

# Sport for Development

Promoting a healthy lifestyle and peaceful coexistence for internally displaced persons, refugees and local communities

## Challenge

Since the onset of the Syrian crisis and the advance of the so-called 'Islamic State', approximately one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 250,000 Syrians have sought refuge in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan in northern Iraq. 60 percent of these refugees are living within host communities while 40 percent are accommodated in camps. In some cities, such as Dohuk, the population has doubled since 2011. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) is reaching its limits in providing basic services for this huge number of mostly impoverished people as well as all other population groups. They should additionally be provided with psychosocial support, education and leisure activities. Traumatized children and young people, in particular, require professional guidance and support. Providing such services is linked to enormous challenges: local governments and schools are overburdened and teachers are very often already working in double shifts. Within the existing education system, but also beyond, there is hardly any access to sport activities.

## How We Work

Whether it is football, basketball, climbing, taekwondo or dancing – sport strengthens the body, while at the same time promoting interpersonal communication and cooperation among team members. German development cooperation is harnessing this aspect to promote stability and social cohesion with a regional project in Jordan and Iraq.

On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH supports introducing sports activities into camps for internally displaced persons and Syrian refugees and host communities in northern Iraq. By playing sports together, young people between 8 and 24 years of age

can have the opportunity to experience and gain many of the values that over time have become neglected as a result of war and displacement: respect for others, fairness, self-confidence and belonging to a community.

The project has started its work in Jordan in 2016 by training local experts to identify and exploit the potential of sport for children's development. The same successful approach is being used in Iraq: social workers, teaching staff and trainers - some of them with a migration background of their own - learn how to communicate social skills and values through sport and become role models for the younger generation.

Project Name	Exchange, Education and Conflict Transformation through Sport for Development
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project Region	Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaimaniyah (planned: Anbar, Nineveh)
National Partner	Ministry of Planning, Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Duration	06/2018 – 06/2024

Together with local and international partners and with support from the German Football Association (DFB), the project conducts training courses at schools, youth centres and child friendly spaces in IDP camps. The qualified and well-equipped coaches conduct regular sport and life skill sessions for children and youth, receive individual coaching on and off the pitch by qualified supervisors and participate in ongoing further education to learn how to plan and conduct sport events. The focus of all these activities is on violence prevention, social cohesion and psychosocial wellbeing.

The University of Dohuk supports the project with expertise for the development of customised coaching material.



Photo left: Children of a mixed team playing a warm-up game at Bersive IDP Camp, Dohuk governorate.

Photo right: Girls are winning a tournament in Sulaimaniyah with their school team.

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*Photo left: Environmental awareness as part of a football session.*

*Photo right: University students prepare a training session.*

## The benefits

The focus of the project is on the physical and mental growth and rehabilitation of children and young people. By adapting sports activities that are based on scientifically acknowledged pedagogical methods, the project can also integrate disadvantaged and disabled young people – those who are commonly regarded as having little chance of success in life. It also encourages girls and young women to get involved. In a region with traditionally little access to sports activities for girls, involvement can open a way to greater self-determination. Group sport builds many bridges: it provides opportunities for children and young people from all parts of the population to meet, get to know each other, establish friendships and build hope. In doing so, sport helps to prevent conflict and violence.

## Impact

Since the start of the project activities in Northern Iraq in May 2018, over 270 teachers, community workers and trainers of all genders, ages, religious and ethnical backgrounds have been qualified. The same applies for the benefitting children and youth: over 2,500 young people from diverse backgrounds have already participated in regular sport and life skills sessions with a strong focus on psycho-social wellbeing in Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaimaniyah and Halabja governorates as well as in Mosul and Baghdad. More than one third of the participants is female and the number is rising.

## Story from the field

Payman is the coach of the girls' team in Semel Youth Center near Dohuk. Her team consists of 24 girls – some from the local community, some who have fled IS in Nineveh, others escaped the war in Syria and still others have migrated with their families from Turkey decades ago. Christian, Muslim and Yazidi girls share one football pitch. The beginning wasn't easy, as the coach recalls. It took her weeks of conducting training sessions, a lot of patience, talking and listening until the team started growing together. 'Now, there wouldn't be a way to tell who belongs to which religion. They love and respect each other, and I can feel their happiness when they step on the pitch.'

Twice a week, girls, and boys from IDP camps in Zakho are marching through the camps, picking up each other to jointly reach the Child Friendly Space at which their football and life skills session takes place. For many girls it was the first time to kick the ball – and the first time to play the game with boys. The coaching pairs consisting of one male and one female trainer learned how to design trainings sessions for mixed gender groups and how to prevent and react to gender stereotypes on and off the pitch. 'It has taken a few months until a carefree and supportive social interaction was established. We see the girls have grown in self-confidence and how boys have improved their communication skills and their empathy towards others' recall coach Soz and coach Amer.

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