

Inclusion of Refugees in Norwegian Football Clubs

Straume, Solveig¹; Bachmann, Kari² and Skrove, Guri K.²

1: Molde University College, Norway; 2: Møreforsking Molde AS
solveig.straume@himolde.no

Aim

During the course of the last decade we have witnessed an ongoing trend where sport in general, and football specifically, has increasingly been recognised as a means for promoting social inclusion (i.e. Rich, Misener, and Dubeau 2015, Tacon 2007). In Europe, this became particularly evident subsequent to the migrant crisis, which reached a peak in 2015.

Consequently, initiatives were taken from organised sport all over Europe that aimed at enhancing social integration of refugees through sport. In Norway, the Football Association of Norway (NFF) were amongst the voluntary organisations that were granted public funds to address the issue of integrating refugees through football. This study address challenges and opportunities, as well as investigates the way Norwegian football clubs (FCs) are cooperating with relevant stakeholders in and around the community in including refugees into football. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to offer empirical insight, not on *whether*, but *how* refugee inclusion works in voluntary sport organisations.

Theoretical Background

Research on sport and refugee inclusion suggest that sport activities provide an opportunity to facilitate the integration of refugees in that it promotes and maintains intercultural contact between refugees and locals (Piałkowska, Perényi and Elmose-Østerlund, 2017). However, research also demonstrates that newcomers are typically less involved in sport and physical activity than the general population (Rich, Misener and Dubeau 2015). In Norway, similar tendencies are revealed, showing that the minority population is significantly less involved in sport than the majority population and thus demonstrating that more knowledge is needed about strategies for inclusion in sport (Friberg & Gautun 2007, Walseth 2011). Further, voluntary FCs are “communities of interests” whose primary mandate is to serve the interests of their members. Normally the members’ common goals are sport related. Hence, the objective of tackling specific social dilemmas, such as refugee integration, is usually not an immediate objective of the FC, its members and volunteers. The paper explores public expectations of the FCs role as facilitator for refugee inclusion, and how FCs deals with this role in practice.

Research Method

In this study, we utilized a multiple case study methodology and employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data. First, data were gathered through semi structured in-depth interviews (N=41) with various stakeholders from three different (football) regions (cases). Subsequently, we identified informants through snowball and purposive sampling. The informants included representatives from football clubs, refugee reception centres and/or public refugee services, regional football federations, regional sport confederations, municipality representatives, schools, NFF and voluntary organisations. Four different interview guides containing five focus areas were developed, allowing flexibility in regards to the informant. In the analysis, Malterud’s (2012) systematic text condensation was applied. We studied the interviews to get an overview of the data material and to identify preliminary themes. Thereafter, we discussed the preliminary themes before identifying meaning units that were further classified into themes. In subsequent meetings, the

research group discussed the coding, re-evaluated the original themes and identified illustrative quotations.

Based on the findings from the qualitative interviews, an online survey (Questback) was distributed to Norwegian FCs (N=279), requesting data regarding the clubs formal systems of refugee integration, funding of refugee inclusion projects, experiences in working with cooperating partners as well as best practices. The survey was anonymous, and Excel was utilised to analyse and present the data.

Results and Implications

Results indicate that generally, the FCs in our study seem to understand, accept and agree with the expectations provided by the surroundings that they through being voluntary organisations have particular opportunities and therefore responsibilities in focussing on integration of refugees through football. However, the FCs reveal that there are several challenges concerning the inclusion of refugees into Norwegian football. These are in particular related to language and communication barriers as well as cultural differences, gender barriers and economy. The challenges highly include refugee parents, and thus the involvement of this group is considered crucial in order to make inclusion work.

Each Norwegian football region and each FC are different in terms of size, resources and even challenges. It is therefore important to emphasise that working with inclusion may take many forms and that one size does not fit all. However, a generic result from both the qualitative and the quantitative data material is that a broad, systematic club-driven approach (as opposed to an approach driven by individuals) is important for the inclusion of refugees into Norwegian football. To address some of the challenges related to refugee inclusion in football, the “successful” clubs thus work systematically on a club level and in close cooperation with other stakeholders in the community.

The findings of the study increase our understanding of sports organisations involvement in the integration of refugees into football, and particularly how Norwegian (and European) football may cooperate with different stakeholders to reach the goal of *Football for All*.

References

- Friberg J. H., & Gautun H. (2007). *Inkludering av etniske minoriteter i frivillige organisasjoner og fotballag for barn og ungdom i Oslo*. [Inclusion of ethnic minorities in voluntary organisations and football clubs for children and youth in Oslo]. Oslo: Fafo, 2007:16.
- Malterud, K. (2012). "Systematic text condensation: A strategy for qualitative analysis" *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health* 40:795-805.
- Piątkowska, M., Perényi, S., & Elmoose-Østerlund, K. (2017). *Promoting social integration and volunteering in sports clubs. Lessons from practice*. Odense: University of Southern Denmark.
- Rich, K. A., Misener, L., & Dubeau, D. (2015). "“Community Cup, We Are a Big Family”": Examining Social Inclusion and Acculturation of Newcomers to Canada through a Participatory Sport Event." *Social Inclusion* 3 (3):129-141.
- Tacon, Richard. (2007). "Football and social inclusion: Evaluating social policy." *Managing Leisure* 12 (1): 1-23. doi: 10.1080/13606710601056422.
- Walseth, K. (2011). “Minoritetsjenter i idretten – Status og utfordringer”. In: Hanstad D.V., Breivik, G., Sisjord, M.K. and Skaset, H.B. *Norsk idrett. Indre spenning og ytre press*. (355–369). Oslo: Akilles.