

FARE Networking Conference

Football for Equality



CONFERENCE BRIEFING

I. Introduction

Football is not yet played on a Level Playing Field

Football is based on the ethos of the “level playing field” to guarantee equality of competition. What matters is the ability to play and not nationality, origin, religion or sexual orientation. This basic principle of equality becomes increasingly visible in the line-up of many professional football clubs and within European national teams, too. Today, 20% of all players in the UEFA Champions League are ethnic minorities.

Within their countries these players are often seen and act as powerful role-models and can help to develop an atmosphere of non-discrimination, respect for diversity and multiculturalism. But unfortunately racism and xenophobia still occur on a weekly basis in national and European football competitions. Racist abuse and slanders of players by other players, by football supporters inside and outside the stadiums, as well as the presence of far-right organisations, trying to infiltrate fan scenes, are still part of football. In several new EU member states racist abuses of black or Roma players, as well as anti-Semitic acts are still at a critical level. In addition, homophobic chants and symbols can be considered an integral part of football in several countries.

Alongside these open forms of discrimination, there is a whole host of more subtle types of racism usually termed institutionalized or structural racism. Examples include the systematic under-representation of migrants and minorities in football administration, management, coaching, as fans in stadiums and – in some countries – as players in professional leagues. These forms of racism and homophobia are hardly regarded as a problem to be tackled.

Challenging Stereotypes in Football

Open as well as hidden expressions of racism and homophobia are usually underpinned, sustained and nurtured by long standing prejudices, stereotypes and discourses.

Stereotypes about black players originating from colonialism include “they can’t play in the cold”, “they have attitude problems and are lazy”. Similar racial stereotyping does exist all over Europe: Turkish migrant players are said to be inclined towards aggression, in Eastern Europe Roma to prefer to play separated from mainstream society. Research (Baines and Patel, 1996) carried out in the 1990s in the UK found that over 90% of professional football club managers believe the myth that 'Asians can't play football'.

These common stereotypes, conscious or not conscious, pose a barrier for making full use of the expertise and knowledge of minority players as coaches or managers. They lead to discrimination and prevent people from playing an active and equal role in society. To combat racism and homophobia effectively one has to raise awareness and challenge these stereotypes.

Homophobia: Football’s Last Taboo?

Discrimination based on sexual orientation poses a big problem in sport and in football in particular. Performing professional sport and being a successful athlete while being gay are usually seen as a total contradiction. This kind of casual homophobia has traditionally permeated professional football throughout the administrative, coaching and playing levels of the game. Homophobia in football is carried by invisibility. On one hand there is not a single male player in the European professional

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leagues who is openly gay; on the other hand it is a common prejudice that female players are stigmatized as 'all lesbians'. European wide 'gay' has become a synonym for everything many fans dislike. One reason why players have not come out until now is because the structures of football are seen as not granting equal rights. The dominant norm is still centered around notions of (white) masculinity like toughness, comradeship, solidarity based on gender and working class virtues. Football will need to recognise lesbian and gay athletes and players and welcome them as part of the sport.

II. Project Outline “Football for Equality”

The conference “Football for Equality” (Vienna, 12-14 December 2009) is part of a new European FARE project carried out by various FARE partner organisations together with the European Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation (EGLSF). The “Football for Equality” project started in November 2009 and will last for 18 months. The main funding for the project comes from the “Fundamental Rights and Citizenship” programme of the European Commission, Directorate-General Justice, Freedom and Security.

The Football for Equality-project aims at:

- using the popularity and universality of football, as a unique entry point to raise awareness on racism and related intolerances (xenophobia, islamophobia, anti-Roma racism and anti-Semitism) and on homophobia.
- to address and link areas of combating racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism on the one hand and the fight against homophobia on the other hand.
- to promote and improve intercultural understanding and tolerance in particular among young people in the European Union.

Project Activities

1. Networking Conference “Football for Equality: Challenging racism and homophobia across Europe” (Vienna, 12-14 December 2009)

Responsible FARE partner: FairPlay-vidc

2. Sensitisation Workshops (4 events in France, Italy, Slovakia and Austria)

The interactive workshops will target football stakeholders (administrators, coaches, referees, players) so that they understand how stereotypes sustain racism and homophobia and how to challenge stereotypes

Responsible FARE partners: LICRA, UISP, Ludia Proti Rasizmu and FairPlay-vidc

3. Tool-kit for young People

Develop educational tools and materials across Europe such as short video films, brochures, hand-outs for teachers, reports, comics, interactive web-sites and make them available online.

Responsible FARE partner: FURD, Sheffield

5. Fan Conference Against Homophobia (spring 2010 in Berlin)

Follow-up to the conference “Football Against Homophobia” which was organised by EGLSF, FARE and the FC Barcelona Penya Barçelona de Gais i Lesbianes in February 2009 in Barcelona.

Responsible FARE partner: EGLSF

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6. Mondiali Antirazzisti in Casalecchio (July 2010)

Focus the involvement of gay and lesbian football teams as well as debates and films about homophobia.

Responsible FARE partner: Progetto Ultra

7. FARE Action Week against Racism and Discrimination in European Football (October 2010)

Particular support for initiatives fighting homophobic stereotypes in football.

Responsible FARE partner: FairPlay-vidc

8. Closing Expert Meeting in Bratislava (spring 2011)

Responsible FARE partner: Ludia Proti Rasizmu

Innovative Character of the Project

Football already proved to be an innovative learning field to tackle and overcome racist and homophobic stereotypes, it also has the potential to influence attitudes of young EU citizens towards fundamental rights. Despite the notion that sport can help to create mutual understanding and multicultural dialogue among different ethnic groups and minorities very few initiatives attempt to systematically harness the integrative potential of sport and football in particular on a European level.

The project will apply a multi-agency approach and attempts to bring communities together which in the public and media discourses are regarded as opposing each other, such as gay and lesbian rights activists and Muslim groups. The actions are designed to empower and support networks of gay and lesbian football fans. Furthermore the transnational, network approach of the FARE Action Week allows for cost-effective local initiatives and ownership while linking these decentralised grass-roots activities at a European level following the motto of unity in diversity. Finally, through the tool of football the project reaches out to young people, who are otherwise very difficult to be interested for the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship agenda.

European Dimension

In the 'White Paper on Sport' (2007), the European Commission states that "Sport involves all citizens regardless of gender, race, age, disability, religion and belief, sexual orientation and social or economic background. The Commission has repeatedly condemned all manifestations of racism and xenophobia, which are incompatible with the values of the EU." Acts of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and homophobia constitute severe violations of fundamental European values as outlined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (Article 21 Non-Discrimination).

The "Football for Equality" project will highlight the fact that equality is an essential and unalienable aspect of Citizenship. As citizens of the European Union we share the same fundamental rights and responsibilities. The respect of fundamental rights, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms are the very foundations of a unified Europe which evolved over the last 52 years.

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Expected Outcomes of the Project

- Greater understanding and awareness of discriminatory practices, discourses and stereotypes in football in particular the continued discrimination of gay and lesbians (homophobia) and the exclusion of migrants and ethnic minorities
- Stronger usage of football as a medium for promoting fundamental rights and intercultural dialogue
- Exchange of good practise, information and educational materials (cross-country wise and transnational)
- Enhanced networking and increased expertise among grass-root organisations to address and campaign against racism and homophobia on a local level for the full inclusion of migrant groups and LGBT people

Furthermore, the project works towards the mobilisation and future involvement of migrant communities, fan groups and gay and lesbian initiatives in actively combating homophobia and racism inside and outside stadiums, in particular in the FARE Action Week. This will contribute to long-term sustainability and ownership by targeted groups.

The involvement of major football governing bodies including UEFA, players' union, national FAs and professional clubs as well as networks such as FARE and FSI will contribute to mainstreaming the approach of using football as a tool to promote the fundamental rights & citizenship issue.

III. European FARE Networking Conference “Football for Equality”

As a kick-off for the project a pan-European conference is gathering a broad range of football stakeholders, anti-racism activists, fans and organisations representing discriminated groups and communities, drawn mainly from groups who previously participated in actions of the FARE network. The event offers the opportunity to analyze and discuss the issues of racism and related forms of intolerance and the long time neglected problem of homophobia in football.

The conference uses plenary sessions and interactive workshops to address the following themes:

- Identifying and challenging racist stereotypes and homophobic attitudes in football
- Fighting intolerance on cross-community
- Creating an inclusive European NGO network fighting intolerance and promoting intercultural understanding in football
- Fostering active citizenship through sport: Capacity building and promotion of fundamental rights

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