



BASELINE STUDY - "PARTICIPATION & EXCLUSION OF DISPLACED YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES
IN EUROPEAN SPORT"
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



BACKGROUND

Migration flows worldwide are a stable and constant human condition. Nevertheless, in these last few years we have seen increasing flows of people forced to leave their countries due to wars, conflicts, exploitation and conditions that represent threats to their existence, especially from North Africa, the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since 2015, with the commonly designated “refugees and migrant crisis”, Europe has faced growing numbers of asylum seekers that travel for a better life, including better health conditions. “2.4 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations and 860 thousand asylum-seekers (pending cases) were hosted in EU-27 Member States at the end of 2018”¹. In this context of conflicts or natural disasters where people are displaced to flee insecurity and violence, physical and mental damages and injuries represent relevant elements that acquire a very specific and delicate dimension. The relation between disability and forced displacement is complicated, even beyond the already complicated dimension of disability in the context of migration. On one hand, disability may be a consequence of forced displacement and conflicts; on the other hand, traumas caused by abuses, stress, fear and journeys hardships can reveal themselves at a later stage, in different ways that can affect people with physical and mental, intellectual disabilities and complications. Furthermore, refugees with disabilities are more likely to be side-lined in every aspect of humanitarian assistance due to physical, environmental and societal barriers against accessing information, health and rehabilitation services and human rights protection (UNHCR, 2011).

Besides, forced displacement also amplifies the risk experienced by refugees with disabilities to be exposed to violence, including sexual and domestic abuse, exploitation by family members, discrimination and exclusion from access to education, livelihoods, a nationality and other public services. The majority of people with disabilities face poverty and discrimination. However, refugees with a disability face double vulnerability: “They are among the most marginalized in an already disposed group” (Refugees International, 2003). The challenges currently facing Europe on how migrants and refugees can be successfully integrated into local communities are not short-term and will remain on the political agenda for the foreseeable future. These challenges can be seen as three-fold: economic, legal and social.

Refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities, therefore, represent an invisible group of individuals who are forced to leave their countries in strongly disadvantaged situations, but at the same time a challenge that calls the European Union and its Member States to take responsibility and action. Sport and physical activity can be extremely valuable not only for participants’ physical and mental health, but also in the context of their social inclusion and integration. The vision of the three-year STEADY project is to increase sports participation of Displaced Youth with Disabilities (DYD) by promoting volunteering and equal access of migrants & minorities to organised and grassroots sport.

THE PARTNERSHIP

The Partnership consists of nine (9) sport organisations and NGOs from eight (8) different countries:

- Hellenic Paralympic Committee (HPC)
- Paralympic Committee of Serbia (NPC Serbia)
- Equal Society
- AttivaMente
- Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC)
- Play and Train
- Centro Social de Soutelo (CSS)
- Footura
- Agitos foundation

The partners bring varying degrees of related expertise and experience to the project with some organisations’ engagement with DYD - Hellenic Paralympic Committee and Agitos foundation – dating back to 2016. The project STEADY has received funding from the European Union’s Erasmus+ Sport programme under grant agreement no 2018-3286/001-001.

¹ <https://migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/europe>

Following desk research and surveys of the partners, the following key barriers were identified:

- Poor awareness of tackling disabilities among immigrants' integration
- Lack of reliable data about the number of Immigrants & Asylum seekers with disabilities / Displaced Youth with Disabilities
- Immigrants with disabilities is currently not always a concern with regards to integration procedures/activities
- Whilst there are number of Activities for integration immigrants or people with disabilities through Sports, there is only one activity for immigrants with disabilities (led by Agitos and HPC) and no unified methodology for measurements or a scale up strategy.
- There is a need for a cross-disciplinary cooperation between sport organizations and refugee related organizations. There should be an emphasis in creating a strong and trustworthy networking among sport clubs, sport federations and refugee related organizations.
- Girls and women immigrants experience different barriers than boys and men when it comes to being involved in sport.
- Immigrants and people with disabilities experience barriers that seem to be related to the gender order in society at large, or as the study participants expressed: it is related to "culture".
- There is a lot of knowledge and experience available throughout Europe on involving athletes with a range of disabilities however, needs, beliefs and endeavors for further improvement are still present.
- There is a need for a strong cooperation and networking between different stakeholders that could create databases and coordination tools to connect relevant organizations
- "Role Models", such as Paralympians or famous athletes who have been refugees in the past can be used as an effective practice to reach DYD. DYDs often are depicted in a stereotyped or victimized way that does not reflect their real potential and does not valorise the incredible drive that sports can have in order to improve quality of life of these people, as well as their possibility to enrich the sports environment itself, as well as our social and cultural environments.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PARTNERSHIP

The baseline gives a first overall picture at the beginning of STEADY action through three main tools: a data and statistics survey, focus group, case studies collection.

It serves as an instrument that helps STEADY partners understand the current status of participation & exclusion of Displaced Youth with Disabilities in European Sport.

To address the barriers and the lack of reliable data, the Baseline Study identifies opportunities for partners to consider and address in the delivery of STEADY project, both within their national context and jointly as a partnership.

