-949. See also Ramón Spaaij, “Refugee Youth, Belonging and Community Sport”, *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 34, Issue 3 (2015), pp. 303-318, and Chris Webster (2022) “The (in)significance of footballing pleasures in the lives of forced migrant men”, *Sport in Society*, Vol. 25, Issue 3, pp. 523-536

7 Ramón Spaaij, “The Ambiguities of Sport and Community Engagement”, *Ethos* Vol. 21, Issue 2 (2013), pp. 8-11.

8 An interesting overview of recent empirical literature and evaluation studies is provided by Jondis Schwartzkopff, *Integration of Refugees through Sport*, Sport Inclusion Network, 2022, retrieved under [https://sportinclusion.net/files/SPIN\\_Refugees\\_Review-Study\\_2022\\_final.pdf](https://sportinclusion.net/files/SPIN_Refugees_Review-Study_2022_final.pdf)

## 2. Terminology: key concepts and typologies used in the report

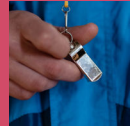
The report uses a handful of key terms, which are used across Europe with a variety of semantic nuances. In order to avoid misunderstandings, we provide some definitions below.



### FOOTBALL CLUB:

---

The football clubs this report refers to are grassroots clubs, where the game is played at an amateur level. We use “club” as shortcut for all kinds of local associations, registered or not, which organise football activities of any kind, on a regular and competitive basis, or spontaneously, outside competition. No terminological difference is made between clubs that are solely focused on football and clubs that also offer other sports.



### TRAINER/COACH:

---

Both “trainer” and “coach” are terms that have been used by survey respondents to refer to any local volunteer who designs and conducts football training or practice sessions and who, in the case of participation in competitions, is also responsible for defining the line-up of the team.



### FOOTBALL FEDERATIONS:

---

“Federation” is used as umbrella term for football governing bodies on whatever level (regional, national, or supra-national), including English-speaking countries, where the term “association” is more widely used for historical reasons.



### VOLUNTEER:

---

Volunteers in grassroots football are the main target group of the FIRE+ survey. They are understood as individuals who commit time and energy for the benefit of their club and the people who participate in its football activities. By definition, volunteering activities are undertaken of an individual's free will, without payment or remuneration.



CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION (CSO):

MIGRANT:

REFUGEE:

INTEGRATION/INCLUSION:





### **CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION (CSO):**

---

CSO is used as a shortcut for not-for-profit associations that are independent of local or national government levels, and who are committed to welcoming and to the integration of migrants, especially asylum-seekers and refugees. CSO includes NGOs, foundations, or charities, etc.



### **MIGRANT:**

---

The report uses “migrant” as a perfectly neutral term, referring to individuals who, for whatever reason, have moved to another country than the one they were born or brought up in.



### **REFUGEE:**

---

The authors are well aware of the fact that the term “refugee”, strictly speaking, refers to a legal status obtained once a request for asylum has been met with a positive answer from the host country. In daily language, however, “refugee” and “asylum-seeker” are used almost interchangeably. The report therefore uses “refugee” as a generic term for any person who has experienced forced migration or displacement.



### **INTEGRATION/INCLUSION:**

---

The report understands “inclusion” as the desirable goal of a process of social integration of newcomers in their host society. The process of “integration” is understood as a two-way process engaging both the newcomers and the host society, implying rights and obligations on both sides, and necessarily having an effect on both sides. “Inclusion” enables newcomers to fully take part in society, on an equal footing with locals.

# CONCEPT



### 3. The survey design

The survey was jointly designed by the Middle East Technical University (METU) and the ESSCA School of Management (ESSCA), the two academic partners of the FIRE + project. It sought to understand:

- 1) the types of support received by the football clubs, their volunteers, trainers, and other CSOs involved in football from local, regional and national governments;
- 2) the experience of football encounters with the refugees and the subsequent interpretation of these encounters;
- 3) the short and mid-term outcomes of football activities conducted for and with refugees.

We opted for a mixed-method survey, entailing not only traditional survey questions the results of which can be quantified, but also qualitative questions<sup>9</sup>.

There were open-ended questions inquiring what these football events meant for those involved; and on what meanings they attach to their experience of multi-cultural encounters with the newcomers. There were also more classical survey questions asking them to rate the change that they experienced due to the football events they organised.

The survey further included questions that inquired about different types of support received by the respondents' organisations from local, regional, national, and supranational levels. Support here refers to the funding of projects, seed funding for long-term projects, and to one-off support such as equipment sponsoring. The open-ended answers were processed through qualitative data analysis, using research question-oriented coding.

The aim of the survey was to explore how grassroots football clubs facilitate the social and personal development of refugees. Our investigation spanned diverse contexts and structures across various European regions, with a keen focus on the multitude of realities encountered by those working directly with refugees.

The development of our survey necessitated a nuanced approach. We wanted to ensure that the questionnaire would resonate with our respondents, offering them a comfortable platform to share their experiences and insights. As such, the wording and sampling strategy was meticulously discussed with all our partners.

We employed a purposive sampling strategy for our survey. This basically means that we specifically targeted individuals who were relevant to our study – those who are working with refugees within grassroots football clubs or CSOs that use football as a methodology. This approach allowed us to focus on respondents who had rich, first-hand experiences and narratives to share, thus ensuring the valuable substance in our data.

<sup>9</sup> On the importance and use of multiple ways of collecting data, see Norman K. Denzin, *Triangulation*. The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology (ed. G. Ritzer). New York: John Wiley, 2015.

The survey was designed to be multilingual and tested to cater to a wide range of respondents across Europe. This guaranteed that potential respondents could comfortably participate and contribute to our research in one of the working languages: English; French; German and Italian. Additionally, the team continuously monitored the survey progress online. This allowed us to keep track of the response rates and rectify any technical, linguistical, or logical errors swiftly, ensuring the smooth and effective running of the survey.

An essential factor that guided the design of our survey was the European Commission's framework of "Key competences for lifelong learning"<sup>10</sup>. Adopted by the Council of the European Union in May 2018, this framework identifies eight crucial competences deemed essential for every citizen's personal fulfilment, employability, active citizenship, and social inclusion. The key competences range from literacy, multilingual, and digital competences to personal, social, and learning to learn competences. It also includes citizenship, entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression competences.

The relevance of these competences to our survey was rooted in the understanding that football-based projects serve as non-formal and informal learning opportunities. They contribute significantly to the competence development of refugees, local participants, and both volunteer and professional staff. Thus, incorporating this framework in our survey helped highlight the transformative potential of these football projects, underscoring their role not just as a sportive activity, but also as an educational tool fostering lifelong learning and competence development.

All in all, the survey has allowed us to gather insightful data on the extent to which the assumption of the power of football as a tool for social integration is backed up by experience from the field. Our research underscores the value of football-based projects in enhancing refugees' ability to thrive in their new communities and contribute positively to society. **It's not just about playing the game; it's about empowering individuals and transforming societies.**

In the survey, in line with the entire FIRE+ project, we used "refugees" as an umbrella term that includes people with or seeking international protection status (asylum seekers). The respondents were given a brief description in the consent section, with a link to the project site where a lengthy explanation is available for those seeking further clarification.

The data of the survey was treated in accordance with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation. The survey has been approved by the Human Subjects Ethics Committee of Middle East Technical University (approval number: 0452-ODTUIAEK-2022). No personal data was collected through the survey, overtly or covertly.

Our online survey was open for responses over a period of seven months. We received the very first response in August 2022 and collected valuable inputs until the last response was received in February 2023. This timeframe allowed us to gather a wealth of insights, contributing to the depth and richness of our analysis.

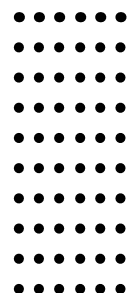
---

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Key competences for lifelong learning, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/569540>



## 4. The principal target public of the survey

The involvement of multiple stakeholders in football activities welcoming refugees produces a **multi-layered experience**. The layers come from the simultaneous presence of multiple actors, clubs (with their volunteers, trainers, players, etc.), CSOs, refugees, as well as peripheral actors initially not necessarily foreseen, such as local pub owners, local schools, different segments of local communities, local media, as well as the regional, national and supranational football governance bodies, and various levels of political-administrative governing bodies, ranging from sub-local to supranational.



The survey chose to address one segment of this layer – arguably the one on which all these activities are hinged: the **individuals who organise meaningful football contacts with refugees, be it structured or unstructured one-off encounters (tournaments etc.) or regular, structured training sessions.**

These encounters are peaceful and friendly. They go deeper than the level of a simple introduction and superficial meeting, since they share a common goal, such as training together and enjoying the collective and individual pleasure football provides. They may lead to building long term relationships and contribute to the overall integration.



The principal target segment includes all actors in grassroots football clubs, with their staff of various levels of commitment, as well as at times CSOs who work closely with these clubs.

The rationale for this choice of target respondents to the survey is threefold.

First, it is in line with the overall outlook of the FIRE+ Project, which was first and foremost aimed at the community of European grassroots football in the largest sense, and local football volunteers in particular. It is no coincidence that the FIRE+ MOOC was clearly designed for this specific segment of users.

Second, the organisers of grassroots football initiatives for a refugee public are well-placed to observe the results, successes, and failures of their activities, with regard to the progress in their target public's integration process and other changes with regard to attitudes or skills. As many testimonies collected for the FIRE MOOC or at the national conferences organised by the partner or-

rganisations have clearly shown<sup>11</sup>, those among them who have already engaged with a refugee public for several years, are capable of adopting a reflective distance to the outcome of their own work.

Third, this choice of respondents is also due to the fact that, over recent years, the refugee communities clearly have been over-solicited, almost to the point of abuse, by scholarly field research on all levels. It is not exaggerated to say that they are tired by the incessant data request from academia. As Göçer and Şenyuva have shown in detail for the Turkish case<sup>12</sup>, research on refugees has various ethical issues, one of which is over-surveying of the same refugee segments, which may lead to thin data. It is also not ethically responsible to always put the burden of the research on the same segment of the society when the phenomenon under scrutiny has multiple stakeholders.

For all these reasons, this survey conducted under the FIRE + project was designed for the stakeholder group of European football volunteers to respond. Their observations and experiences do represent the point of view of the initiators and organisers of the football encounters. Of course, as organisers, they are also part of the local community themselves. Therefore, they also have feedback on not just the club-refugee relations but also on the reception of the refugees in the locality. They have repeated experiences of playing football with refugees, are familiar with the process and the challenge of welcoming refugees through the sport. In terms of the diversity of their roles or functions within their organisations, the survey reveals, as expected, a wide variety. They include presidents, administrators, trainers, players, divers volunteering functions, project officers of clubs, and even referees. Although the main stakeholder of the survey are the clubs and CSOs that organise football events and projects, there is a multiplicity of voices within that group.

Since we did not narrow down the sample according to the size or impact of the football project or event, we had a chance to include a variety of football encounters from simple plays in the local park to structured training with uniform kits. The variety of the events are as important as the choice of respondents, since different types of events and projects lead to different outcomes. As a result, this choice in methodology allows for us to observe different patterns of refugee integration/non-integration through the sport of football emerge from the collected data.

The strong qualitative component of the survey allows to account for all this multiplicity in the type of actors and events sampled in the survey. The qualitative questions collect data on following issues:

- 1) the experiences of the respondents with organising football events/projects with refugees;**
- 2) respondents' interpretations of these experiences, of their impact on the actors and local communities;**
- 3) respondents' evaluations of policies and actions taken by different stakeholders such as local government, COVID lockdowns, etc.**

11 Within the framework of the MOOC, over twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with experienced volunteers from football clubs or CSOs in a variety of European countries. Moreover, the international organised by FIRE asnd FIRE+ between 2019 and 2023 provided opportunities of debate and exchange with over 30 volunteers in various positions, in addition to experts from sport organisations and CSOs.

12 Derya Göçer and Özgehan Şenyuva, "Uluslararası İlişkiler Disiplini ve Niteliksel Yöntem: Türkiye'de Göç Çalışmaları Örneği" [The Discipline of International Relations and Qualitative Method: The case of migration research in Turkey], Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi Vol. 18 (72), pp. 19-36, 2021. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/uidergisi/issue/68191/1000761>

There was also room in the survey for the respondents to tell stories of success and/or frustration regarding these experiences. Qualitatively, the survey was designed to collect “thick data”, of not just what happened or generally happens on the pitch or in the locker rooms, but also how these interactions are perceived. Perception and interpretation of facts is crucial in understanding processes of encounters through sport, as sport in this context is precisely a tool of changing, transforming perceptions in the first place. Our pursuit of “thick description”<sup>13</sup> prolonged the time it takes to fill out the survey and was demanding on the respondents. The average time spent by respondents on the survey was 38 minutes, which is impressive. However, that burden was necessary to find out patterns of what works and what can work better.

Quantitative and qualitative questions complemented each other. Questions such as those asking for the club's age, or years of experience in organising refugee events/projects geared toward welcoming them, provide us with material to judge how different type of projects, different capacity level in clubs produce varying results.



Credit Siphon Le-Sport et Citoyenneté — May 9, 2023 : sport and refugee day

13 Here, “thick description” is a reference to the detailed stories that the survey required from the respondents. In academic literature it also refers to the thick description of the researcher of an issue in the context of which the researcher immerses him or herself (such as in ethnographic field work). The common point lies in going beyond just asking ‘how often’ or ‘where’ do you meet the refugees but teasing out stories from the respondents. Thickness in qualitative research in the form of evidence-based story telling goes well with social causes since “stories allow others to visualize and empathize with certain situation or plights.” See Sarah Tracey, *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. New York: John Wiley, 2020, p. 9.

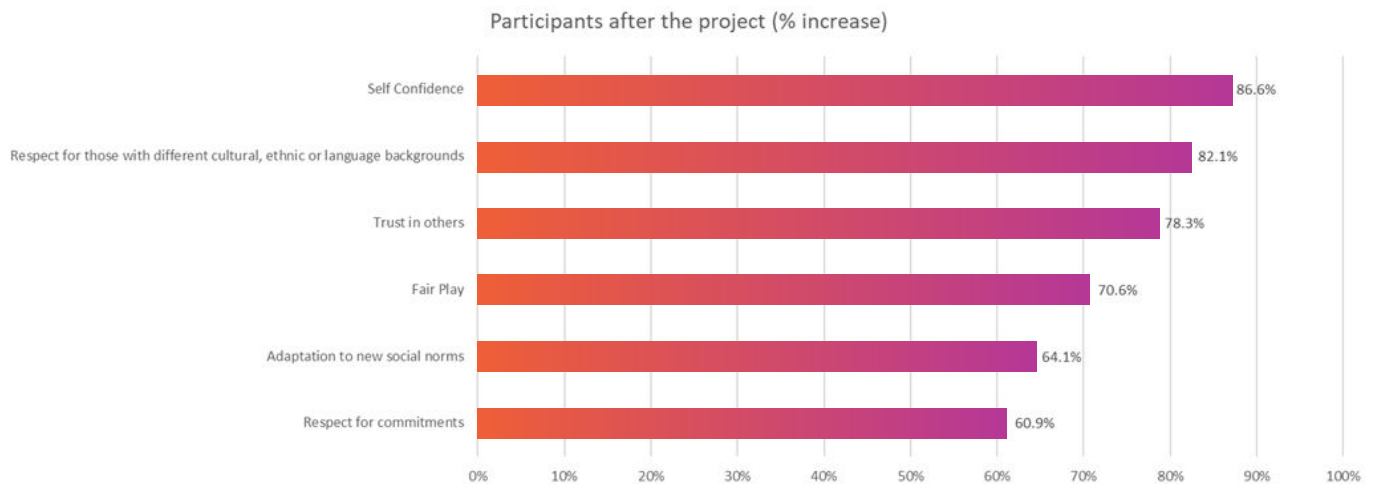
## 5. Analysis of survey findings

### 5.1 Observed impact on refugees – quantitative findings

The survey results indicate a significant positive impact of football-based integration projects on the personal development and social skills of the refugee participants, as evaluated by the respondents, who had the opportunity to observe their personal development over time. A majority of volunteer project managers have thus reported an increase in various essential qualities among the participants after their involvement in these projects. The data suggests that these programmes are not only beneficial for the development of social skills but also foster intellectual, creative, and communicative growth among participants.

Increased respect for commitments (60.9%) and adaptation to new social norms (64.1%) indicate that participants are learning to navigate the complexities of their new environment more effectively. Additionally, the data highlights the development of key sportsmanship values, with 70.6% of participants showing improved fair play.

One of the most striking outcomes is the growth in trust in others (78.3%), which is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and social cohesion among refugees and host communities. Furthermore, an impressive 82.1% of participants showed increased respect for those with different cultural, ethnic, or language backgrounds, demonstrating that these projects are effectively promoting cultural understanding and tolerance.



**Graph:** perceived changes in participants' behaviour

The highest increase observed is in self-confidence (86.6%), a crucial factor for personal growth and successful integration into a new society. This boost in self-esteem can positively impact refugees' motivation to pursue education, work, and social opportunities.

The survey also reveals that half of the respondents agree that the participants have improved their logical thinking and ability to draw conclusions. Moreover, the projects seem to foster entrepreneurial skills, with 51.7% of participants reporting an enhanced ability to develop and implement ideas.

Significantly, these initiatives are promoting collaborative problem-solving, as 61.1% of participants improved their skills in negotiating joint solutions with people holding different viewpoints. This is further supported by the high percentage of participants (75.0%) who gained confidence in expressing their opinions in discussions.

The most notable results focus on community engagement, language, and teamwork. A striking 80.7% of participants reported an increased ability to contribute to the interests of their community or society. Additionally, 88.1% improved their communication skills with people who speak another language, and an impressive 90.2% showcased better cooperation within a team.

Lastly, the highest increase observed is in the ability to get along with people from different cultural backgrounds (95.0%), which is essential for successful integration and harmonious coexistence in diverse societies.

Personal development (80.3%) and non-violence (81.7%) stand out as key areas where participants have experienced growth, highlighting the potential of these projects to foster a more harmonious and inclusive society. Additionally, the high percentage of respondents who reported increased understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity (72.4% and 83.6%, respectively) underscores the projects' role in combating prejudice and discrimination.

Furthermore, the survey highlights the impact of these projects on participants' understanding of and commitment to various social issues. For example, participants showed increased awareness of health and well-being (69.6%), human rights and fundamental rights (71.7%), and the inclusion of disadvantaged or marginalised people in society (83.1%).

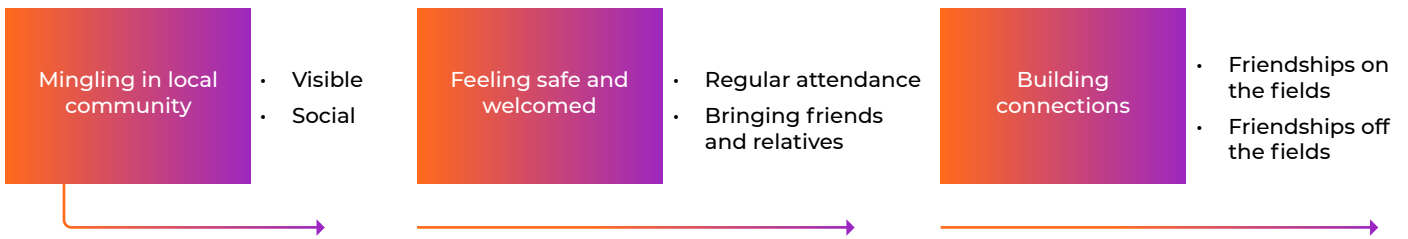
Finally, the survey results indicate that these football-based integration projects are particularly effective in fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. An impressive 91.7% of respondents reported increased solidarity with people facing difficulties.

## **5.2 Types of refugee interactions – qualitative findings**

Qualitative findings are generated by the set of open questions to which respondents could answer in detail and in their own language. Such open questions make a questionnaire rather ambitious, which is confirmed by the average 38 minutes that respondents spent on completion of the survey.

There is a three-tier pattern that emerges from the survey responses regarding interaction with refugees, especially in the presence of a strong, well-established club or funding by local authorities or federations.





**Graph: three tiers of refugee interaction**

The **first-tier experience** consists in immediate socialising in the local community, encountering locals in football places, wearing the club jersey or insignia and hence achieving visible mingling (i.e. not looking any different from the locals), attending social events after or before the football events, or simply chatting after a training session. This first-tier experience is necessary to make initial contact and probe feelings of “*welcome*” and “*safety*” in a new country. However, if these types of interactions rely exclusively on volunteers in the club, the circulation of people (refugees and volunteers) without building meaningful relationships may tend to be tiring. As a respondent from Ireland put it, “*we found that once a partnership was developed and working, then these people were moved to their new homes and everything. We as a club had to start again from the beginning. As relying on volunteers to do this, after time it can become frustrating to lose this relationship and have to do it all over again*”. In the absence of a strong club, long-term funding or seed funding, refugee experiences risk staying at this tier only.

The **second-tier experience** is when the newcomers start to attend regularly and bring their immediate or extended families, or their friends either as observers or players. This is a crucial stage, and it is only possible if the refugees continue to stay in the same locality and if the club or the CSO is able to offer continuous opportunities for interaction. This is when the play continues in a regular fashion, so observations of these kind can be made: “*I noticed how accommodating and helpful the refugee children are during the warm-up and practice sessions. They integrate and take hints from German players*” (coach of a youth team in Germany). This second-tier experience in the sport of football may cross paths with other experiences, such as language classes: “*The teachers from the language classes have asked us to offer football after class*” (a respondent from Germany). Once the second-tier experiences get regular they also integrate to other segments in the locality that do not have pre-defined role in integration: “*the inhabitants near our field have had the opportunity to meet and make friends with the boys of our team*” (a respondent from Italy).

The **third-tier experience** that seems to give the most contentment or gratification to the European respondents is establishing meaningful relationships, friendships on and off the field; attending each other’s birthday parties, engagement or marriage ceremonies, celebrating the start of a new job, removing hierarchical barriers between the locals and the refugees. It is at this level that the trainers, organisers, officials feel the most pride in reporting the outcome of football encounters. In the words of one respondent from Germany “*One of our participants once said: the club is his new family.*”

This kind of feeling of unity cannot be achieved in the absence of sustained interactions. The results even lead to a higher-level impact that goes beyond mingling at the local level: *“We take our [refugee] children to other cities and show them our country. For one thing, they can concentrate mentally on other things. They also learn other linguistic dialects”* (a respondent from Germany).

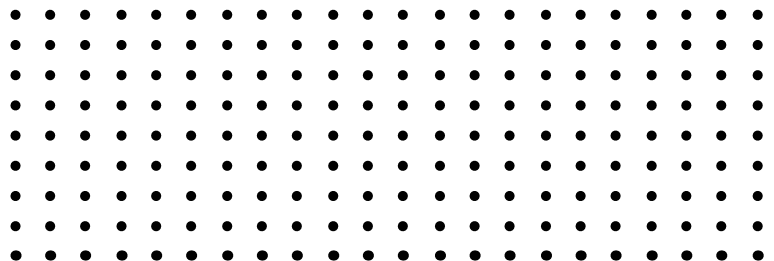
This third-tier experience incorporates many elements that the survey asked quantitatively to the respondents, such as attitude change towards cultural issues, one of which is gender: *“It still gives me goosebumps that many women now have a job, a driving licence and their own car and speak very, very good German, go to parties styled. Some even have a new boyfriend and are without a headscarf”* (a respondent from Germany). These changes, in attitude, language skills, and the building of lasting relationships then lead to the final and desired outcome of successful integration: *“95% of the refugees who have passed through our association – over 2,000 refugees – have successfully built their lives here in Germany and are very well integrated into work, study and self-employment”* (a respondent from Germany). Therefore, if the interaction reaches this third tier, then there is a very high chance of achieving lasting results.

The respondents seem to agree on the criteria for successful integration: it is first and foremost building relationships, as opposed to more formal types of integration such as employment or citizenship. *“Our refugees are fully integrated, there are deep friendships with players, fans, parents, members, etc.”* (a respondent from Germany).

### 5.3 Observed impact on volunteers/project collaborators – quantitative findings

A small number of quantitative questions targeted the perceived impact of their own activities on the group of respondents themselves.

Quite significantly, these initiatives also are successful in nurturing active citizenship and social responsibility among the volunteers. The data shows that, as a result of their experience, they are even more inclined to engage in civil society (51.7%), voluntary activities (64.4%), and work against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia, or racism (61.0%). The results also demonstrate that a majority of respondents (63.8%) are more committed to active citizenship and participation in democratic life after their involvement in these projects.



## 5.4 Observed impact on the local community's perception

### – qualitative findings

In the responses to the open-ended questions, three types of local communities are portrayed.

- One type is where the local community is very much in sync with the local club in terms of the spirit with which to approach refugees.
- A second type of local community is where the locals are not that much aware of the existence of the refugees since there is a very real physical segregation and lack of crossing paths.
- A third type is where the local community is aware of newcomers but is cautious towards them.

Football encounters and sustained football interactions help with all type of communities, but perhaps make the most impact on the second and notably third type of community.

The **first type** is very supportive towards the club and the refugees: *“The local community is positive about our project, of course this also applies to our other local clubs. The parents of our student players are also committed to the refugees. They support them wherever they can”* (a respondent from Germany). Clearly, the values of the club are shared by the community and vice-versa.

The **second type** of local community does not display an attitude, as they are either unaware of or uninterested in the presence, circulation, and possible integration of the refugees. *“Some locals did not know about refugees, and it made them aware of how hard a life can be”* (a respondent from Latvia). Mixing locals with refugee in football games or events ensures first that there is more information flowing and less uninformed prejudices.

The **third type** is showing reservations: *“The association, the village and the community had reservations at first. When refugees stood together in groups, they changed sides of the street. That changed when we brought the refugees into our midst and let them participate in club life. Women and children also found the guys pretty cool afterwards”* (a respondent from Germany).

The main reservations seem to resolve around the issue of religion. The Muslim headscarf is mentioned several times explicitly. Therefore, planning projects with gender inclusivity or at least gender mainstreaming might prove to be highly beneficial and efficient in having an impact on not only refugees' attitude but also on locals' attitude. That women with headscarf can play football seems to be an important fact of the matter that diffuses through the locals through first-hand experience. After interacting with the refugees, the third type of locals gained *“a more positive image towards refugees, they could see that refugees do voluntary work and especially that women and men celebrate and play football together with local people. Especially that women with headscarves play football and actively participate in sports”* (a respondent from Germany).





It is very important to see that gradual or initial openness of the local community and club and welcoming refugees at different scales, not just in local park, but also in the stadium, in weekend gatherings, in different cities etc, ensures attitude changes of the refugees towards these locals as well. *“According to our projects, there are many aha-effects. After a visit to a synagogue ‘The Jews are just like us Muslims, they don’t eat pork either.’ After a youth exchange with Ukraine, Poland [...] almost all the male youths thought, ‘Yes, my sister can also have a boyfriend’, before that was unthinkable [...]”* (a respondent from Germany).

Therefore, when the third type of locals have a football club or CSO that can organise and sustain third-tier experiences with the refugees, the outcomes are no different than the first or second type of local communities. It is the quality of experiences that make the lasting impact, not necessarily the starting points in terms of attitudes and culture.

It still should be noted that organising events with Ukrainian newcomers felt easier due to the common religious background. There seems to be more of a collective agreement on the support towards the Ukrainians. *“Municipality and state support a lot of refugees from Ukraine. So, we do the same from all our love”* (a respondent from Germany).

One final issue with the local perception is that for a full-scale integration it is very meaningful for the club/CSO to aim to scale up from the local to national and even to international. The following quote makes this point very clear: *“During the international youth exchanges, young refugees were able to represent Germany and were perceived as Germans. It was simply fascinating to see how refugees dealt with the history of Germany, researched it intensively and felt connected to their new home”* (a respondent from Germany).

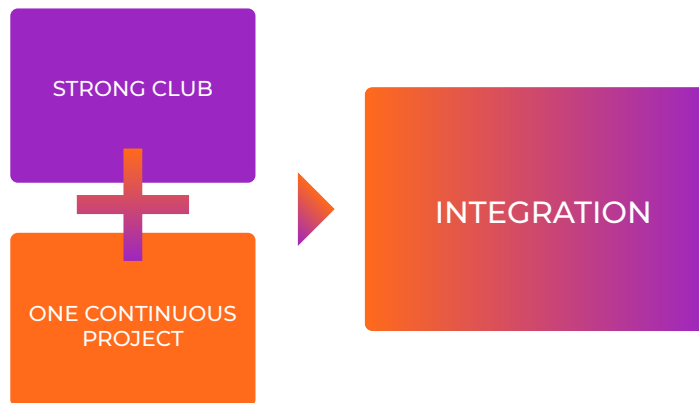
## 5.5 Successful scenarios

The results of the survey in terms of the materialised scenarios are clear and meaningful. Two modalities lead to successful outcomes of partial or full integration of refugees with football as a medium.

1

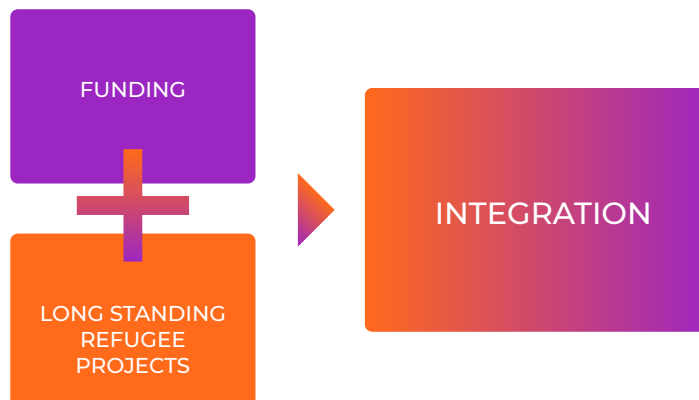
A **strong club**, well established in the local community, with its independent funding and **one continuous football project for the refugees** (one year and older), leading to refugees

- feeling welcome and safe
- mingling with the football community and then the larger local community;
- integrating through employment, schooling and/or marriage.



2

**Seed funding from an external source**, the kind that results in **longer and various projects** and allows for staff to be hired on the long term. The supporting bodies are mostly local governments and football federations. Funding from regional and national governments are scarce. This scenario also leads to successful integration outcomes.



Both scenarios also involve attitude change in the local community towards the refugees, with increased openness to welcome newcomers.

When funding is on a short-term basis and football initiatives rely heavily on volunteers, integration outcomes are weaker. Contrary to the assumption that high refugee mobility may result in fragile integration outcomes, the survey results indicate that the mobility of organisers and instructors has a greater impact on the integration experience and outcome. This is the consensus among European grassroots football stakeholders.

There is a heightened sense of “welcome” and “safety” in every scenario. The following observation and interpretation, however, are exclusive to clubs where integration projects are routinely implemented. Since 2015, this particular club has organised such projects: “In our opinion, more trust has developed and the boys and their families, have ‘arrived’ and feel at home” (a respondent from Germany).

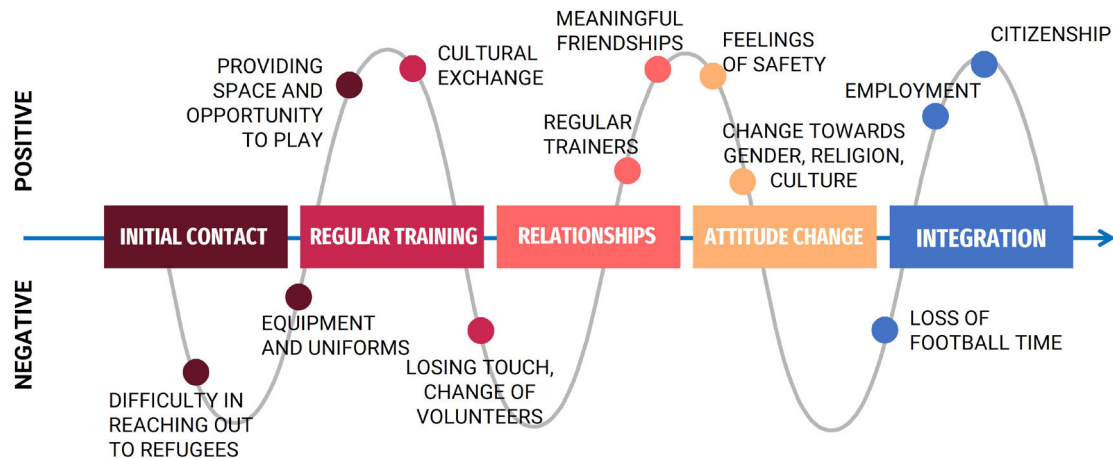
Successful scenarios do not always lead to successful football outcomes. Some of the refugees who settled with the solidarity shown from the football community may drop out of football events. The reasons for this dropping out lie in the way they are integrated. “The majority of the refugees have arrived in the community, have regular jobs and a regular daily routine. Their initial boredom and foreignness are no longer present. They were supported in their integration and are an integral part of the community. They were simply too tired to be active in sports in the evenings and on weekends” (a respondent from Germany).



Credit Siphon Le-Sport et Citoyenneté — May 9, 2023 : sport and refugee day

## 5.6 Mapping the Refugees' Journey

Football clubs and CSOs in Europe that organise events geared towards refugees kick off a journey. Based on the survey results we can illustrate and wrap up that journey in a comprehensive graph, discerning the more challenging and more comfortable parts of the “travel”. In the graph below, the “positive” part refers to experiences along the way that are easy to establish and the impact of which is relatively high. The “negative” part refers to experiences that are more challenging to organise and to sustain and the impact of which may not always be as intended.



**Graph: The refugee football journey**

**Initial contact** refers to the access to the refugee population in the locality and how they are introduced to the football event.

**Regular training** refers to the sustained activities of football, matches played, training and coaching sessions.

**Relationships** refer to loose and increasingly tight personal relationships that are established thanks to regular training but also social events before or after tournaments, training sessions etc.

**Attitude change** comes later in the process when the impact of sustained contact and established relationships becomes visible in the form of locals being more tolerant, refugees being more relaxed and open-minded, cultural and social changes being easier (such as in the mingling of different genders).

**Integration** here refers to the visible results of the whole process, when jobs are found, citizenship applications are filed and approved, or a separate flat is rented for a young adult. Actions that indicate settling down and taking roots in a way that occurs as the football community observes and supports the individual or the family.

The oscillations in the graph indicate that the start of this journey is not always easy and in the absence of equipment or in the case of a high circulation or turnover of volunteers, relationships may be difficult to establish. However, once regular training and relationships take root, success in the form of further integration is highly likely. Although it sometimes comes with a price when refugee participants lose touch with the football community due to new life commitments.

## 6. Recommendations

### 6.1 Staff

If grassroots football is to continue playing an impactful role in the integration of refugees in Europe, simply relying on the good will of volunteers and one-off support through local funding or federation subsidies clearly is not enough. The issue of funding is key for helping football clubs deploy their full potential as hubs of social integration.

The survey results show that the best kind of funding is when there is a seed money to finance several projects in a row across multiple years, carried out with more or less the same staff. This means the staff can develop their own competences on how to work with different groups through experiential learning and transfer their experience to new waves of refugees, and as the composition of these refugee groups change (different region, ethnicity, religion, etc.) such experience becomes even more important.

Semi-permanent staff supported by sustainable or renewable funding are key to helping refugees also off the field, with regard to communication, accommodation, employment. Such staff also organise additional activities that make a meaningful impact against the backdrop of regular and stable football programmes, such as tournaments to travel and meet further people, outside the local zone, thus developing a feel for the whole country, and social events to come together and celebrate collective efforts. Smart funding is giving football clubs the opportunity to avoid staff turnover and make their refugee-targeted initiatives a natural, mainstream part of their portfolio of activities.

### 6.2 Funding priorities

According to the survey findings, project funding from local authorities, football federations or private donors should in priority be targeted for the following uses:

**Equipment:**

club jerseys or full kits, including football shoes, in order to ensure the newcomers do not look different from the locals during the training sessions. This is an often underestimated symbolic first step of integration and equality.

**Sustained training activities:**

as pointed out above, funding should ensure one-off initiatives can be renewed and extended. Regularity is an important factor of social integration. Funding should enable clubs to continue their offerings for refugees without asking their already loyal local members for extra fees.

**Youth exchanges:**

funding should allow clubs to organise youth football exchanges on the regional, national, or even international level without having to shoulder the entire burden of the travel costs. Especially for the significant (and particularly vulnerable) target group of unaccompanied minors, such experiences are invaluable in terms of sense of belonging and inclusion.



### 6.3 Gender

The survey respondents also strongly suggest that women should be able to play football regardless of their religious beliefs and the dress codes imposed by them. Headscarves should not be an issue, and football projects should not shy away from inviting women with headscarves to the games. On the contrary, the survey results suggest that a message of acceptance and equal value addressed both to local communities and to refugee communities have a positive impact on both.

Against the backdrop of our findings, the recent decision of the French Council of State to uphold the French Football Federation's rule preventing players from wearing headscarves<sup>14</sup>, is incompatible with the gender mainstreaming recommended by the survey, and contrary to football's fundamental spirit of providing a playing field where encounters are non-hierarchical, non-intimidating, and non-stigmatising.



Credit Siphon Le-Sport et Citoyenneté — May 9, 2023 : sport and refugee day

14 See Le Monde, "French court upholds football federation ban on headscarves", 29 June 2023, retrieved at [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/06/29/french-court-upholds-football-federation-ban-on-headscarves\\_6039552\\_7.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/06/29/french-court-upholds-football-federation-ban-on-headscarves_6039552_7.html)

## 7. Conclusion

### **A football club is something to integrate into.**

This simple statement is not only factually correct, but also a very powerful emotional claim. A football club is a place where the long and difficult process of inclusion in a new society may find a beginning. The contribution that football makes to resolving the huge challenge of integrating refugees in Europe is a modest one, but it is also a crucial one, as it occurs at a decisive moment in that process. In the best of all cases, as shown by the testimonies gathered for the FIRE+ MOOC, the football club accompanies the process from the beginning to the end: from the first after-training chats with the locals to becoming – often years later – a volunteer in the same club or another one, in another city. From participation to equal access and opportunity. Football is unable to give any kind of integration guarantee – things may go wrong on the way. But if it did not exist, our societies would be the poorer for it.

► [www.footballwithrefugees.eu/](http://www.footballwithrefugees.eu/)



## 8. Appendices

### Appendix 1 : Ethics approval – MTU Human Subjects Ethics Committee

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER


ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY


DUMLUPINAR BULVARI 06800  
ÇANKAYA ANKARA/TURKEY  
T: +90 312 210 22 91  
F: +90 312 210 79 59  
ueam@metu.edu.tr  
www.ueam.metu.edu.tr

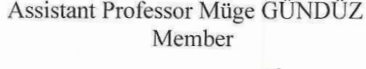
No: 28620816 / 0015 13.09.2022

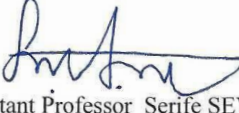
Re: Your application to METU Human Subjects Ethics Committee

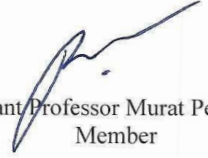
**Associate Professor Özgehan ŞENYUVA**  
The protocol entitled “**FIRE+ Further Football Including Refugees / Survey for Football Clubs and Organizations**” has been reviewed and approved by the METU Human Subjects Ethics Committee. The protocol number is **0452-ODTÜİAEK-2022**  
Best Regards,


  
Prof. Dr. Mine MİSİRLİSOY  
Chair


  
Associate Professor İ.Semih AKÇOMAK  
Member

  
Assistant Professor Müge GÜNDÜZ  
Member

  
Assistant Professor Şerife SEVİNÇ  
Member

  
Assistant Professor Murat Perit ÇAKIR  
Member

  
Assistant Professor Süreyya ÖZCAN KABASAKAL  
Member

  
Assistant Professor A. Emre TURGUT  
Member





# Survey on football and the inclusion of refugees in Europe



This document is part of the FIRE+ project. Co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

The research and redaction were conducted by Derya Göçer, Middle East Technical University, Ankara and Özgehan Şenyuva, Middle East Technical University, Ankara and Albrecht Sonntag, ESSCA School of Management, Angers with the support of the FIRE+ project partners.

We would like to thank all involved in producing this final document.

## #FOOT4ALL

[www.footballwithrefugees.eu/](http://www.footballwithrefugees.eu/)

