

Evaluation Study Together in Sport project

by HIGGS

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Limitations

The purpose of this evaluation study is to provide information in regard to the implementation of the “Together in Sport” project funded by the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

The project is implemented by the German Olympic Sports Confederation (Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund, DOSB) in cooperation with the Hellenic Olympic Committee (HOC) and METAdrasi with the collaboration of local municipalities in Greece.

The evaluation study was prepared and conducted by the team of the HIGGS Social Impact Assessment Measurement Service to measure and depict the social impact of the “Together in Sport” project. It was based on information and data provided by METAdrasi on primary data collected through satisfaction questionnaires via the interview process to interested parties.

The information provided by METAdrasi has not been independently confirmed by HIGGS team in any way.

HIGGS team treats the data, assumptions or estimates provided by METAdrasi as accurate. It is clarified that HIGGS team proceeded to an independent primary research regarding the presentation of the findings of questionnaires and interviews.

This study is not or should not be considered as a promise or binding provision for the future impact of the “Together in Sport” project. The exploitation of this study by any party and any decisions based thereon are the sole responsibility of those who will use this study. Each recipient should make their own estimates about the “Together in Sport” project and its future course.

HIGGS team bears no liability or responsibility of any kind with regard to this study and cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions that may result from the use of the analysis presented herein.

The present Evaluation Study was developed in order to assess the impact of the “Together in Sport” project in the area of Ioannina, explore the successes and challenges experienced and evaluate the results achieved during its 21-month duration.

The initial section of the study lays emphasis on the methodology and tools used for the evaluation process. The evaluation was based on a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data and methods to inform the evidence-based conclusions, inferences and recommendations. The second section of the assessment focuses on the main findings emerged by the key findings of Social Impact Assessment (SIA).

It is reckoned that the “Together in Sport” project in the specific area has achieved its objectives to a significant extent although some minor challenges occurred. Some of the main findings are presented below:

- ❖ The number of children benefiting from the project was consistently significant as a percentage of total population.
- ❖ Project’s impact proved positive for asylum seeking children in terms of developing strong relationships with peers and the feeling of belonging.
- ❖ In many occasions the sports activities operated as significant boosters of feelings of regularity, while also boosting morale and happiness/calmness feelings across the main stakeholders: refugee children, parents, camps’ personnel.
- ❖ The outbreak of the pandemic Covid- 19 has definitely impacted the project activities, as some activities were postponed.
- ❖ The project’s dissemination activities were conducted in a systematic way and at certain occasions were rather robust – in others they served their main purpose but could have been further enhanced.
- ❖ The coordination and collaboration among the municipality, the two Open Facilities of Temporary Reception, METAdrasi and other stakeholders (football associations, SOS Villages, etc) were excellent in terms of project execution.
- ❖ The project could further benefit from a more structured approach of connecting to other local stakeholders and sports associations.
- ❖ Local society was at points very supportive to the project and participated at large to some events. Nevertheless, even further interaction between refugee children and locals could be achieved.

The project

The project's aim is to enable participation in sporting and other recreational activities for asylum seeking children in every stage of the asylum procedure in order to promote meaningful recreational activities and to strengthen reception structures in the participating municipalities.

Using sports as the core component of the project, the project initial goal is to give the chance to asylum seeking children and youngsters to get in touch and learn more about organized sports and to develop relationships through sports with their peers from the local communities. The project is offered free of charge and is addressed to asylum seeking children and youngsters aged 7-17 and their peers from local communities. In addition, the support of the cooperating municipalities was important for the project to succeed its goals.

Specifically, the project "Together in Sport" aims to:

- ❖ Cultivate and promote values like mutual respect, team spirit and intercultural tolerance.
- ❖ Familiarize the participants with the values of Olympic education.
- ❖ Improve the everyday life of asylum seeking children/youngsters and to enhance their sense of belonging.
- ❖ Strengthen the existing structures and the initiatives regarding the reception and the care especially of unaccompanied minors at local level.
- ❖ Promote new communication channels through sports, in order to enable the peaceful coexistence among children and youngsters coming from different cultural backgrounds.
- ❖ Reduce the reservations of local communities towards asylum seekers and improve and strengthen social cohesion.

The methodology

The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) study of the “Together in Sport” captures qualitative and quantitative data. The methodology consisted of three key phases. In the first stage of the study, a kick-off meeting with the core team of METAdrasi and an interview with the Project Manager (PM) of the organization was conducted in order to gather initial opinions and feedback about the scope and the aims of the project. During this phase a stakeholder analysis was prepared and discussed with METAdrasi team in order to determine the interested parties which were to be involved in the process. Specifically, the research focused on the following stakeholders:

- **Beneficiaries of the project**
- **Project partners** (coaches, representatives of municipalities, representatives of sports facilities)
- **Team members of METAdrasi**



In the second phase, satisfaction questionnaires were created for each stakeholder group and interviews were conducted with stakeholders who directly or indirectly were impacted from the implementation of the project in order to collect their views, opinions and experiences gained through their participation. In particular, HIGGS, with the support of the leader partner, organized interviews either in person or via video/tele conference in order to assess the involvement of the stakeholders and enlighten aspects of the project.



TiS in Ioannina

Ioannina was one of the three cities in Greece in which “Together in Sport” was implemented. Overall, a dedicated local team (2 full time employees + various sports coaches) supported by the coordination team based in Athens led to a very successful project implementation.

During the project implementation the following outputs were achieved:

- ✓ Number of beneficiaries: 543
- ✓ Number of participants in regular training activities (sports): 205
- ✓ Number of participants in recreational activities: 444
- ✓ Number of recreational activities and events organized: 15
- ✓ Number of partners (Municipalities, Coaches, Sports Clubs): 18

In total the targeted beneficiaries participated in **4** sports (with emphasis in football and wrestling), in 18 different groups. Furthermore, most children participated in a total of **15** events throughout the project’s implementation.

These were as follows (highlighted in green the sports related events):

Football Game PAS GIANNINA

Gym Park Event

Joint Practice TAE - KWONDO

Wrestling

Volley Match

Friendly Football Game

Track Event

Wax Museum

Biking at Ioannina Lake

Silverware Museum

Papagianni Museum

Perama Cave

Outdoor Activities (Voutsaras)

As highlighted by the interviews, though no official data could be provided, a significant number of local children were interacting with the Facilities’ children. For example during the track trainings sessions several local children would also be present with their own teams. Likewise, during the common excursion with SOS Children’s Villages the majority of participants were of local origins.

Findings of Impact Assessment

The representative of the HIGGS team visited the area of Ioannina in the 31st of August and the 1st and 2nd of September in order to meet the interested parties involved in the project. The site visit included interviews and questionnaire-based research aimed at:

1. METAdrasi local team personnel (2 persons)
2. Representative of the Municipality of Ioannina (1 person)
3. Representative of the Prefecture of Ipeiros (1 person)
4. Representative of a football association that also acted as football coach of the refugee children team (1 person)
5. The wrestling coach (1 person)
6. The heads of the two local Open Facilities of Temporary Reception (2 persons)
7. Refugee children from the two camps (18 persons) with the following characteristics: 8 from Katsikas Camp and 10 from Agia Eleni one. 8 out of 18 were boys and the rest were girls. 6 children were below the age of 10, while the oldest one was 13 years old.

*Unfortunately it was not possible to conduct structured interviews with children's parents.

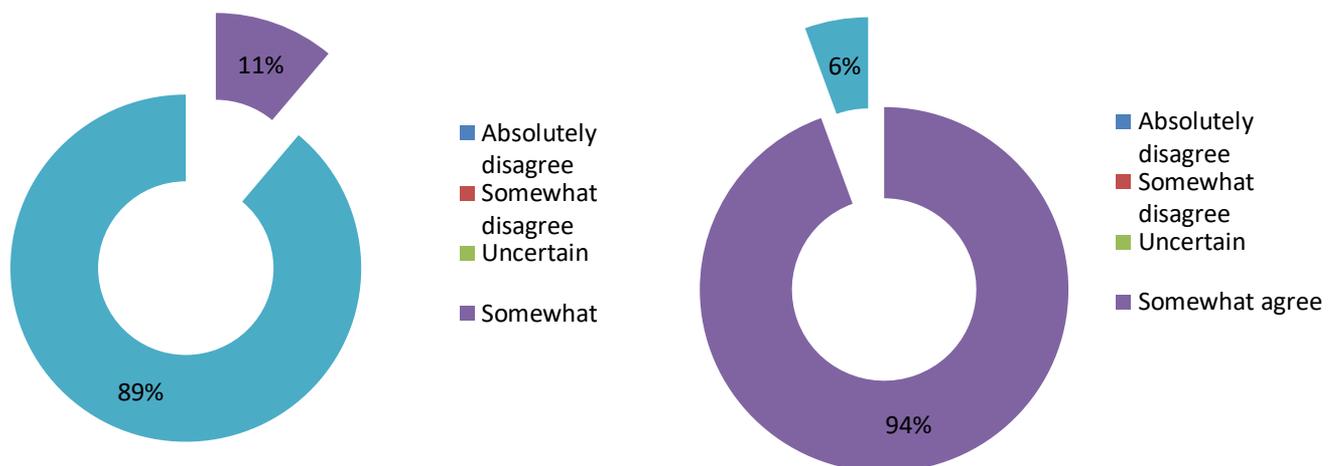
Regarding the interviews with the children, prior consent from their guardians was provided while the interviews were facilitated by interpreters provided by either the Open Facility management team or METAdrasi.

The Social Impact Assessment focused on the following key aspects of the project:

Beneficiaries

All children interviewed were **very positive** about the project. They reported **sports knowledge acquisition** to a great extent, with older kids being more strongly positive towards transfer of know-how. Between the two prevailing sports (football and wrestling) interviewed children highlighted football as the one for which they learned more techniques. Nevertheless, wrestling courses also seem to had a very positive result in terms of knowledge acquisition: according to the wrestling coach, 3 out of the 18 older children (coming from the third camp in the area of Ioannina) already had some experience in wrestling and he was able to work with the whole group more intensively – unfortunately the interviewer could not reach out to these children for a deeper view on the subject matter due to time and location restrictions.

Children were asked on their opinion on what level they felt that the different events (sports versus recreational events) were helpful to them in various fields (feeling of happiness, feeling of inclusion, interest, etc). 100% of the sample replied that they either somewhat or absolutely agree on the relevant statements. A small difference was noticed between sports activities and recreational activities, with the latter being a bit less highly graded – qualitative data indicate that this is much related to the fact that other projects offered to children also include recreational activities but not sports.



Nevertheless, during the interviews **several children mentioned that they had more interaction with local children in the recreational activities** than the sports activities – especially the ones related to daily sports trainings.

Other findings include:

- ❖ All beneficiaries participated both in regular training activities and in recreational events during the project implementation.
- ❖ All children were very happy and satisfied with the sports trainings hours and how regular those were.
- ❖ All participants admitted that during the games with other peers, **there were no disagreements or other negative issues evolving as they prioritized the fact that they had the chance to meet and discuss** with them.
- ❖ All beneficiaries strongly agreed that through the project, and especially the various special events, **they had the chance to meet other peers of local origins**. Nevertheless, in a more qualitative analysis some children of the sample stated that “we met local children but we eventually did not make Greek friends” – a statement potentially based on the fact that the interaction in some occasions was brief.
- ❖ Moreover, all revealed that the project **offered them the opportunity to learn and participate in sport activities that they did not have knowledge of in the past**.
- ❖ Younger children were also fascinated by the wrestling courses, as the courses were enhanced with a cultural dimension: songs from their home countries as well as from Greece were interchanged at various intervals.
- ❖ All of them confessed that through their participation in the “Together in Sport” project they came to **feel happier as they learned new things and exercised themselves**.
- ❖ All children emphatically requested the project to be continued for the next year.

Overall, children interviewed highlighted that it was the first time that they would participate in something equivalent. A strong preference on sports courses and events was noted; on the one hand courses had a good frequency while on the other recreational activities were also offered by other stakeholders. Nevertheless, most children mentioned that they had also good interactions with local children during recreational activities – a 64% of them mentioned one of the last relevant activities as their favourite one, in which they used the bus in which also children from SOS Children’s Villages. **Another benefit of all activities was that the children would exit the facility in which they spend a tremendous part of their time daily** – this was highlighted even in Agia Eleni in which children have easier access to local public schools and thus were exiting the facility every week day.

Partners

HIGGS team visited 6 persons from various partners (representatives from the municipality and of the Prefecture, and the Heads of the Open Facilities of Temporary Reception) in order to assess the impact of the project from their perspective.

All responders (100%) agreed that the collaboration and communication with both the local team of METAdrasi and the coordinators in Athens was excellent. People of METAdrasi were described as positive, ready to hear their needs and ideas and communicate appropriately what was expected from them in the project. During the interview process, all partners revealed that their tasks and their role regarding the implementation of the project had been discussed and agreed from the launch of the project.

Of course, intensity of participation in the project differs, with representatives of local authorities being less involved than others, like the Heads of the Open Facilities or the coaches. Nevertheless, when asked, all interviewees confirmed that they took part in all sports events – 80% highlighting how positive was the football tournament. In two cases they brought also their children with them, thus supporting one of the aims of TiS, i.e. enhanced interaction with locals.

Regarding their satisfaction level, 100% felt completely satisfied by their role in the project, the same percentage also being overall satisfied with the project itself.

Some additional findings include:

- ❖ None of the partners mentioned that they gained valuable knowledge about other cultures. They all stated that they had past experiences or an overall understanding of people with migrant background, some attributing this to a certain multicultural characteristic of the region. Nevertheless, with the exemption of coaches, they found it somewhat important that **they witnessed the power of sports** – one interviewee mentioning that “it is amazing how sports unite us, when entering the court; children would not differentiate other children based on their origins”.
- ❖ **All partners stated that their engagement with the project brought on emotions of happiness and contribution to a good cause.** All of them felt happy with their participation in the project as they recognise that the needs for asylum seeking children are significant and they can offer something from their side – as one of the coaches and head of a sports association interviewed stated “we are always willing to support and join initiatives

with positive social impact”.

- ❖ When asked whether the issue of culture or language was an issue for their role in the project they **all agreed that no such issue was raised to the level of affecting their role in the project, with 60% impulsively stating the “sports unites us all”**.
- ❖ All interviewees agreed that the **project had a positive impact on the local community**. 50% of them recognised a significant effect while the other half of the sample declared that there were definitely some positive effects. It is important to highlight that the latter group was also referring to the extent of knowledge on the local community about the project and its core activities: though there were several occasions of interactions between local population and children from the Open Facilities, these were mostly confined to the specific groups of locals invited and being aware of project’s initiatives (i.e. local children of football associations that took part in the football tournament, children from SOS Children’s Villages that took part in some recreational activities, etc).
- ❖ In relation to the information and coordination received by the lead partner, **100% of the partners interviewed strongly agreed that there was full information and coordination**. It needs to be highlighted that two interviewees spontaneously mentioned the excellent collaboration with the Project Coordinator.
- ❖ According to partners, **a great percentage of the local population was informed** about the project. The municipality and the prefecture utilized their own channels for reaching out to the local population. Likewise, more specialized information dissemination was conducted by coaches and representatives of sports associations as well as of other associations like the club of families with three children. Nevertheless, all partners highlighted that they are willing to do more if they are asked or consulted by METAdrasi.

The representatives of the two Facilities highlighted that TiS was a great project that also showed the way on how they can cooperate with other stakeholders for enhancing the children’s (or the Facilities’ in general) weekly projects.

It is worth mentioning one additional positive impact stated by children’s parents and the Heads of the two Open Facilities of Temporary Reception. They all mentioned that **because children regularly exit the Facility for participating in the sports courses the project functions as a valuable mechanism for calmness in the Facility**. On the one hand the Facilities employees can do their work more easily and uninterrupted and the same is true for parents. Likewise, sports activities act as valuable tools for children to direct their energy into something both fun and physically beneficial to them, leading to a more calm presence within the Facilities upon their return. The latter effect was more strongly highlighted in one of the Facilities in which cases of children’s’ misbehave were noticeable.

All partners (100%) strongly agreed that the project was all worth it and that they would join such a project again.

None had taken part in a similar project (i.e. a sports-focused project) before and thus this experience was revealing of the benefits of sports. Even the two coaches interviewed were amazed with the easiness of communicating with non-Greek children and with the inclusiveness witnessed during blended tournaments and events.

Team members

HIGGS representative interviewed the two team members in the city of Ioannina on September 1st. Moreover, several observations were made during the next day, when the two team members facilitated HIGGS representative's visits to the two Facilities. Both team members were rather new employees of METAdrasi, having started working on the project during June and July 2022. Nevertheless, they were fully aware of the history behind the project and its past successes (and weaknesses). From the two team members, one had significant prior experience with the refugee sector while the other had a minor one – nevertheless, he is involved in sports so he felt connected with the project from the start.

100% of the team members stated that **the tasks were completely clarified** by the Project Manager (PM) of the project. They both reported a structured approach on being inducted to the project, allowing a good understanding of expected outputs and outcomes to be achieved. Both interviewees stated that they were completely satisfied with their tasks, responsibilities and their role concerning the.

- ❖ All interviewees absolute agreed that **the information received about the project was clear and complete** and that there was full coordination by the PM.
- ❖ Both team members stated that from their participation in the project, **they gained valuable knowledge about other cultures and refugee children in particular**. Interestingly even the one team member with the significant experience in the field mentioned that through this project he felt closer to the refugee community than even before. The less experienced one felt that the project is very instructive to him on how sports can act as a significant facilitator of intercultural interactions. As he stated “I have seen negative reactions of locals towards refugees – it is amazing that through sports negative stances are minimized.
- ❖ **All interviewees strongly agreed that their engagement with the project, brought on them emotions of happiness and contribution**. One mentioned: “it is the best job I ever had!”.
- ❖ All team members mentioned that the **quality of the communication among the team was very effective**. They highly praised the regular contacts with Athens coordination team while also found beneficial the discussions with the Kavala team.



❖ **All team members (100%) strongly believe that the project is extremely beneficial for the target population.**

According to observations made by HIGGS representative the two METAdrasi Ioannina team members enjoyed the trust of the Facilities personnel. Moreover, many children of the Facilities approached them when they entered the Facility with a very joyful stance – some even asking when the training courses will start again. Both of them seemed to know most of the children and call them by their names, thus projecting a sense of inclusiveness and of “community”.

Finally, both team members highlighted the willingness to continue working in the project.

Recommendations & Take-aways

“Together in Sport” project in Ioannina was very successful, even if the pandemic disruption is taken into consideration.

The following list presents some take-aways and recommendations derived from the various interviews and project data analysis:

- ❖ **The coordination procedures among Ioannina and Athens team were very efficient.** The project implementation could be somewhat further enhanced if a few more coordination meetings and exchanges on views on project implementation are organized between the different sites (Ioannina, Kavala, Athens).
- ❖ The project communication activities mainly utilized a **hubs and spokes system**: METAdrasi or other project partners would contact associations or groups of people for passing on specific messages. This system has been rated as very beneficial for reaching out specialized groups. Nevertheless, the project could benefit further through wider communications activities targeting the whole local population. To that end, interviews found local authorities (municipality and prefecture) ready to do more.
- ❖ An addition to the communication plan could include on-site visits and outreach within the schools in the region, ideally during the first month of schools’ operation in order to disseminate further the project.
- ❖ The variety of sports activities could be enhanced with the addition of another sport – swimming or volleyball were highlighted as good potential additions, though some interviewees stressed the safety issues related to swimming.
- ❖ Regarding the sports trainings the efforts to render them blended ones (i.e. participation of both locals and refugees in the same team) should be maintained.
- ❖ Prior to the sports tournaments it is recommended that some joint trainings among different teams are organized, thus further enhancing intercultural interactions.
- ❖ Though there are some plans for creating sports facilities within the Facilities, the project should aim maintaining its activities being an opportunity for children exiting the premises.
- ❖ The give-away of project’s shirts or sports medals were highlighted as features that created significant pleasure to the children, enhanced project’s visibility and connected locals with refugees.
- ❖ Regarding the younger children some add-on feature could be developed for involving parents of both groups.