

Mateša Blanka*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7591-7484>

Kačer Bruno**

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1399-0107>

Rašetina Petar***

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1198-1969>

UDC: 796.011-054.73

Original scientific paper

DOI: 10.5937/ptp2602035M

Received on: April 15, 2026

Approved for publication on:

May 5, 2026

Pages: 35–54

THE ROLE OF SPORT IN THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS

ABSTRACT: The topic of this paper is highly relevant and of great importance. There is a large number of immigrants worldwide, particularly in Europe, and it is necessary to identify mechanisms that will ensure their successful adaptation to the society into which they have immigrated, both for their own benefit and psychological well-being and for the benefit of society as a whole, including legal certainty and the rule of law. Therefore, this topic requires a multidisciplinary approach, and the authors of this paper are experts in the fields of psychology and law. The aim of the paper is to examine whether and to what extent sport can contribute to the integration of migrants into the host society, particularly in terms of their social inclusion, connection with the local community, reduction of social distance, and development of a sense of belonging. The paper analyzes the psychological role of sport in the integration of migrants, drawing on European research as well as specific Croatian examples, such as Filipino basketball and Indian cricket initiatives, which foster social connectedness, resilience, and cultural adaptation.

*LLD, Associate Professor, Head of the Chair of Civil Law, Head of the Postgraduate University Specialist Study Program in Sports Law, University of Split, Faculty of Law, Split, Croatia, e-mail: blanka.matesa@pravst.hr

**Student, University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Split, Croatia, e-mail: bkacer@ffst.hr

***Mag. iur., Assistant, University of Split, Faculty of Law, Split, Croatia, e-mail: petar.rasetina@pravst.hr



© 2026 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Various scientific methods have been applied in the paper, particularly the inductive and deductive methods; the methods of analysis and synthesis, abstraction and concretization, generalization and specialization; the methods of proof and refutation, classification, and description; as well as the historical, compilation, and comparative methods. The paper concludes with findings that confirm the proposed hypothesis.

Keywords: *immigrants, sport, personality rights, psychological aspect, civil law aspect.*

1. Introduction

Increased population mobility has led to a growing need to develop effective mechanisms for the inclusion of migrants into society, and the subject of this paper is the analysis of the role of sport in their integration. Sport and physical activity have historically received very little attention within the field of refugee and forced migration studies (Spaaij et al., 2019). Although sport is traditionally associated with competitive, recreational, and health-related functions, its significance in contemporary social relations is much broader, and the question of its role in integration processes deserves special scholarly attention. Sport is a powerful but underutilized tool for migrant integration in multicultural Europe. This paper synthesizes academic findings with Croatian case studies to evaluate its practical effectiveness. The aim of this paper is to examine whether and to what extent sport can contribute to the integration of migrants into the host society, through both psychological and civil law perspectives. Various scientific methods have been applied in this paper, particularly the inductive and deductive methods, methods of analysis and synthesis, abstraction and concretization, generalization and specialization, methods of proof and refutation, classification, description, the historical method, and the method of compilation.

2. Migration and the Integration Process

Before analyzing the specific relationship between sport and integration processes, it is necessary to define the concept of migration, distinguish its basic types, and clarify the concept of migrant integration. It is also essential to point out the most common challenges that accompany integration processes, such as language barriers and discrimination (Rajković & Magdalenić, 2024).

2.1. Concept and Types of Migration

Migration can be defined as the movement of people from their usual place of residence to a new place of residence, either within the borders of the same country or across an international border, on a temporary or permanent basis. A migrant is considered to be a person who moves from their usual place of residence to another place or country for various reasons, such as employment, education, family, or better living conditions (International Organization for Migration [IOM]. n.d. Key migration terms). Based on the motives and circumstances of their occurrence, migrations are most commonly divided into economic and forced migration.

2.2. The Concept of Immigrant Integration

Integration can be defined as a dynamic and two-way process of change that places demands on both migrants and the host society. In general, integration can be characterized as the process through which an individual becomes accepted into a society (Gregurović, 2019). At its core, integration involves two parties: migrants, with their characteristics, efforts, and adaptations, and the host society, with its own characteristics and responses to newcomers (Penninx, 2007). However, although integration is typically described as a two-way process involving migrants and the receiving society, more recent approaches suggest the inclusion of a third party: the migrants' country of origin (Blagojević, 2020).

Migrant integration is a complex process of incorporating migrants into the host society (Jurić, 2024). It entails the obligation of the host society to ensure formal rights that enable migrants to participate in the economic, social, cultural, and civic life of the community, as well as migrants' adaptation to the values and standards of that society and their active participation in the integration process, without requiring them to renounce their own cultural identity (Lalić Novak, 2019). In this context, the social connections that refugees establish with members of the local community are particularly important for understanding the integrative role of sport (Jurković, 2023). Integration begins at the moment of arrival in the host country and is considered complete when a migrant becomes an active member of society from legal, sociological, economic, educational, and cultural perspectives (Jurić, 2024).

One of the most important dimensions of integration is social integration (IOM. n.d. Integration and social cohesion: Key elements for reaping the benefits of migration). Social integration can be defined as the extent to which individuals are included in community life and develop relationships with

members of the host society (Jennissen, Bovens, Engbersen, & Bokhorst, 2023). It focuses on incorporating individuals into social systems, building relationships, and shaping attitudes toward society as a result of consciously motivated interactions and cooperation between individuals and groups (Gregurović, 2019). In this sense, social integration represents a process of mutual acculturation between two different sociocultural groups that, despite their differences, are equal in rights and obligations (Arjona Garrido, Checa Olmos, Garcia-Arjona, & Pardo, 2012). Cultural integration refers to the inclusion of migrants in the cultural life of the host society, with the degree of adaptation depending on the integration model adopted by that society (Council of Europe [CoE], 1997). Sport and physical activity can provide a space for developing new forms of cultural capital, while simultaneously preserving migrant-specific cultural capital that strengthens identity and helps reduce social exclusion (Smith, Spaaij, & McDonald, 2019). In addition to social and cultural integration, economic integration is particularly important. It involves migrants' effective participation in the labor market, recognition and utilization of their knowledge, skills, and qualifications, and access to employment, training, and career advancement opportunities. The European Commission, in its Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027, emphasizes that migrants constitute a significant part of the European Union's workforce, but often face difficulties in having their competencies recognized and in finding jobs that match their level of knowledge and experience (European Commission [EC], 2020). Finally, migrant integration can also be viewed through the dimension of political participation, that is, involvement in the public and social life of the community (Šimunović, 2024).

2.3. Challenges of Migrant Integration

Immigrants often face numerous difficulties that hinder their full inclusion in society. These challenges may be legal, social, cultural, linguistic, and economic in nature, and they are often interconnected and cumulative. Migrant integration is measured in terms of employment, education, health, social inclusion, and active citizenship in the receiving country (European Union [EU], n.d.). However, while citizens of the European Union have the formal possibility of free access to the labor market, migrants from third countries must obtain work permits, and integration mechanisms across EU member states condition various migrant rights such as social rights, education and schooling, political participation, and others on the possession of a valid work permit (Pajnik, 2012).

Without a work permit, it is not possible to obtain a residence permit; without an individual work permit, it is not possible to obtain permanent residence; without permanent residence, it is not possible to acquire citizenship; without an individual work permit, it is not possible to register with the Employment Office; without permanent residence, it is not possible to access the healthcare system (Pajnik, 2012). Discrimination and stereotypes also represent a serious challenge (Jennissen et al., 2023), which are closely linked to the social isolation of migrants. Additionally, one of the particularly significant challenges is economic marginalization (Penninx, 2007). This is reflected in limited access to employment, insecure and low-paid jobs, lower incomes, and fewer opportunities for professional advancement (Vukojičić Tomić, 2018).

3. Sport and Psychological Well-being of Immigrants

3.1. Sport's Psychological Role in Migrant Integration Pathways

Research has consistently shown positive results when sports programs are actively designed with inclusion in mind. To ensure the highest possible quality of migrant integration in the future we must first understand that sport isn't just a leisure activity, but a deeply intricate system that supports integration in several levels. Firstly, on the individual level it creates opportunities for many social interactions and identity development. Secondly, at the organizational level clubs can act as spaces where inclusion of migrants can be actively facilitated. It is important to mention that their effectiveness depends on inclusive program designs and organizational support, which highlights the fact that integration through sport is not something automatic but needs to be actively facilitated (Borgogni & Digennaro, 2015). These perspectives are supported by findings made by Middleton, Petersen, Schinke, Kao, & Giffin in 2020. Sports, aside from their benefits on physical health, can also be seen as a form of learning where migrants gradually pick up on social norms, expectations and usual behaviours that help them fit in with locals. Integration does not happen immediately; it takes time and effort. If we consider the long-term nature of integration through sports, we can see it provides a structured and continuous environment where relationships can develop over time. For example, stability is created through regular participation in training or club activities, which is important for migrants who have experienced disruption or uncertainty. Sport should be understood as a gradual and ongoing process, rather than just a quick solution for many integration challenges (Middleton et al., 2020; Doidge, Keech, & Sandri, 2020).

Studies view sport as a socializing agent fostering respect for diversity and belonging to the community. Activities such as participating in clubs or programs help migrants build new friendships, learn local customs and develop skills like teamwork (Nagel, Elmoose-Østerlund, Adler Zwahlen, & Schlesinger, 2020). Key similarities across the studies were the integration mechanisms that were used, such as active coaching, team-based activities, welcoming environments and a focus on acceptance. Target groups put a focus on refugees, youth, forced migrants and emphasized fun over competition. Participating in sport activities like that enhances their social capital, psychological well-being and improved their physical health. Sport fosters respect for diversity and multicultural dialogue in European societies, serving as a strategic public health and cohesion tool. It promotes shared values like fair play and teamwork, thus helping migrants adapt to local cultures while also reducing prejudice among locals (Hatzigeorgiadis, Morela, Elbe, Kouli, & Sanchez, 2013). Another study shows that in Brighton, UK, sport clubs actively drive refugee inclusion through tailored coaching, team activities, and welcoming environments, stating that refugees reported forming friendships with the locals, learning social norms and gaining confidence in doing so. Those are key steps toward societal integration. Football and multisport programs have proven especially effective when it came to building trust (Doidge et al., 2020). An interesting meta-synthesis of over 40 studies has positioned community sports as vital “sites of integration” for forced migrants. Participants have experienced improvement in the sense of belonging, psychological well-being, all through safe, non-competitive spaces that foster intercultural interactions and skill development like teamwork and communication (Middleton et al., 2020). Refugees in sports clubs described participation as something empowering, saying it is “what makes us strong.” Facilitating community ties, self-esteem, and practical skills, outweighed physical benefits in integration outcomes (Stura, 2019). When it comes to youth, especially teenage refugees, findings show improved peer relationship, greater societal adaptation and reduced feeling of isolation from sports programs. They leverage teamwork and cultural exchanges to bridge social gaps and position sports as a great and easily accessible entry point for vulnerable youth (Kölbel, 2025).

We must also take several important limitations into consideration. First and foremost, sport is not automatically inclusive. As stated in “Integration by Sport Activities: Resource or Only a Paradox?”, aside from its positive aspects when it comes to the integration of migrants, sports can sometimes also reinforce some existing inequalities. Some of those include barriers such as skill differences, participation costs and cultural expectations, all of which can limit access for migrants. Another limitation would be that the success of sport in

promoting integrations is highly dependent on context. Varying factors such as program design, coaching style and even institutional support all play a major role. Without intentional efforts to include migrants, those programs may lead to separation rather than integration with migrants forming their own groups instead of forming meaningful interactions with the wider community. This is supported by Stura (2019), whose findings show that while participants often felt personally empowered, the broader impact on integration was inconsistent.

Some of the strongest and most consistent findings were about the psychological benefits of sport. Participation in sports can provide migrants with a sense of normality, and a sense of structure. Those are particularly important for those who have experienced displacement or trauma. In their study, Middleton et al. (2020) have found that participating in sports is linked to improved wellbeing, which includes better mood, stronger sense of belonging and lower stress levels. All these benefits are closely related to the social nature of sport since individuals can build supportive relationships and feel like they are part of a group. Sport also plays a very important role when it comes to rebuilding confidence and identity. Migrants often face stigmatization and often feel defined by their status of a “migrant”. Sport allows them to take on new, and more positive roles like that of a teammate or athlete. Stura (2019) has highlighted how participants described sport as something that made them feel more capable than before, it made them feel stronger. This can also have positive effects that spill over into other areas of life like education or even employment. Lastly, taking part in sports can support emotional coping and mental health. Physical activity is known to reduce levels of depression and anxiety, with these effects being even stronger in group settings due to social support. For the youth in particular, sport can act as a protective factor in reducing the feeling of isolation while helping them build relationships with the local youth (Flensner, Korp, & Lindgren, 2020).

3.2. Examination of Real-World Cases

For the purpose of a comprehensive analysis of the topic, the following will examine several real-life examples, first the Refugee Olympic Team, and subsequently the state of immigrant integration in the Republic of Croatia, with concrete examples. Prior to high profile initiatives, community level interventions demonstrate sport’s tangible integrative effects. In Kakuma Refugee Camp, Deng Dak’s ‘Sports for Cohesion’ football program had united 1,500 youth across rival ethnic groups, and in doing so reduced resource conflicts while also facilitating psychological restoration and friendships across the communities (World

Economic Forum [WEF], 2024). This micro-level evidence of belonging and trauma mitigation provides essential context for understanding larger scale efforts.

According to the Olympic Charter, “Any competitor in the Olympic Games must be a national of the country of the NOC which registers them”, which means that any refugee athlete does not have the right to represent their host country whose passport they do not hold yet (International Olympic Committee [IOC], 2024). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) then, in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), created the Refugee Olympic Team. The goal was to allow and help refugee athletes continue their training, and to compete. Those athletes represent a symbol of hope to any and all refugees around the whole world, showing how sports can lead to their dreams becoming reality. The number of members keeps growing each year.

Foreign workers in Croatia, in particular ones from India and the Philippines holding temporary or permanent residence permits, have increasingly turned to sports as an important mechanism for developing community ties, lessening work-related stress and facilitating cultural integration into the Croatian society. Integration is also influenced by the interaction between work and leisure domains, with employment providing stability while sport supports social participation and well-being. This then highlights that sport complements work by addressing the social and psychological aspects of integration (Schmieder, 2025). Participation in group activities such as those addressed key challenges often faced by migrants and refugees alike, from social isolation to diminished self-efficacy by promoting resilience through shared experiences (JRS Croatia, 2024; Šušac, Babić, Franjić & Babić, 2022). This trend aligns very well with the previously mentioned research on the integrative power of sports, where activities like team sports can create a safe space for bonding, intercultural dialogue and empowerment among migrants and refugees (Pinoy385, 2025). In Croatia, the increased influx of these workers has led to the emergence of sport-based initiatives that while preserving cultural identities also bridge the gaps with the local population. For example, the Filipino community shows this through the Philippine Croatia Basketball League (PHBL), an amateur league that is primarily based in Zagreb, and has become a cornerstone of social life for those workers (Pinoy385, 2025). Basketball, which has been deeply embedded in Philippine culture ever since its introduction by American colonizers back in the early 20th century holds unparalleled popularity in the archipelago nation of 117 million people. The Philippine men’s national basketball team (which is also known as Gilas Pilipinas) has been a member of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) since 1936, finishing fifth at the Berlin Olympics that year. Their participation in the 1954 World Championship in Brazil marked the first

time an Asian national team has ever competed in the event, and earning the bronze medal have achieved the best-ever finish by any Asian country at the FIBA World Cup to this day. The Philippines hosted the World Championship twice: first in 1978, when Yugoslavia claimed gold and the recently deceased Dražen Dalipagić was named the tournament's best player; the second time was two years ago, co-hosting with Japan and Indonesia. They established the world's first professional Asian league (PBA, est. 1975), which was the second in the whole world after the NBA, and proudly hold historic FIBA achievements like the 1954 World Championship bronze. The PHBL, initiated by Delmar Pulman, was explicitly designed to connect Filipino workers, encouraging interactions with Croats, promoting relaxation from demanding jobs, and has become a major social event (Pinoy385, 2025). It is important to mention its growth from 8 teams in their first season to a record 19 teams in the second season (2024/2025), with Batang Zagreb's 2-1 final series victory over Center Hoops. The matches are often live-streamed, providing their families back home with the ability to cheer them on.

Developments are also evident among Indian workers, who are infusing new energy into Croatian cricket, a sport with niche but historic roots tracing back over 200 years to British naval stations on Vis Island during the Napoleonic Wars (HRT Sport, 2026). Cricket's rhythmic, strategic play offers multiple psychological benefits like improved focus, stress coping via routine, and collective identity reinforcement, and building self-esteem through skill progression (HRT Sport, 2026; Steady Project, 2022). Out of over 200 cricket players in Croatia, out of which over 100 are active, around 70 of them are foreign players. Active foreign players make up 30% of junior players as well. Two emerging clubs include predominantly foreign workers, first being the Indian Šibenik club, which is yet to be officially registered (pre-registration) and Ludbreg (HRT Sport, 2026). These sport-driven gatherings occur against a backdrop of surging migrant numbers, as documented by Croatia's Ministry of the Interior (MUP). Filipinos have received 10,999 residence and work permits in 2023, rising to 14,680 in 2024 and then 17,629 in 2025 (5,648 by February 2026), while Indians saw 15,627 (2023), a peak of 20,502 (2024), 15,400 (2025), and 2,097 in early 2026. That places both nations in the top five right alongside Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nepal and Serbia with annual totals of 172,499–206,529 permits (2023–2025) (Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia [MUP], 2026). This large demographic shift amplifies the low-barrier utility of sport in combating psychological strain from migration, such as anxiety, positioning it as a public health ally per Croatia's mental health strategy (Ministry of Health Croatia, 2023).

4. Personality Rights as the Foundation for Migrant Protection

According to one perspective, personality rights today represent an increasingly significant portion of civil law worldwide approximately 30% of civil law with a tendency for this proportion to grow (Radolović, 2014). Personality rights are defined as a set of entitlements recognized by norms of objective law over an individual's personal, non-property interests (Klarić & Vedriš, 2025). In the objective sense, personality rights constitute a set of norms within the ethical-legal order that regulate every legal subject's right to express and develop their personality in accordance with their psycho-social development. In the subjective sense, they represent the right of a specific legal subject to demand and ensure that others respect and support the development of their personality, again in accordance with their level of psycho-social development (Radolović, 2006). Thus, each individual, as the holder of subjective rights over their personal interests, may choose to exercise these rights or not, based on their own judgment (Gavella, 2000). Personality rights are defined as rights inherent to a natural person, acquired at birth, while the personality rights of legal entities arise from the nature and social purpose of those entities (Crnić, 2016). They primarily concern the individual sphere of a person, protecting personal attributes and uniqueness in relation to their environment and in public, economic, and official activities (Gorenc et al., 2014).

At the European Union level, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union was solemnly proclaimed on December 7, 2000, in Nice and became legally binding on December 1, 2009, upon the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. This document is of particular importance as it outlines the core values of the EU human dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, democracy, and the rule of law emphasizing the protection of fundamental rights and respect for the diversity of member states.

In the Republic of Croatia, personality rights are regulated under the Law of Obligations (2005), which stipulates that every natural and legal person has the right to protect their personality rights under conditions defined by law (Law of Obligations, 2005, Art. 19, para. 1). It also specifies which personality rights belong to natural persons and which to legal entities (Law of Obligations, 2005, Art. 19, para. 2.-3.). The reference to "etc." in these provisions indicates that the protection of personality rights also covers other situations where personality rights are violated. Certain personality rights not listed in Articles 19, paragraphs 2 and 3, are recognized only when their content is established through judicial practice. In such cases, courts determine whether a particular personality right has been violated, potentially establishing a new personality right not explicitly

listed in the law. However, courts may occasionally mistakenly treat something as a personality right when it is not (Kačer, 2021).

In the context of sport, personality rights acquire an additional dimension as they are exercised within a specific social space characterized by public visibility, market relations, and strong media presence. Sport is not only a domain of competition but also a space of intensive social interaction, where the respect for athletes' dignity, protection of their identity, and preservation of their reputation come to the forefront. Migrants participating in sports activities are particularly exposed to the risk of violations of personality rights, for example through racist incidents, hate speech, or inappropriate media portrayals, which requires effective legal protection. In this sense, personality rights act as a corrective to sporting and market relations, ensuring that economic and competitive interests do not override the fundamental rights of the individual. The right to identity is of particular importance, encompassing migrants' national, cultural, and personal identity, which in sport often manifests through affiliation with a specific community or national team. At the same time, the right to reputation and honour protects athletes from unfounded accusations, discriminatory statements, and media manipulation that can have serious consequences for their professional careers and personal lives. The right to privacy becomes even more significant in the context of pervasive media attention, especially for migrants who are often the focus of public interest precisely because of their origin. The European Court of Human Rights has emphasized that private life is "a broad concept that is not susceptible to exhaustive definition" (Da Lomba, 2017).

Migrants in sport occupy a dual legal position, as they simultaneously participate in contractual relationships as athletes and enjoy protection as holders of personality rights. This dual dimension requires the balancing of different legal interests, with civil law providing protection mechanisms through remedies such as compensation for damages, personality rights protection, and anti-discrimination measures. In practice, personality rights have proven to be a key instrument in combating inequalities and ensuring equal participation of migrants in sport, thereby contributing to their social integration. In this context, sport can be viewed as an important integration mechanism that facilitates the inclusion of migrants in society, but only if their personality rights are effectively protected. Without such protection, there is a risk that sport, instead of serving as a means of integration, becomes a space for reproducing social inequalities and discrimination. Therefore, personality rights are not only individual rights but also a broader social instrument that enables the realization of equality, dignity, and social inclusion in the modern legal system.

The case *Slivenko and Others v. Latvia*¹ represents a key ruling of the European Court of Human Rights regarding the protection of migrants' personality rights under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court examined the lawfulness of the applicants' expulsion from Latvia and determined that, although formally foreigners, they had developed strong personal, social, and family ties in the host country. In its reasoning, the Court emphasized that "the concept of 'private life' is not susceptible to exhaustive definition; it covers the physical and psychological integrity of a person and can sometimes embrace aspects of an individual's physical and social identity" (§§ 94–95). The Court highlighted that private life includes the right of a person to develop their identity and social relationships in the country where they reside, especially in cases of long-term residence and genuine integration into the host society (§§ 96–98). This position is particularly significant for migrants, as it confirms that their integration into society, including professional and social activities, constitutes a legally protected aspect of their personality. In the context of sport, this interpretation allows the conclusion that migrants' participation in sports activities, as a form of social inclusion and identity building, forms an integral part of their personality rights, further emphasizing the necessity of legal protection within the civil law framework.

5. Conclusion

Migration is one of the most complex features of contemporary societies, and the issue of integrating migrants represents not only a legal and political challenge but also a social and psychological one. In this context, sport emerges as a field that goes beyond its recreational and competitive functions and can serve as an important instrument for social inclusion, connection, and the development of a sense of belonging. The analysis presented in this study confirms the initial assumption that sport can play a significant role in the integration of migrants, particularly in establishing social contacts and reducing social distance within communities.

At the same time, the study shows that the integrative effects of sport are neither automatic nor uniform across all circumstances. The mere opportunity to participate in sports activities is not sufficient if appropriate social and institutional conditions are lacking to enable the genuine inclusion of migrants. The success of sport as an integration mechanism largely depends on the

¹ *Slivenko and Others v. Latvia*, no. 48321/99, decision of 23 January 2002, European Court of Human rights.

openness of the social environment, the activity of sports clubs and recreational groups, the availability of sports programs, the removal of discriminatory barriers, and the existence of public policies that view sport not only through the lens of elite performance but also as a means of social cohesion and inclusivity. For these reasons, sport should be regarded as an important integrative element.

A particular value of sport lies in its ability to provide migrants with direct contact with the local community in a less formal and more accessible environment than many other social domains. Through joint training sessions, competitions, and sports programs, opportunities are created for communication and mutual acquaintance. In this way, sport can contribute not only to the individual well-being of migrants but also to strengthening social connectedness and mutual understanding between migrant populations and the host community. Additionally, the psychological aspects of sport such as the development of self-confidence, emotional stability, and a sense of acceptance, further confirm that sport can play a vital role in the process of migrants adapting to a new environment. On the other hand, legal analysis shows that the integration of migrants through sport cannot be complete without effective protection of their personality rights. Civil law protection of personality rights ensures that integration is based on respect for the fundamental rights of every individual. Croatian examples, such as Filipino basketball programs and initiatives involving Indian communities, have demonstrated results consistent with European research, showing that sport can build resilience and trust across different cultures while providing significant psychological benefits. These sport programs should not be seen as optional; they are essential for the psychological well-being of migrants and are key to fostering social cohesion. Since migrant integration through sport encompasses social, legal, and psychological dimensions simultaneously, understanding and practically improving it requires collaboration among experts from different fields, particularly lawyers and psychologists, but also kinesiologists, sociologists, educators, and sports professionals.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, B.M. and B.K.; formal analysis, B.M. and B.K.; investigation, B.M. and B.K.; methodology, B.M.; validation, B.M. and B.K.; visualization, B.M. and P.R.; writing – original draft, B.M., B.K. and P.R.; writing – review & editing, B.M., B.K. and P.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This paper was written within the framework of the institutional research project of the Faculty of Law, University in Split – “*Managing Migrations – Experiences and Perspectives (UMIP)*”, financed from the source 581 – The Recovery and Resilience Mechanism.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article and/or supplementary material. Further inquiries may be directed to the corresponding author(s).

Informed Consent for Participation in the Study / Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Mateša Blanka

Sveučilište u Splitu, Pravni fakultet, Split, Hrvatska

Kačer Bruno

Sveučilište u Splitu, Filozofski fakultet, Split, Hrvatska

Rašetina Petar

Sveučilište u Splitu, Pravni fakultet, Split, Hrvatska

ULOGA SPORTA U INTEGRACIJI IMIGRANATA

APSTRAKT: Tema ovog rada veoma je aktuelna i od velikog je značaja. U svetu, a naročito u Evropi, postoji velik broj imigranata, te je neophodno pronaći mehanizme koji će obezbediti njihovu uspešnu adaptaciju u društvo u koje su imigrirali, kako radi njihove sopstvene koristi i psihološkog blagostanja tako i radi dobrobiti društva u celini, uključujući pravnu sigurnost i vladavinu prava. Stoga ova tema zahteva multidisciplinarni pristup, a autori ovog rada jesu stručnjaci iz oblasti psihologije i prava. Cilj rada je da se ispita da li i u kojoj meri sport može doprineti integraciji migranata u društvo prijema,

naročito u pogledu njihove socijalne uključenosti, povezivanja sa lokalnom zajednicom, smanjenja socijalne distance i razvoja osećaja pripadnosti. U radu se analizira psihološka uloga sporta u integraciji migranata, oslanjajući se na evropska istraživanja, kao i na konkretne hrvatske primere, kao što su inicijative filipinske košarke i indijskog kriketa, koje podstiču socijalno povezivanje, otpornost i kulturnu adaptaciju. U radu su primenjene različite naučne metode, naročito induktivna i deduktivna metoda, metode analize i sinteze, apstrakcije i konkretizacije, generalizacije i specijalizacije, metode dokazivanja i opovrgavanja, klasifikacije, deskripcije, istorijski metod, metod kompilacije i komparativni metod. Rad se završava nalazima koji potvrđuju postavljenu hipotezu.

Ključne reči: *imigranti, sport, prava ličnosti, psihološki aspekt, građanskopravni aspekt.*

References

1. Arjona Garrido, A., Checa Olmos, J. C., Garcia-Arjona, N., & Pardo, R. (2012). Immigration, school, physical activity and sport: Analysis of sport acculturation in Spain. *Kinesiology*, 44(1), pp. 83–93. Downloaded 2026, March 15 from <https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/file/124407>
2. Blagojević, A. (2020). Pravni i institucionalni okvir integracije migranata u hrvatsko društvo [Legal and institutional framework of migrant integration in Croatian society]. *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Splitu*, 57(3), pp. 707–737. <https://doi.org/10.31141/zrpf.2020.57.137.707>
3. Borgogni, A., & Digennaro, S. (2015). Playing together: The role of sport organisations in supporting migrants' integration. *Empiria. Revista de Metodología de Ciencias Sociales*, 30, pp. 109–131. DOI:10.5944/empiria.30.2015.13887
4. Council of Europe. (1997). Measurement and indicators of integration. Downloaded 2026, March 15 from https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/migration/archives/documentation/Series_Community_Relations/Measurement_indicators_integration_en.pdf
5. Crnić, I. (2016). *Zakon o obveznim odnosima [Law of Obligations]*. Zagreb: Organizator
6. Da Lomba, S. (2017). Vulnerability and the right to respect for private life as an autonomous source of protection against expulsion under Article 8 ECHR. *Laws*, 6(4), p. 32. Downloaded 2026, March 22 from <https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/62877/>

7. Doidge, M., Keech, M., & Sandri, E. (2020). 'Active integration': Sport clubs taking an active role in the integration of refugees. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 12(2), pp. 305–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2020.1717580>
8. European Commission. (2020, November 24). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027. Downloaded 2026, March 22 from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0758>
9. European Union. (n.d.). Migrant integration statistics introduced. Downloaded 2026, March 22 from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_introduced&utm_source=
10. Flensner, K. K., Korp, P., & Lindgren, E.-C. (2020). Integration into and through sports? Sport activities for migrant children and youths. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 18(1), pp. 64–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2020.1823689>
11. Gavella, N. (2000). *Osobna prava, dio prvi [Personal Rights, Part I]*. Zagreb: Pravni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu
12. Gorenc, V., et al. (2014). *Komentar Zakona o obveznim odnosima [Commentary on the Law of Obligations]*. Zagreb: Narodne novine
13. Gregurović, S. (2019). The impact of EU citizenship on migrant integration: The case of highly skilled migrants from Southeast Europe in Brussels. *Etnološka tribina*, 49(42), pp. 102–121. <https://doi.org/10.15378/1848-9540.2019.42.03>
14. Hatzigeorgiadis, A., Morela, E., Elbe, A.-M., Kouli, O., & Sanchez, X. (2013). The integrative role of sport in multicultural societies. *European Psychologist*, 18(3), pp. 191–202. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000155>
15. HRT Sport. (2026). Šibenik dobio kriket klub [Šibenik received a cricket club]. Downloaded 2026, March 24 from <https://sport.hrt.hr/vise-sportova/sibenik-dobio-kriket-klub--12378442>
16. International Olympic Committee. (2024). *Olympic charter*. Downloaded 2026, March 22 from <https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/General/EN-Olympic-Charter.pdf>
17. International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). *Key migration terms*. Downloaded 2026, March 24 from https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms?utm_source

18. International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). *Integration and social cohesion: Key elements for reaping the benefits of migration*. Downloaded 2026, March 25 from <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2616/files/2018-07/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Integration-and-Social-Cohesion.pdf>
19. Jennissen, R., Bovens, M., Engbersen, G., & Bokhorst, M. (2023). *Migration diversity and social cohesion: Reassessing the Dutch policy agenda*. Cham: Springer
20. JRS Croatia. (2024, February 19). Sport kao put integracije u hrvatsko društvo [Sport as a path to integration into Croatian society]. Downloaded 2026, March 25 from <https://hrv.jrs.net/story/sport-kao-put-integracije-u-hrvatsko-drustvo/>
21. Jurić, T. (2024). Integracija imigranata u Hrvatskoj: načela učinkovitog integracijskog modela [Integration of immigrants in Croatia: Principles of an effective integration model]. *Crkva u svijetu: CUS*, 59(3), pp. 483–517. <https://doi.org/10.34075/cs.59.3.2>
22. Jurković, R. (2023). *Sport i migranti u Hrvatskoj: kulturnoantropološka studija integracije izbjeglica* [Sport and migrants in Croatia: Cultural-anthropological study of refugee integration]. Zagreb: FF Press. Downloaded 2026, March 25 from <https://openbooks.ffzg.unizg.hr/index.php/FFpress/catalog/book/157>
23. Kačer, B. (2021). Farmaceutsko pravo i odgovornost za štetu, posebno s aspekta povrede prava osobnosti [Pharmaceutical law and liability for damage, especially regarding violations of personality rights]. In: Rijavec, V., Kraljić, S., & Reberšek Gorišek J. (eds.), *Medicina, pravo & društvo* [Medicine, Law & Society] (pp. 289–317). Maribor: Pravna fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani. <https://doi.org/10.18690/978-961-286-478-1>
24. Klarić, M., & Kačer, B. (2020). Poseban aspekt prava osobnosti u sportu vezan uz zlouporabu dobi izbjeglica [Special aspect of personality rights in sport related to abuse of refugee rights]. *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Splitu*, 57(2), pp. 305–319. <https://doi.org/10.31141/zrpf.2020.57.136.305>
25. Klarić, P., & Vedriš, M. (2025). *Građansko pravo* [Civil Law]. Zagreb: Narodne novine
26. Kölbel, M. (2025). Sport as a bridge: Exploring the role of sports programs in the social integration of teenage refugees. *Policy Futures in Education*, 23(7), pp. 1236–1253. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103251327941>
27. Lalić Novak, G., & Giljević, T. (2019). Pravno i institucionalno uređenje integracije imigranata u Republici Hrvatskoj – prema europskom modelu

- [Legal and institutional regulation of migrant integration in the Republic of Croatia – Towards a European model]. *Godišnjak Akademije pravnih znanosti Hrvatske*, 10(1), pp. 163–184. <https://doi.org/10.32984/gapzh.10.1.8>
28. Middleton, T. R. F., Petersen, B., Schinke, R. J., Kao, S. F., & Giffin, C. (2020). Community sport and physical activity programs as sites of integration: A meta-synthesis of qualitative research conducted with forced migrants. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 51, 101769. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2020.101769>
29. Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia. (2026). Statistika dozvola boravka i rada [Statistics on residence and work permits]. Downloaded 2026, March 27 from <https://mup.gov.hr/gradjani-281562/moji-dokumenti-281563/stranci-333/statistika-169019/169019>
30. Ministry of Health of the Republic of Croatia. (2023). Strateški okvir mentalnog zdravlja do 2030. godine [Strategic framework for mental health development until 2030].
31. Nagel, S., Elmose-Østerlund, K., Adler Zwahlen, J., & Schlesinger, T. (2020). Social integration of people with a migration background in European sports clubs. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 37(4), pp. 355–365. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2019-0106>
32. Pajnik, M. (2012). Migrants as cheap labourers in Europe: Towards critical assessment of integration. *Migration and Ethnic Issues*, 28(2), pp. 143–163. Downloaded 2026, March 28 from <https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/file/129436>
33. Penninx, R. (2007). Integration processes of migrants: Research findings and policy challenges. *Migration and Ethnic Issues*, 23(1/2), pp. 7–32. Downloaded 2026, March 28 from <https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/file/22132>
34. Pinoy385. (2025, March 19). *Filipinci i košarka u Hrvatskoj: Strast, zajedništvo i život* [Filipinos and basketball in Croatia: Passion, community, and life]. Downloaded 2026, March 28 from <https://pinoy385.hr/filipinci-i-kosarka-u-hrvatskoj-strast-zajednistvo-i-zivot/>
35. Radolović, A. (2006). Pravo osobnosti u novom Zakonu o obveznim odnosima [Personality rights in the new Law of Obligations]. *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Rijeci*, 27(1), pp. 129–170. Downloaded 2026, March 28 from <https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/file/12466>
36. Radolović, A. (2014). Pravni poslovi prava osobnosti [Legal affairs of personality rights]. *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Rijeci*, 35(1), pp. 95–118. Downloaded 2026, March 28 from <https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/file/193214>

37. Rajković I., M., & Magdalenić V., A. (2024). Uzroci migracija i integracijska iskustva suvremenih migranata iz Indije u Zagrebu i Zagrebačkoj županiji [Causes of migration and integration experiences of contemporary migrants from India in Zagreb and Zagreb County]. *Migracijske i etničke teme*, 40(2), pp. 337–366. <https://doi.org/10.11567/met.40.2.8>
38. Schmieder, J. (2025). *Sports and work and their importance in immigrant integration*. Theseus. Downloaded 2026, March 28 from <https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/906267>
39. Smith, R., Spaaij, R., & McDonald, B. (2019). Migrant integration and cultural capital in the context of sport and physical activity: A systematic review. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 20(3), pp. 851–868. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0634-5>
40. Spaaij, R., Broerse, J., Oxford, S., Luguetti, C., McLachlan, F., McDonald, B., Klepac, B., Lymbery, L., Bishara, J., & Pankowiak, A. (2019). Sport, refugees, and forced migration: A critical review of the literature. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 1, pp. 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2019.00047>
41. Steady Project. (2022). Manual: Sport as a tool for empowering young and displaced persons with disabilities. Downloaded 2026, March 28 from https://www.steady-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Manual_SRB.pdf
42. Stura, C. (2019). “What makes us strong” – The role of sports clubs in facilitating integration of refugees. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 16(2), pp. 128–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2019.1625584>
43. Šimunović, R. (2024). Sociopolitičke perspektive integracije migranata – multikulturalizam u teoriji i praksi [Sociopolitical perspectives on migrant integration – Multiculturalism in theory and practice]. *Pravnik*, 58(110), pp. 335–345. Downloaded 2026, March 28 from <https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/file/474762>
44. Šušac, A., Babić, M., Franjić, D., & Babić, D. (2023). Zadovoljstvo životom i duševno zdravlje profesionalnih sportaša [Life satisfaction and mental health of professional athletes]. *Zdravstveni glasnik*, 8(1), pp. 12–23. Downloaded 2026, March 28 from <https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/file/403445>
45. Vukojičić Tomić, T. (2018). The challenges of diversity management to migrant integration in the European Union. *Hrvatska i komparativna javna uprava*, 18(2), pp. 223–246. <https://doi.org/10.31297/hkju.18.2.1>

46. World Economic Forum. (2024). How sport can unify and inspire refugees worldwide. Downloaded 2026, March 28 from <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/how-sport-can-unify-and-inspire-refugees-worldwide/>
47. Zakon o obveznim odnosima [Law of Obligations]. (2005). *Narodne novine*, br. 35/05, 41/08, 125/11, 78/15, 29/18, 126/21, 114/22, 156/22, 155/23