

# WHAT CAN SPORT ACHIEVE?

## Final score from a research project on immigrant integration

By Jan Schwenkenbecher

**Sport, it's always said, is one of the greatest drivers of integration. That can indeed be true if the baseline is right. In the "InBewegung" ("Keep Moving") project, researchers from Goethe University studied what this baseline looks like and what sports clubs require for setting up integration programmes.**

In 2020, 1,186,702 people moved to Germany from abroad. Immigration peaked in 2015, with 2,136,954 people. In the past 30 years, the annual figure has always exceeded 660,000. Only in two of those 30 years did more people leave Germany than arrived. Germany, an immigration country.

Frankfurt. They conducted surveys, used participant observation and held interviews with hundreds of club managers and members as well as non-members and refugees.

And what's the conclusion now that the project has just ended? Is Sportkreis Frankfurt good at integration? Michael Fingerle, professor of educational sciences, head of the Diagnostics and Evaluation Department at the Institute of Special Education at Goethe University and one of the "InBewegung" project leaders, responds with a loud laugh. A big question, too big a question. "It's a question that you can't answer with 'Yes' or 'No'," says Fingerle. But he also says: "Sport can

gration," he says, "so she launched a sports programme for refugee minors." Soon, however, it didn't stop at the one training session per week. She built up contacts and relationships with the children and gradually became their go-between with German society. The children turned to her with questions about residence permits or accommodation, and they phoned her at night when they weren't feeling good. "You can't demand something like that of people," Fingerle says, "you can just be jolly glad if you find someone now and again who'll oblige."

To offer more, the clubs would need many more such individuals, that is, more volunteers. From their findings, Fingerle and his colleagues have derived three recommendations as to how Sportkreis Frankfurt as an umbrella organisation could help:

- It could assist club managers with their work.
- Together with the relevant institutions in the City of Frankfurt, it could commit to developing municipal integration management and a strategy to encourage voluntary work.
- It could implement activities aimed at securing resources, which it could then use to support individual clubs in their integration efforts.



### ABOUT MICHAEL FINGERLE

**Professor Michael Fingerle**, born in 1962, studied psychology and graduated in 1991. He worked as a research associate at the universities of Mannheim, Leipzig and Halle and earned his PhD at the University of Jena. He was appointed as professor at the Institute of Special Education (Faculty 04, Educational Sciences) at Goethe University in 2004.

[m.fingerle@em.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:m.fingerle@em.uni-frankfurt.de)

In light of this, giving newcomers sufficient opportunities to come into contact with the local population and make new friends would seem all the more important. And scarcely anything is considered a more suitable springboard for integration than sport. When it comes to football, boxing, swimming, running, cycling or bowling, everyone is on a level playing field, and you can get along just fine without mastering the lingo. But is it really that simple? Come to Germany and join a sports club – no sweat?

### Sport can help

Over the past two years, researchers from Goethe University and the University of Hildesheim have been looking for answers to this question in the "InBewegung" project funded by Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The researchers approached Sportkreis Frankfurt, the umbrella organisation for over 400 sports clubs in

by all means help to foster integration. But whether it actually does so will always depend on the conditions on the ground, and by 'conditions' I mean above all resources." Resources, in this instance, are two things: money and people.

### Personal commitment

"As far as integration is concerned, Sportkreis Frankfurt already took up the gauntlet many, many years ago," says Fingerle. Nevertheless, it's not always easy, he says, because – for starters – clubs are independent, and you have no top-down access to them. "What's more, everything is down to volunteers," Fingerle says. "Often, just a handful of people do an awful lot. And you can't really go and say: 'Please can you do this or that as well'."

One particular case has stuck in Fingerle's mind. "We had a club with a very dedicated trainer who also wanted to do her bit for inte-

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### The author

Jan Schwenkenbecher (see page 37)  
[jan.schwenkenbecher@posteo.org](mailto:jan.schwenkenbecher@posteo.org)





Photo: Sportkreis Frankfurt/Mohamed El Hamdaoui

The photograph of the two young footballers was taken during "Frankfurter B6lzplatzliga F 43+", a project centring on Frankfurt's amateur football league. Through this project, Sportkreis Frankfurt encourages sport, physical exercise and social learning among adolescents and works together with child and youth welfare organisations as well as refugee housing associations, which all take part with their own teams.