

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN SPORTS EDUCATION ANTI RACISM WORK

During the second world war and up to the 1970s, Finland was outside the migration flows in the world, and even those in Europe. Immigration to Finland began to grow in the early years of the nineties. It is estimated that in 2008 around 28,100 people moved to Finland. This is the largest number we had seen since our independence. We can safely assume that immigration will continue to grow: according to estimates, some 300,000 or 400,000 people will move to Finland during the next two decades.

Finland has made preparations for receiving immigrants. This is seen in our legislation, as an integrated theme in the strategies of the Government and various ministries, as well as in the colourful array of people in our streets.

The set of duties the Ministry of Education has in regard of immigration policy is extensive. Our Ministry is responsible for their basic education, vocational training, higher education and adult education. The Ministry is also charged with supporting immigrant cultures and ensuring that everybody has equal access to culture. We take care of matters relating to sport and physical activity and young people. The Ministry of Education has a key role in promoting good ethnic relations and ethnic equality.

In the sector of the Ministry of Education, the focus in immigrant policy action is on fostering integration. This also applies to the field of sports and physical activity. The present Government has issued a resolution outlining policy for promoting sports and physical activity. Included in it is a development programme for advancing the integration of people from immigrant backgrounds through sports and physical activity. The programme will be drawn up and implemented in collaboration with the education and culture sectors.

These current measures by no means imply that this work had not been done before. Multiculturalism and immigration policy started to get substance in sport policy as early as the mid 1990s. At that time, the work gained momentum from various actions and campaigns, such as the Council of Europe drive "All different, all equal" and many others.

Supported by the Ministry of Education, the Finnish Sport Federation started to finance local and regional projects promoting tolerance through sports. In addition, two organisations were established to specifically promote immigrant sports: FIMU (Finnish Multicultural Sports Federation) and LIIKKUKAA! (which translates into English as MOVE! and uses culture and sports to advance social inclusion, intercultural respect and equal sports opportunities).

Sports and physical activity offer a brilliant vehicle for integration. People from different backgrounds can engage in sports together even if they lack a common language. Sport is a platform for spontaneous encounters between people, thereby facilitating closer contacts and interaction. It helps cast off unnecessary prejudices and provides a channel for immigrants to create important social networks in support of their everyday life.

The most widely used sports language today is the language of football: the wall pass has the same meaning whatever the language. And the Finnish Football Association has indeed made good use of this integration tool at its disposal. The Association is also aware that the same racist phenomena exist in football as anywhere in society. We cannot make them disappear by hiding our heads in the sand. We have to tackle them head on. Let me quote the words of the Red Cross representative who

presented the Football Association with the Finnish Red Cross award 2009 for their fair play and anti-racism work. "The Finnish Football Association has not shunned taking up difficult issues, as their *Rasisti on reppana* campaign shows." Today's seminar is another indication of the desire of the Football Association to work for a multicultural Finland. In this action, it can rely on the backing of its international umbrella organisation UEFA.

In its Strategy 2020, the Ministry of Education boldly declares that its aim is to take Finland to the spearhead of knowledge, participation and creativity in the world. In this, immigrants have a key role to play, be it about sports and physical activity, youth work or any other aspect of culture.

We who work within the field of sports and physical activity must rethink our actions and work — not by renouncing old things proven to be good, but by seeking new creative solutions and drawing on the different backgrounds and experiences of our immigrants.

My vision is a Finland devoid of all discrimination. A Finland where immigrants are engaged in societal, economic, political, cultural and other social life side by side with their fellow Finns and working on the same principles. What this requires is for you, me and all of us to pull together in a concerted effort.

It is my pleasure, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, to wish every success to the Finnish Football Association and the whole sports field in their work for a multicultural Finland brimming with the joy of sport.