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**Sport and Forced Displacement:
Exploring the Journeys of the 2020 Refugee Olympic Team Candidates**

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Master's Thesis

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and the co-supervision of: Tarminder Kaur Ph.D

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Statement of Originality

I hereby declare in lieu of oath that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged in the enclosed list of references.

In Olomouc, 31/5/2021

Signature

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'R' followed by a horizontal line and a loop.

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Zásady pro vypracování

This thesis is aimed at studying the relationship between professional sports and international development in the context of the Refugee Athletes Scholarship program and the Refugee Olympic Team. While the refugee crisis has been an ongoing issue in the world, sports offer a unique lens through which a different perspective on the issue might prevail.

In-depth interviews with the professional refugee athletes will be conducted and narrative analysis will be done when needed. An analysis of the different media outlets' content on the team and program will be implemented as well to further understand the team's perception from both an internal and external aspect.

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Abstract

With the ever-persistent global refugee crisis, the need for new tools to address it becomes necessary day by day. This thesis explores the relation between sport and forced displacement through investigating two foundational events in the lives of the current candidates of the 2020 Refugee Olympic Team. The first one is the forced displacement experience, while the second one is getting affiliated with the IOC's Refugee Olympic Team and Refugee Athlete Support Program. Through the use of qualitative data and in-depth interviews for data collection, this thesis presents the processing role that sport played in the two events, in addition to the debate between the literature and the narratives of the IOC and the refugee athletes about the different aspects of the programs. A paradox emerged between the above-mentioned parties due to the divergence between the IOC's announced perspective of the program and the realistic experiences of the refugee athletes who are actually going through it.

The intention behind this thesis is to portray the different debates about the IOC's Refugee Olympic Team and Refugee Athlete Support Program from the perspective of the literature, the IOC, and the 2020 Refugee Olympic Team candidates.

Keywords:

The Refugee Olympic Team, forced displacement, The International Olympic Committee, Sport for development and peace, professional/elite sport, nation-state.

Table of Content

Chapter 1: Introduction	9
1.1 Research Objectives and Questions	10
1.2 The Structure of The Thesis.....	11
1.3 Key Concepts	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review	13
2.1 The Role of the UN and the IOC in the Field of SDP	13
2.2 Sport’s Role as An Inclusion Tool for Refugees	15
2.3 A Deeper Dive into The IOC’s ROT/RASP	17
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework	26
Chapter 4: Methodology	29
4.1 Research Participants	29
4.2 Data collection	32
4.3 Data Analysis:.....	33
Chapter 5: Results & Discussion	35
5.1 The Forced Displacement Experience: The First Foundational Event	35
5.2 The ‘Bumpy’ Road to the ROT/RASP: The Second Foundational Event.....	39
Chapter 6: Conclusion & Way Forward	54
References	56
Annexes	67
Annex A: Discussion Guide for the in-depth interview with the 2016 ROT member	67
Annex B: Discussion Guide for the in-depth interview with the 2020 ROT Candidates	69
Annex C: Discussion Guide for the in-depth interview with the IOC.....	71

List of Figures

Figure 1: Timeline of the creation of the Refugee Olympic Teams and the Refugee Athlete Support Program

Figure 2: Map of the 2016 Refugee Olympic Team Members' Nationalities

Figure 3: Distribution of the 2016 Refugee Olympic Team Members' Host Countries

Figure 4: Map of the 2020 Refugee Olympic Team Candidates' Nationalities

Figure 5: Distribution of the 2020 Refugee Olympic Team Candidates' Host Countries

Figure 6: The participants triangle

Figure 7: The IOC's management and dissemination scheme for the RASP

Tables

Table 1: The Research Participants

List of Abbreviations:

IOC = International Olympic Committee

ISF = International Sport Federation

MDGs = Millennium Development Goals

NGO = Non-governmental Organizations

NOC = National Olympic Committee¹

SDGs = Sustainable Development Goals

SDP = Sport for Development and Peace

RASP = Refugee Athlete Support Programme

ROT = Refugee Olympic Team

UN = United Nations

UNOSDP = United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace

¹ Host NOC is the NOC in the host country of the refugee athlete.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the search for new methods to tackle the issue of forced migration and resettlement, the contributing role of sports has been on the rise (Spaaij, et al., 2019). However, there is still a gap existing between research done and the actual presence of sport as a tool used in the political and public policy aspects in the settlement of refugees in their new host countries. The experience of resettlement is highly affected by past and present social and emotional experiences of the individuals, the success of which is measured in terms of their social integration (Hiruy, 2009). Hence, regardless of the different reasons behind the displacement experience, sport could have a contributing role as an advocacy tool for integration and inclusion. However, sport's role is affected by the different classifications of sport, whether on a grass-root or elite/professional level, and by the implementation levels whether on a local or a global scale.

According to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1, 2015, 10): *'Sport is an important enabler of sustainable development. The growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace is realized in its promotion of tolerance, respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of individuals, communities, to health, education and social inclusion'*. The role of sport is also stressed by International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport as it promotes solidarity and respect for the integrity and dignity of every human being, fostering a sense of belonging and bringing people from different backgrounds together (UNESCO, 2015).

For professional sport to be used as an advocacy tool for inclusion and justice, international organizations play an essential role to facilitate such usage. International partnerships are essential here to efficiently advocate for the important contribution of sport to socio-economic development, and international development goals (UNESCO, 2015, 9). Thus, the International Olympic Committee²'s Refugee Olympic Team³ and Refugee Athlete Support Program⁴ could be perceived as case studies of how international organizations can use professional sport as an advocacy tool for inclusion and justice, possibly contributing to

² Hereinafter, IOC is used to refer to International Olympic Committee

³ Hereinafter, ROT is used to refer to Refugee Olympic Team.

⁴ Hereinafter, RASP is used to refer to Refugee Athlete Support Program.

solving the global refugee crisis (IOC, 2016e). The IOC's ROT and RASP has an 'international' nature as they are considered to be transcontinental initiatives resembling how global partnerships based on sport could possibly work.

The rationale behind creating the ROT and RASP is to provide the refugee athletes with the chance to participate in high-level competitions and to raise awareness on the global refugee crisis. This could be traced back to the Olympic Truce, which was established to create peace between conflicting nations and to put wars on pause, thus allowing their athletes to compete (IOC, 2009).

Hence, sport continues to gain a reputation among the international community as a possible development path that might be convenient under specific circumstances. As the UN⁵ Inter-agency task force on sport for development and peace (2003, 3) described: *'well-designed sport-based initiatives are practical and cost-effective tools to achieve objectives in development and peace'*.

1.1 Research Objectives and Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the role of professional/elite sports in the global refugee crisis through exploring the role of the IOC's ROT/RASP in tackling such global crisis. This is done through analysing two foundational events in the athletes' lives, which are the forced displacement experience (which is one of the main reasons that led the athletes to the second event), and their affiliation experience with the IOC's programs. The different aspects and perceptions of the programs are explored via the narratives of three refugee athletes and the IOC, while reflecting on the relevant literature supporting and contradicting the possible contribution of the program. In addition to exploring the role of sport in different stages of the refugee athletes' lives through their experiences of forced displacement and the ROT/RASP.

Previous research focused on the program solely from the IOC's side, thus, it is necessary to investigate the meaning of the ROT/RASP from the point of view of the refugee athletes affiliated with them in order to understand the realistic meaning of such programs. Hence, this thesis aims to present both sides of the story.

⁵ Hereinafter, un is used to refer to The United Nations

The following research questions were formulated to guarantee a realistic representation of the two foundational experiences of the athletes, there are two primary research questions, supported with secondary research questions as follows:

The research questions:

- How was the experience of the professional/elite athletes in their host countries after facing forced displacement?
 - What is the role of sport in settling down in the host country after the professional/elite athletes' displacement experience?

- What is the practical experience of the professional/elite athletes in the IOC's ROT/RASP?
 - How is the ROT/RASP's awareness and application process perceived by the 2016 team members, the 2020 team candidates and the IOC?
 - How is the ROT's role, contribution and message perceived by the 2016 team members, the 2020 team candidates and the IOC?
 - What is the perception of the ROT in relation to the 'Olympic' national teams?
 - What does the ROT mean in terms of belonging and representation?

1.2 The Structure of The Thesis

This section provides a brief description of the structure of the thesis:

Chapter 1 introduces the readers briefly to the idea of using sport as an inclusion tool, as well as the ROT/RASP, the research questions and the key concepts used.

Chapter 2 covers the literature review and its division into 3 sub-section to ensure the complete understanding of the topic.

Chapter 3 highlights the theoretical framework, which includes; Hurrelmann's socialisation theory, Putman's theory of social capital and Giorgio Agamben's theory of Homo Sacer (spaces of exception).

Chapter 4 describes the methodology of the research conducted, the sample composition, and the data collection process.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the narrative analysis alongside the result's discussion.

Chapter 6 describes the conclusion and the way forward for future research.

1.3 Key Concepts

Pearson (1992) defined **development** as not being exclusive to one specific economic, political or social perspective, rather it is the combination of all these different perspectives in order to reach a state that is better than the current one. While international development tackles the global partnerships behind the pursuit of a better world for all people through eliminating poverty, discrimination and injustice following the blueprint of such partnerships within the context of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015b).

In development context **sport's** definition usually includes a broad and inclusive set of activities, suitable to people of all ages and abilities, with an emphasis on the positive values of sport (Shilbury et al., 2008). The focus here is on the elite/professional⁶ level, which is the level of sport in which athletes earn a living from competing in a sport (Bourg & Gouget, 2010; Danowski, 2012; Piermattéo et al., 2018). However, it's crucial to highlight that this definition isn't followed strictly in this thesis, given that the target group of this research are athletes who went through forced displacement, which understandably affected their athletic careers. Thus, the definition is re-adjusted to include both those for whom sport is considered their main job whether it's the main source of income or not.

Having participated in international championships and being registered in the respective international sport federation is included here as part of the definition since in our sample this was a common criterion. It is also one of the criteria used by the IOC for the team/program.

Sport for development and peace⁷ is 'the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialization of children, youth and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution' (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011, 311).

As for **refugees**, they are defined as individuals who went through forced migration and now have the internationally recognized legal status of a refugee in their host countries (Pederson, 2018).

⁶ Both levels are considered to be the same in this thesis.

⁷ Hereinafter SDP is used to refer to Sport for Development and Peace

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, a critical review is conducted on the literature relevant to the research topic in order to provide the readers with a deeper understanding. This chapter is divided into 3 subsections; first, the review starts with explaining the transition of the responsibility from the shoulders of the United Nations Office for Sport for Development and Peace⁸ to the IOC's in SDP projects. Then the role of sports as an inclusion tool is explored, through providing examples of relevant projects. Finally, the review zooms in and focuses on the different aspects of the ROT/RASP and what does the literature say.

2.1 The Role of the UN and the IOC in the Field of SDP

In support of using sport as a tool for development and peace, the UN took a big step in 2001 and established the United Nations Office for Sport for Development and Peace, which provided significant official recognition, awareness, and legitimacy to the SDP field (Schulenkorf & Adair 2014). The office worked on promoting sport as an innovative tool to support the UN's goals and values. It aimed to *'advocate the usage of sport for peace, facilitate and coordinate some actions to help the stakeholders to create projects about sport'* (Fraguier, 2017,4). As well as maximizing sport's role in the creation of a more sustainable and equitable future through promoting peacebuilding in challenging situations.

The surprising closure of the UNOSDP in 2017 and the transition of the responsibility from the its shoulders to the IOC's, caused confusion (Bardocz-Bencsik and Doczi, 2019). However, from the IOC's perspective it was the logical evolution (IOC, 2017). Nevertheless, there were concerns regarding the aims of the IOC in relation to the field of social development. In its preparations to be able to better represent the social dimension after the closure of the UNOSDP, the IOC created a commission for Public Affairs and Social Development through Sport (IOC, 2017). However, the IOC already had commissions that could help in such field, such as the Olympic Solidarity Commission which was established in 1981 to exclusively support the National Olympic Committees⁹ to manage the different athletes' programs and to assist with their preparations and qualification efforts (IOC, 2016a).

⁸ Hereinafter UNOSDP is used to refer to United Nations Office for Sport for Development and Peace

⁹ Hereinafter, NOC is used to refer to National Olympic Committee is

The UNOSDP managed to create a stable base for SDP projects, and established a reputation among the international organizations and governments, *‘The strength of UNOSDP was to work with all of the sectors in sport and manage private and public relations with the most important stakeholders in the worldwide sport organizations’* (Fraguier, 2017, 4). The UNOSDP had considerable influence as it was connected to 193 member states, which meant that both communication and project implementation were smooth (Burke, 2017). However, the IOC considers itself to have a similar composition represented in its NOCs network.

It is also worth highlighting that the UN in general have an equal status of state, thus the ability to make decisions and take actions that might affect people could be more accessible to the UN than the IOC. However, the IOC has the advantage of having a more structured network (NOCs, International Sport Foundations¹⁰...) ¹¹ when it comes to various sport institutions, as well as an extensive reach to local communities through different initiatives (Brook, 2017).

The main reason given for such closure was linked to the back-then increasing partnership between the UN and the IOC. It was claimed that this would promote a more direct and stronger partnership between the two organizations, as now the UN would have more access to the resources and expertise of the IOC and its network (NOCs, ISFs...). This focus on partnerships’ importance relates to SDG 17 as it could be perceived as promotion for cooperation in order to achieve further goals. As the IOC president stated: *‘This will strengthen the position of sport even more in society and will help sport to fulfil its role as an enabler of sustainable development’* (in IOC, 2017).

Nevertheless, the responsibility transition caused a change in the preestablished working mechanism. This change stemmed from the differences in the strategies of both institutions. For example, the different definitions of sport they adopt: for the UNOSDP it’s *“all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games”* (UN, 2003), while for the IOC it’s: *“competition that leads to the award of medals”* (Fraguier,

¹⁰ Hereinafter, ISF is used to refer to International Sport Federation

¹¹ *‘Together with the International Sport Federations, the NOCs are a constituent of the Olympic Movement under the leadership of the IOC. The mission of the NOCs is to develop, promote and protect the Olympic Movement in their respective countries, in accordance with the Olympic Charter’* (IOC, 2020d).

2017,1). Such differences cause concerns as the two sport organizations aren't perfect substitutes for each other, which might impact the already-established improvements in the field. The main concern that was shared among the SDP circles is the lack of financial independence and proximity to media outlets as well as sponsors, which raised transparency concerns and a possible bargaining of social interests (Coalter, 2010; Fraguier, 2017)

2.2 Sport's Role as An Inclusion Tool for Refugees

Going through a forced displacement experience could have long-term consequences on different aspects of life and health. The journey is often life-threatening and extremely challenging as it often entails traumatic events. Sport, whether professional or amateur, enters the scene through its humanizing effect as it could help forced migrants feel human (Hartley et al., 2017).

Middleton et al (2020) highlight three themes found within the literature on refugees, forced migrants and sport, which are health promotion, integration and social inclusion, and barriers and facilitators to participation. Here, we will focus on the second and third themes. Firstly, integration and social inclusion, which uses leisure driven from sport as an inclusion tool, as it can help refugees to get to know their new host country communities, as well as it can help them in practicing the language and to develop their social skills. Additionally, participating in sport allows them to feel that they are the same as the people in their new host countries, not the 'others'.

Secondly, the barriers and facilitators of participation in sport after resettling, in other words refugees face obstacles to participate in sport after resettling, which include structural, sociocultural, interpersonal and personal barriers. It is worth mentioning that such barriers to entry exist regardless of the sporting level, whether on amateur or elite/professional level. The general structural barriers include lack of accessibility to transportation, public spaces and facilities that would prevent them from taking part in sport programs. Other structural barriers include the lack of participation opportunities for refugees in sporting activities and the lack of communication and coordination on a state level. In addition to this there is the inefficient referral mechanism, which is the method through which the newly arrived individuals are to be linked to such sporting opportunities. The sociocultural barriers focus more on the lack of the inclusive societal norms that are needed for the refugees to be able to participate, leading to feelings of discrimination, inter-group boundaries and isolation which could arise because of sports, whether directly or indirectly, making the refugees feel 'othered' and 'alienized'

(Middleton et al., 2020; Spaaij, 2012). The personal barriers include family responsibility, as well as lack of time and knowledge about sports opportunities. The most common personal barrier is language, as upon arrival to their host country, refugees most often can't speak the language.

Through more sport projects, sport could facilitate the aforementioned barriers, having a potential role in fostering a sense of belonging as it helps in connecting people with similar experiences of forced displacement and common cultural backgrounds (Olliff, 2008).

While Olliff (2008) found out that the top 3 reasons for young refugees to participate in sport are learning new skills, followed by making friends at second place, then having a coach that helps them with other stuff. The promotion of an inclusive sporting sector is recommended as an important step in order to be able to utilize sport as an inclusion tool successfully, through integrating inclusive practices in the local sport associations. Hence, sport goes beyond just being a physical activity for refugees and asylum seekers through their journey of inclusion in their new host countries.

While projects focusing on this field, can be dated back to the early 2000s, as a part of the policy initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament; The European Year of Education through Sport, around 185 projects at different levels were selected and co-funded by the European Parliament (Amara et al, 2004). Such projects focused on taking advantage of sport and the values it conveys. One of the projects aimed at understanding how sport was used as a social inclusion tool for refugees in the UK. According to them, sport can provide various types of benefits, which include individual and physical benefits in terms of health and promoting the quality of life. In addition to social benefits, such as inclusion and building social networks, and community benefits that capture sports usage as a tool for communication between refugees and their new host communities.

In more recent years, the number of projects using sport as a tool for integration and peace building has been on the rise (European Commission, 2018). Among such projects is ASPIRE: Activity, Sport and Play for Inclusion of Refugees in Europe, which is an international collaborative project, taking advantage of the popularity of sports as a potential unification tool. The project aims to provide a long-term perspective through offering participation opportunities for refugees in sport which is aimed to promote the psychological support and

intercultural conversation between the refugees and host countries, it's strongly linked to different NOCs (Bailey et al., 2017).

It's worth highlighting that the potential role of sport in athletes' lives doesn't stop at the amateur level but extends also to include elite sport. Michelini (2020) focused on elite sport as being used as a tool for inclusion through highlighting the mechanisms by which the refugee athletes cope with their resettlement experience and athletic ambitions. Four coping mechanisms are highlighted; idealization, de-sportification, postponement and abdication. The idealization of sport focuses on how elite sport could be a factor linked to patriotism which is closely related to the socio-political situation of the country of origins. Whereas de-sportification focuses on maintaining the sport activity itself for a better quality of life, not on a competitive level. Postponement highlights how some athletes put-off their sport ambitions, rather than dismissing them completely. This could be due to the stress that arises after moving to the host country. Finally, the abdication of sport in which a resignation occurs towards the ambition of playing professionally after resettling. Under any mechanism, all the athletes included in the study agreed that forced migration is the main reason why they didn't reach their athletic aspirations.

It is worth mentioning that when different sport levels are considered, this entails a drastic difference in the analysis of the role of sport. As with the grass-root level, sport usually comes into the picture as a possible contributor to settling-in after the individual reaches their host country, as it's considered from a post-displacement perspective. On the other hand, when sport is considered on an elite/professional level, the story differs. Sport is now considered from both a pre- and post-displacement perspective, since it has already been a part of the athletes' lives before resettling. Thus, it could have another role in their pre-resettlement lives other than the one after displacement.

2.3 A Deeper Dive into The IOC's ROT/RASP

According to Kaidal et al (2014), when global peace is discussed in the SDP literature, it reflects conflict resolution through non-violent alternatives, yet it doesn't mean the total absence of the global conflicts themselves. The main component for achieving peace is justice and eliminating discrimination. To assist in stopping global conflict, sport could be utilized in

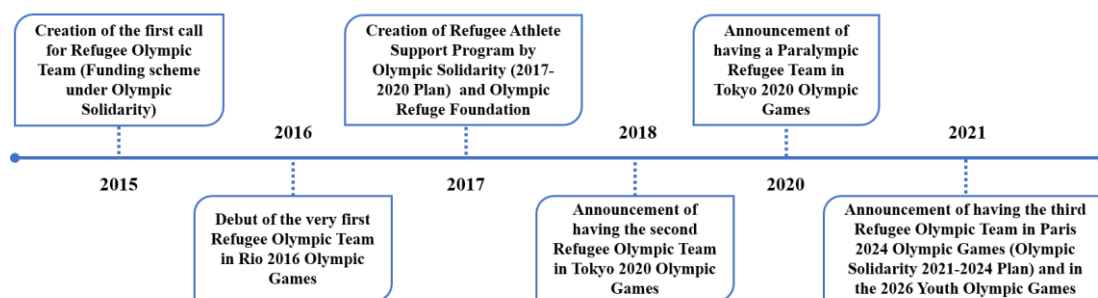
terms of the Olympic ideal as the Olympic Games were initially formulated to be an event that promote cooperation between nations, as the environment of competitive sport provides emotional intelligence, a sense of belonging and improves self-esteem. The authors argue that sport can be used to achieve a level of peace among nations. If countries could achieve tolerance, respect for human dignity and moral values through sport, it could eventually minimize conflict.

One of the main reasons why sport is being employed more often in the role of a development tool, is that it acts as magnet for a large number of people, thus attracting more attention and providing a new outlet for communication and implementation. This perfectly aligns with what is missing regarding the refugee crisis, as more solidarity is needed globally (Westboy, 2008).

In 2015, the number of refugees worldwide increased dramatically, reaching 65.3 million in total (UNHCR, 2015b). This surge instigated various new initiatives from organizations and governments all over the world in attempt to tackle the crisis from their own perspective.

In the same year the IOC announced establishing the very the first ROT in the 2016 Olympic Games. As, illustrated in figure 1 below, the efforts behind the ROT/RASP creation started in 2015 and is still ongoing as more plans for future teams are being made.

Figure 1: Timeline of the creation of the Refugee Olympic Teams and the Refugee Athlete Support Program



Source: Done by author based on data from the International Olympic Committee, 2021

The rationale behind creating the program was to provide an equal chance to the refugee athletes to prepare and participate in high-level competition and to help in raising awareness of the global refugee crisis. It aims to showcase how refugees can be an added value to the society and hence denounce the negativity attributed to the word ‘refugees’ (IOC, 2016f). The creation of the team mirrors the fundamental principles of Olympism, which state that: ‘*The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practising sport, without*

discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding... and solidarity' (IOC, 2020a, 11).

The application conditions were to have proven high-level competition results in an individual sport, and to be a recognised refugee or beneficiary of international protection according to the UNHCR (IOC, 2016c). The ROT is seen, from the perspective of the IOC, as a marriage between the IOC and UN that share a common theoretical base, peace objectives and status in the global community (Novogratz, 2017).

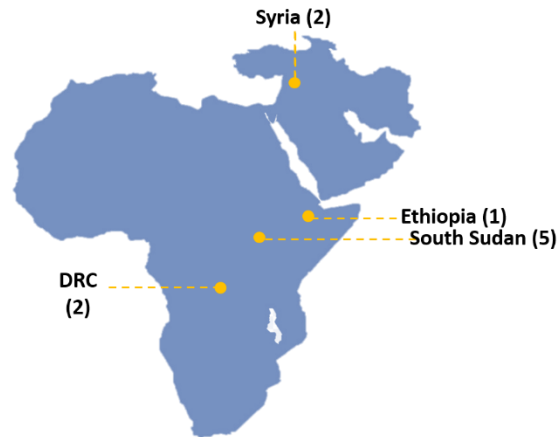
In his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, the IOC President Thomas Bach commented on the creation of the team:

'This will be a symbol of hope for all refugees in the world, and will make the world better aware of the magnitude of this crisis' (in IOC, 2020).

The composition of the team was announced in June 2016, to be considered as a 'national' team that would compete alongside other national teams. Like all other teams, the ROT had the same housing in the Olympic village and received the same welcome ceremony. The Olympic Solidarity commission covered all costs for the team (IOC, 2016a). As Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, commented: *'Refugees are people like others, they like to compete, they have the same strengths and weaknesses as others'* (IOC, 2020b).

The team consisted of 10 athletes out of 43 candidates. The athletes represented 3 sports; athletics, swimming and judo (IOC, 2016b). As shown in figure 1 below, the team consisted of 10 athletes from 4 different countries: The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Syria.

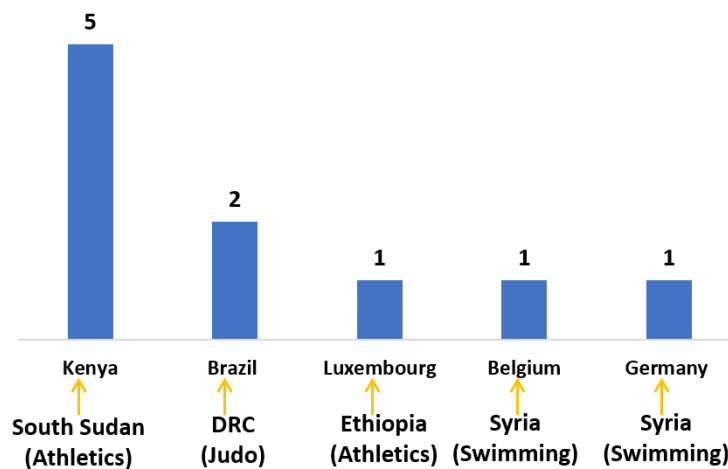
Figure 2: Map of the 2016 Refugee Olympic Team Members' Nationalities (Number of athletes)



Source: Done by author based on data from the International Olympic Committee, 2016 (<https://www.olympic.org/ioc-refugee-olympic-team-rio-2016>)

The team members resettled in 5 different host counties; Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Kenya and Luxembourg as illustrated below in figure 3, with half of the team relocating to Kenya from South Sudan, all of which participated in athletics. Such concentration might be due to the continuous influx of refugees between the two countries that has been going on since 2013 (UNHCR, 2019). The South Sudanese represent around 24.6% of total refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya, constituting the second largest nationality following the Somalis refugees (UNHCR, 2020).

Figure 3: Distribution of the 2016 Refugee Olympic Team Members' Host Countries



Source: Done by author based on data from the International Olympic Committee, 2016 (<https://www.olympic.org/ioc-refugee-olympic-team-rio-2016>)

It's worth mentioning that Google searches on refugees reached a peak during the 2016 Games, however, it decreased afterwards. The 2016 ROT might have raised awareness but only during the games and not after it, which could be due to the fact that people have already searched the term. However, changing people's attitudes towards refugees is an extremely hard task, which is linked to how they are portrayed in the media, leading people to be prejudiced towards refugees in terms of negative events happening in their societies (Scheidler, Ledford, 2018). Hence, the presence of the ROT in the media, could shed light on the refugees in a positive way.

The Olympic Refuge Foundation¹² was established in 2017 following the creation of the first ROT, it aims to better integrate refugees into their host country societies. One of its main activities is to: *'Mobilise the Sport for Refugees Coalition of 80+ partners and build multi-stakeholder partnerships'* (IOC, 2021). Again, partnerships are being included as a corner stone for future programs. The IOC president highlighted the IOC's partnerships: *'Together with UNHCR, we are addressing not only refugee athletes, but the refugee community at large.'*

¹² It leads many community-level projects in Turkey, Jordan, Kenya and many other countries.

Since its launch, the Olympic Refugee Foundation has already reached over 200,000 displaced young people and their host communities, with the aim of reaching one million people by 2024' (IOC, 2021). The foundation supports several community-level projects aimed at the inclusion and integration of refugees in their host communities. It also has future plans to implement sport for protection programs in the cities with large numbers of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers (Olympic Refugee Foundation, 2019).

During the 133rd IOC session in Buenos Aires in 2018, the announcement for the second ROT for Tokyo Olympic Games 2020 was made: *'Through sport we want to make a contribution to keep the world aware of this problem and this challenge so that it doesn't disappear from the conscious of the world'* (Thomas Bach in IOC, 2018b).

Thus, building on the experience of the first team, the decision to carry on this legacy was made. As Grandi commented on such inclusion in the 2020 Games; *"In 2016, the Rio refugee team captured the imagination of people around the world and showed the human side of the global refugee crisis through sport, I'm delighted that this tradition is to continue in Tokyo. Giving these exceptional young people the opportunity to compete at the very highest levels is admirable"* (in UNHCR, 2018).

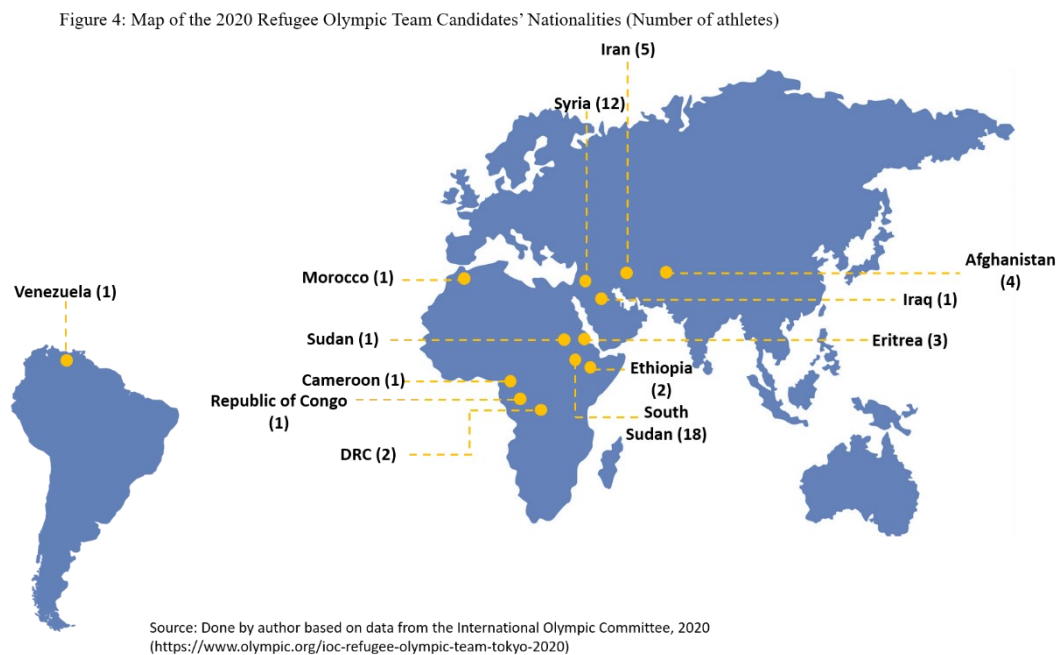
Consequently, a new bye-law to Rule 5 was introduced to the Olympic Charter in 2018, stating the support to the athletes with a refugee status (IOC, 2018a, 20). Generally, rule 5 focuses on the role of the Olympic Solidarity Commission in assisting the NOCs and the technical support from/to the International Sport Federations when needed (IOC, 2020a, 21).

The first Refugee Athlete Support Programme was created, as a part of the Olympic Solidarity 2017-2020 Plan, to be administered by the Olympic Solidarity Commission (IOC, 2020c). The objectives of the program are to provide a chance to the refugee athletes to prepare and participate in high-level competitions.

The division of the support is similar to the Olympic scholarship program for athletes, including a monthly training grant to training and coaching costs, and a fixed subsidy that is available upon request to participate in high-level competitions that is managed by the respective 'Host NOC' (Olympic Solidarity Commission 2017-2020 Plan, 1-2).

Thus, there is a 'more-structured' continuum towards the efforts of refugees' inclusion, as IOC President Bach said in the same IOC session: *'This is the continuation of an exciting, human and Olympic journey, and a reminder to refugees that they are not forgotten'* (in IOC, 2018b).

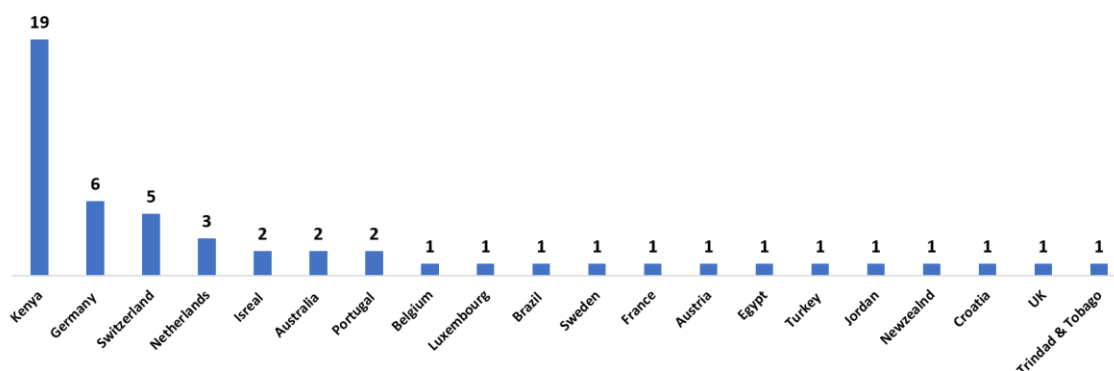
Now, around 55¹³ candidates are selected for the 2020 Refugee Olympic Team. The IOC refugee athlete scholarship holders come from 13 different countries with a wider representation compared to the previous team, as illustrated in figure 4 below, which is based on the data of 52 athletes only, according to data available on the International Olympic Committee website.



Residing in 21 host counties, figure 5 below illustrates 20 countries only based on the available data. Kenya continues to be the largest host country as compared to the other host countries of the candidates of the 2020 ROT.

¹³ It is also worth noting that all of the athletes (except for one) that were in the previous ROT are now among the candidates for the 2020 ROT.

Figure 5: Distribution of the 2020 Refugee Olympic Team Candidates' Host Countries



Source: Done by author based on data from the International Olympic Committee, 2020 (<https://www.olympic.org/ioc-refugee-olympic-team-tokyo-2020>)

Pederson (2018) who analyses the IOC's creation of the Olympic games and the possibility of refugees' participation throughout history, argues that the main obstacles that kept refugees from being able to participate in pre-2016 Olympic Games, were mainly the rules that are based on nationality and the nation-state relation. Which Pederson explained as '*The assumed congruence between the nation, as cultural community, and the state as a political-territorial entity*' (Betts, 2009 in Pederson, 2018, 9). The nation-state nature of the organization itself might be a reflection of the assumption that '*individuals cannot reach their full potential without belonging to a nation-state*' (Pederson, 2018, 54).

It's worth mentioning that the rule of having the same nationality within the same team (athletes must belong to a national team), was first introduced in the 1908 Olympic Games (Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbot, 2008, 51), however it was included in the Olympic Charter for the first time in 1920; '*Only naturalized nationals are qualified to take part in the Games*' (IOC, 1920, in Pederson, 2018, 39). Thus, a sharp criterion for inclusion in the Games required nations to be politically independent (to have a NOC).

Refugee athlete's participation was rejected by the IOC throughout history, it wasn't possible for refugee athletes to participate as they technically didn't belong to a nation, and thus couldn't compete under its name (Pederson, 2018). However, back then it wasn't as common for an individual to not belong to a nation-state.

From Pederson's point of view, the refugees were previously seen as a threat to the hegemony of the nation-state, which he perceives as the core of the Olympics. Thus, it was considered as a threat due to the refugees' inter-governmental nature which excluded them from the nation-

state and thus out of the scope of the Olympic Games. Therefore, before the creation of the ROT, the participation of refugee athletes wasn't an option on the table, despite the Olympic Games reflecting internationalism, the nation-state was still considered at the core of the international environment of the games.

The creation of the team is seen by some as a sign of inclusion, a departure from the IOC's norms, a 'change of heart' from the IOC side. This is because the focus now shifted towards not being restricted by a single nation-state, and that nationalism comes below internationalism (Novogratz, 2017). However, Pederson continued to argue that the creation of the team isn't really a change of heart, rather it's forcing, in a diplomatic manner, the same old categorization. In other words, it categorizes the refugee athletes as 'quasi citizens of the IOC' (Pederson, 2018, 3), which further promotes the nation-state discourse already in place. Since athletes compete in the Olympic games as a part of a national team, not on an individual basis, they need to wear a uniform that has a country's name on its back. This is what the IOC attempts to do for the ROT, as they marched for the first time in Rio Olympic Games in 2016, holding the IOC flag, as well as wearing uniforms with the Olympic Rings on it.

In terms of 'refugee-ness', Novogratz (2017) argues that the decision to make a team out of the refugee athletes is part of the homogenization process. However, the question persists, whether including refugee athletes through the ROT is a matter of equalization and helps in discarding the feeling of the 'others', or if it could somehow be stressing the 'other' feeling through forcibly conforming with the status-quo which mirrors the other 'normal' national teams participating in the Olympic Games.

In the arena of public opinion, two camps emerge in terms of the team comprehension. One camp is advocating its contribution to the refugee crisis and promotion of global partnerships. While for the other camp, it's perceived as an 'inaccurate' or a 'flawed' attempt for inclusion (Pederson, 2018), and a failure from the side of the international community to manage the refugee crisis efficiently. However, this crisis isn't a new one, it has been rooted, sadly, in our world for a long time.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

In order to track the role of sports in the refugee athletes' lives, I shed the light on two main foundational life events for analysis. The first one is the displacement experience and the second one is joining the ROT/RASP.

The experience of forced displacement leads to major uncertainties in various aspects of the refugee's life, such as; potential marginalization, socioeconomic disadvantages, helplessness, and loss of citizenship, as well as major psychological consequences and traumas (Porter and Haslam, 2005; Ostrander et al., 2017). Hence, it's considered to be a major event in an individual's life. The choice of the second event is based on how the interviewed athletes perceived it as being a major event in their lives.

This chapter is divided into three subsections, each describing a theory that is used in the analysis. First, Hurrelmann's socialisation theory is used to understand how the two foundational events affected the athletes, then Georgio Agamben's theory of Homo-Sacer is employed to analyse the 'exceptional' nature of the two events. Finally, Putnam's Social capital theory is used to provide more of a 'background music' to the lives of the athletes, to understand the role that sport played in the two life events.

Hurrelmann's socialisation theory

In order to understand the two experiences, Hurrelmann's socialisation theory is utilized. According to Hurrelmann and Bauer (2018), the individual personality is expressed in terms of internal and external realities, which are driven from the conflict between the individual and society. The personal experience is influenced by both the personal perspective which represents the internal 'reality', and the surrounding environment which represent the 'external' reality. The internal reality covers both the physical and mental aspects of the person, while the external reality focuses on the social circumstances (Michelini, 2020).

The negative (forced displacement) and the positive (ROT/RASP) foundational events affect the external reality as both have an impact on the athletes' surrounding environment. As well as the internal one, as it puts the personal characteristics to test and causes psychological changes which may lead also to acquiring new characteristics or losing old ones (Berry et al., 1987).

Georgio Agamben's theory of Homo-Sacer

To analyse the two foundational events, Giorgio Agamben's theory of Homo-Sacer is borrowed from the field of refugee studies. The theory describes 'spaces of exceptions' as the instances when individuals are reduced to 'bare life' and excluded from the qualified life and normal order of a society (Agamben 1998; Agier 2010; Novogratz, 2017).

Within the context of forced displacement, spaces of exception are formed through humanitarian interventions, refugee camps which are considered as peace zones highlighting the 'exception in both space and time' (Ticktin, 2014, 7). As Agamben (1998) argued, camps are created through legislating the state of exception. Within such exceptions, the validation of international humanitarian organization occurs (Novogratz, 2017), however, such exceptions cause a paradox, as the lives of refugees are portrayed as being 'a part of and apart from the global community' (Novogratz, 2017, 47).

Such 'exception' is applied here to the creation of the ROT/RASP, from the perspective of being an intervention that isn't permanent, which was established to contribute to the awareness of an international crisis through allowing a participation that wasn't allowed before (IOC, 2016a). According to the theory, the socio-political 'exception' space arises due to the depoliticization that occurs because of forced displacement, such as giving up citizenship, and consequently falling into the 'exception' zone. This leads to deprivation of membership in the humanity category (Ticktin 2014).

The ROT/RASP resembles the above mentioned '*exception in both space and time*' (Ticktin, 2014, 7), since the athletes who went through forced displacement wouldn't be able to represent any national team and hence wouldn't normally be able to participate in the Olympic games, consequently becoming the exception. As well as in terms of the duration that they will stay in the program, an exception to their living conditions as compared to pre-joining the program.

Putnam's theory of social capital

Sport enters the framework as a possible processing factor of the changing athletes' realities throughout their life phases, as professional/elite athletes, are known to have distinctive personal and psychological characteristics such as; persistence, desire to succeed and conscientiousness (Hardy et al., 2017). In order to capture sport's possible contribution, a connection with the theory of social capital has to be made. Putnam's social capital theory is applied as it places more weight on interconnectedness between societies as compared to Bourdieu's (Siisiäinen, 2000). According to Putnam (1995, 66), social capital is the: '*features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that can facilitate coordination*

and cooperation for mutual benefit'. Thus, he bases social capital on the personal, collective and institutional trust (Cohen & Cunningham, 2014). When Putnam's theory is applied to the field of SDP, it highlights the reproductive qualities of sport as sport activities themselves and sport events and projects can affect the social capital stock (Darnell, 2010a). This is due to the role of sport, as it *'build character, teach values, encourage healthy competition and promote intergroup friendship, social networks'* (Schulenkorf et al., 2011, 4).

The theoretical foundations of sport for development theory suggests that the combination of sport, cultural activities, global citizenship education (such as; global issues awareness) can lead to personal development, cross-cultural collaboration, social change and can promote societal change over time and space (Lyras and Peachey, 2011).

From the perspective of the athletes, social capital takes the shape of the essential skills acquired from practicing sport, as *'when a person participates in an activity with specific aims and outcomes and involves participation from other individuals, it results in the accumulation of social capital for the participants'* (Sherry & O'May, 2013, 2).

As from the perspective of other stakeholders, professional sport can contribute to generating a more collective sense of responsibility and representation as global sport events can enrich social capital. For example, mega sport events which could boost to nationalism, belongingness, and solidarity (Peachey et al., 2015).

Putnam (1995) divides social capital into bonding and bridging. From a network perspective, professional sport in the form of high-level competition can boost both the horizontal and vertical ties within and across nations. This is done through fostering the ties among people from the same social background (bonding = horizontal) and across different social groups (bridging = vertical) (Claridge, 2004).

Using the theories outlined above, I present the personal narratives of the individuals actually involved in the process, from both the creator and participant sides, in order to understand their own perspectives on the matter.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In order to answer the research questions and provide a transparent analysis of the data, qualitative research methods were used since they provide a contextualized understanding of the transformative life stories and their meanings in an interpretive method (Chirkov, 2009; Denzin, 2017, Middleton et al., 2017). Social constructionist approach was followed as the most convenient instrument to the needs of the research, since it prioritizes the interviewee's view and affirms the 'needed' subjectivity found in the meanings of individuals' narratives of their unique experiences (Creswell, 2008).

4.1 Research Participants

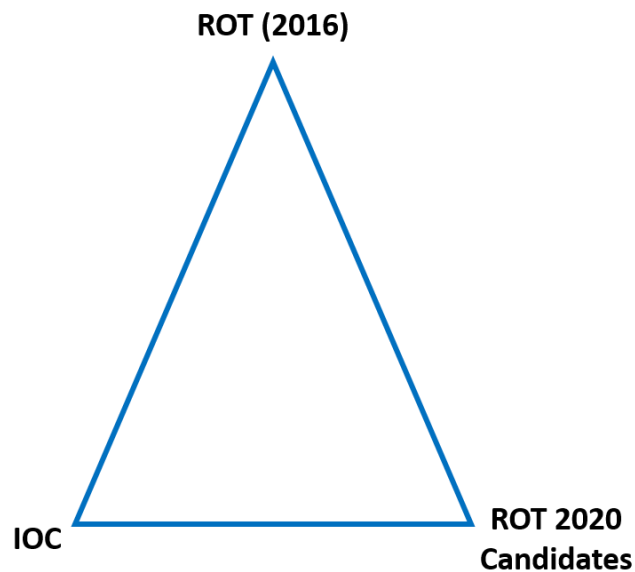
Purposive sampling was adopted as the sample composition depended on pre-defined criteria (Mack et al, 2005).

The Criteria:

- Has to be a professional/elite athlete;
- Has gone through a forced displacement experience and now holds an internationally recognized legal status of a refugee in the host country;
- Has to be a member of the IOC's ROT/RASP.

The sample included athletes from the 2016 team and current candidates for the 2020 team, as well as the IOC, in order to understand the technicalities of the programs. Such composition allows for data triangulation, as different sources of data are included in terms of people, time and space. This allows for presenting different evidences from data which would contribute to enhancing the research validity (Creswell, 2007; Hales 2010). In terms of people, the sample composition allows for a holistic view of the programs, from its participants and creator as illustrated below in figure 7.

Figure 7: The triangle of participants



Source: Done by author

In terms of time, the 2016 ROT member provides the experience in the previous Olympic Games (Rio 2016) as well as the current one as being a candidate for the next team. While the current candidates, provide their experience now and the perspective for the upcoming Olympic Games (Tokyo 2020), allowing us to understand if there are any process changes between the two experiences. The IOC provides a timeline-kind-of perspective on both processes for the first and second time of the programs.

Finally, in terms of place, the included athletes come from different countries around the world and now live in different host countries.

The Challenges:

In the attempts made to contact the athletes, a reachability challenge was encountered. Reaching the refugee athletes affiliated with the IOC's programs wasn't a straightforward process. The first contact point with the athletes was in January 2021, through their accounts on a social-media platform, with a request to conduct research with them as being affiliated with the ROT/RASP. A total of 2 athletes responded. However, it's important to note that the research was already focusing on a very restricted target population in terms of numbers¹⁴. Also, their time availability was restricted as the Tokyo Olympic Games is close. The choice

¹⁴ Only 10 athletes were on the 2016 ROT

of the social-media platform was due to the unavailability of any contact information for the athletes available online at the time of the sampling process.

Another challenge that came up was the, surprisingly, bureaucratic process to be followed to be able to interview the athletes. Through the reply of one of the athletes on the social-media platform, I was told that an approval from the IOC had to be granted first and a contact email was shared with me.

The initial contact/email was sent to an IOC representative to ask for permission to interview the refugee athlete as part of my research for my master's thesis. I was asked to provide further details about my research, interview length, the timeline and the possibility to send the interview questions before hand. Once this information was provided from my side, the acceptance was granted, and I was asked to contact the athlete directly.

More emails were sent to the IOC for the possibility to get in contact with any of the 2016 ROT members. The IOC replied back with a possibility to conduct only 1 interview with an athlete who agreed to participate, as well as sharing the questions before hand. Among the emails sent was a request to do an interview with the IOC, and the interview was conducted with the same IOC representative.

A total of 4 interviews¹⁵ were conducted; one with a 2016 ROT member (who is also a current candidate), two current candidates of the 2020 team, and a representative of the IOC as illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1: The Research Participants

Respondent Code	Type	Gender
A1	2020 ROT Candidate	Male
A2	2020 ROT Candidate	Male
A3	2016 ROT Member	Male
IOC	IOC Representative	Female

Source: Done by author

¹⁵ The interviewed athletes come from host countries in different parts of the world (not disclosed for ensuring anonymity).

It's important to highlight that an all-male sample was not intentional, but unfortunately none of the responses were from female athletes.

4.2 Data collection

Data collection took place in March and April 2021. 'Semi-structured' in-depth interviews were selected as the most appropriate data-collection tool, since they allow for more flexibility and dialogue, which is optimal for capturing the essence of the personal experience, especially if the topic under study is sensitive (Kendall, 2008; Mack et al, 2005). Written consent was obtained from all research participants prior to conducting the interviews, which lasted around 2 hours on average.

The interview language was English in two interviews. However, it wasn't the mother tongue of the participants, hence there was a language barrier, which understandably affected their ability to convey their thoughts accurately. The other two interviews were conducted in a language other than English, which shall remain undisclosed to ensure the anonymity of the respondents.

All of the interviews were conducted remotely through an online video meeting platform, mainly due to the current world pandemic situation. Understandably, there are possible negative impacts on the quality of the interview as compared to 'normal' face-to-face interview (Chiumento et al., 2018). One of the challenges was the ability to establish a rapport with the respondents (Santana et al., 2020), especially that forced displacement is a sensitive topic to discuss even in normal 'face-to-face' interviews. To overcome this challenge, an extended 'warm-up' section in the guide was added as an 'ice-breaker'¹⁶.

Another challenge is the inability to ensure the privacy of the respondents as well as ensuring there are no external distractions occurring during the interview, in terms of the physical place they are doing the interview from. For example; there were some interruptions in two of the interviews, due to the phone or doorbell ringing, which distracted the focus of the respondents. As a solution, the part that got interrupted, was redone. The respondent was asked more probing questions on the subject in which the interruption occurred.

¹⁶ See annex A

The discussion guide was composed of schematic open-ended questions, so that the respondents would have the freedom to express what they see relevant from their perspective to the questions asked, since meanings are driven from the interaction between individuals and their interpretations of the world (Bais et al, 2012; Jamshed, 2014). Three versions of the guide were generated with slightly different questions¹⁷. Two separate guides for the athletes were created, since one of the athletes was on the 2016 ROT, hence more ROT-related questions were added to explore his experience. The guide for the IOC's interview had a more technical orientation in terms of the creation of the team/program. The IOC interview was relatively more structured as compared to the athletes' interviews.

As the respondents should have a role in both 'directing as well as acting' in the research study (Stake, 1995 in Creswell 2007, 209). The research questions were shared with the respondents, for two reasons; firstly, so that they would understand the motives behind this research. Secondly, so that they can also share if the questions were able to track their experiences.

4.3 Data Analysis:

Narrative analysis is applied on the collected data to highlight the importance of individuality when it comes to narrating the stories of the athletes. This is to ensure there wouldn't be divergence from their intent, to ensure inductiveness, as well as to avoid any generalizations or stereotyping regarding the forced displacement experiences (Crotty, 1998 in Creswell, 2008).

Among the different categories of narrative analysis is the experience-centred narrative (Mishler, 1986 in Squire, 2008). Its application here is essential as it covers the meanings of narratives, ensuring a thick and rich description of the athletes' stories (Creswell, 2007). However, it doesn't necessarily relate to a specific event and hence celebrates the '*individualized subjectivities*' (Squire, 2008, 38). The experience-centred approach focuses on the semantics and consequently portrays transformations and changes in the lives of the narrators in a sequential and meaningful manner (Patterson, 2008). The connection between the experience and narrative is highlighted (Squire, 2008), hence we get to understand the meanings that the athletes give to their experiences, both in terms of forced displacement and the IOC's programs.

¹⁷ See annex A, B and C

Following the data collection process, the transcribing process started, in which transcription was done manually to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts. Some of the interviews were conducted in a language other than English, thus translation was done while transcribing them.

The inductive structural coding process began after transcription, which was done following a ground-up approach (Thomas, 2003). This means that the transcript was divided into subsections then the codes were devised from the collected data. Codes were then grouped together under different categories/themes based on the context. The codes and themes are more similar among the three interviews with the refugee athletes when compared with the interview with the IOC.

Chapter 5: Results & Discussion

This chapter is divided into two sections, highlighting the two foundational events analysed. Starting with the athletes'¹⁸ resettling experiences after arriving in their host countries before being aware of the ROT/RASP. Then we move to the phase after being affiliated with the IOC's programs to understand how the athletes and the IOC perceive the ROT/RASP.

5.1 The Forced Displacement Experience: The First Foundational Event ¹⁹

This Section is divided into two subsections representing the two main categories of the codes for the first foundational event. The first subsection/category is the 'Settling-in' which highlights the main changes in the athletes' realities upon arrival, and their attempts regain stability in general and in relation to sport. The second one is the 'Belongingness after arrival', which focuses on the belongingness crisis and the barriers they faced in relation to how sport helped in overcoming them.

Forced displacement and depoliticization occur in parallel, after falling into the 'exception' zone, giving up citizenship and gaining the official refugee status, refugees become 'quasi-citizens' of the world (Ticktin, 2014). Forced displacement leads to complex effect that persists in the present and extends into the future. Such experience leaves traces on both the personal and the professional lives (Michelini, 2020).

The experience of forced displacement altered both the external and internal realities, as the athletes were put in a new environment that differed in various aspects as compared to their previous environment in their home countries. This change also brought about psychological impact.

5.1.1 The settling-in

Upon arrival the athletes started the process of seeking refuge (apply officially for the legal status of a refugee in the host country), also known as the process of depoliticization (Ticktin,

¹⁸ The three athletes started practicing their sport from a young age. They shed light on the positive impact that sport had on their lives through learning essential skills.

¹⁹ Pre-ROT/RASP

2014). A1 commented: *'It was very important to do it as soon as I arrived, if I break my residency, and I have no refugee status, they will deport me'*. The athletes now existed in the 'space' in between nations and governments levels (Agamben 1998), which affected their realities. Living in such intergovernmental environment, the athletes were now legally excluded from political life, unable to work (immediately), as well as being forced into exceptional living conditions lacking the protection of a nation-state, hence a sense of exclusion arises and an *'unstable exception'* is produced (Betts, 2015; Haddad, 2008,130; Pederson, 2018).

After settling the legalities of their stay, a new phase started, as athletes had to figure out their next steps. The way of manoeuvring through such phase differed among them, the work of Michelini (2020) is employed here through his four different coping strategies that refugee athletes use towards their sport ambitions after displacement.

Busy with work, A1 had to take his time to establish a life for his family in his host country. A1 shared: *'Sport for me became a phase, I had to put it aside and started working on settling with my family and provide for them... You know in that time; sport is considered a luxury'*. However, after 3 years he was able to return to sport (athletic goals), such rescheduling of the athletic career mirrors the 'postponement coping strategy' (Michelini, 2020) which delays the start of concrete efforts to achieve sport objectives.

While A2 was persistent to keep sport in his life right after arriving, he shared: *'I contacted the municipality where I lived, and said I am an athlete, I was on the national team back home and I want to continue training, they said they will come back to me, even then I didn't stop training, I trained outside in the street'*. This mirrors the 'idealisation coping strategy', through which the sport motivation and objectives are reinforced after displacement (Michelini, 2020). A2 also shed light on how he overcame the challenges he faced after arrival. He added: *'Sport taught me patience and to be challenging, no matter if we fall, we rise again, there is no impossible, with training it will come true, so these basics of life we learnt through sport'*.

As for A3's strategy to return to practicing, he added: *'it was a very difficult movement when I arrived here, I didn't know anyone... after a short while I got back to training outside the camp... I met people in the streets and heard some news about a competition, I registered and I won it, after that I got a club.... However, the club isn't interesting like back home where if you have a club, then you are employed with payment, you don't need to work, but here no, you are in the club just to have a license, without it you can't compete'*. A3's coping mechanism

follows Mechilini's 'Idealization strategy', as he insisted to resume practicing and competition even if when he knew that in his host country it won't be the same as his home country. Here among the forced displacement impacts on A3's external reality is the change in the nature of the sport system. His desire to resume training resembles a sense of a continuity for him, to be able to process and rehabilitate himself to changes in his internal reality as well.

Thus, the coping strategies differ among the athletes and relate to the refugee experience as it gives an external meaning to sport (Michelini, 2020). Whether they start pursuing their goals right away or postpone them for a period of time, sport helps them in dealing with their impacted external and internal realities. It puts in action the characteristics they gained through their athletic career into practice and thus helps them to process their realities (Hurrelmann, 2018).

A3 reflected on his experience of living in the camp upon arrival and how it was different from his life back home: *'I got lost while training, so it took a long time to return, and dinner time was finished and then I slept after training for 3 hours without dinner imagine, it was so cruel'*. The exclusion from the normal order of society is touched upon here through A3's statement, as he highlighted how his daily life in his host country differed from his life back home. Living in the camp confirmed the state of exception (Agamben, 1998) through which he depended on aid/assistance and lived within exceptional living conditions (Betts, 2015).

5.1.2 Belongingness After Arrival

According to Maslow (1987), forced displacement and belongingness crisis occur hand-in-hand, since the sense of belonging is a fundamental human characteristic then it can be considered as an indicator for successful integration (Brar-Josan, 2015). Sport could be a contributing factor to that indicator as it provides a context through which such belongingness crisis could be stabilised. The belongingness crisis arises due to the feeling of being 'othered' (Middleton et al., 2020) that arises due to the various barriers emerge due to forced displacement, such as: language, networking difficulty and different traditions in host country (Olliff, 2008).

The athletes described their belongingness differently after arrival, as A1 described what sport represented in terms of his belongingness after leaving his home country: *'For me a home is the place where you spend a lot of time, for me it was sport'*. For A1 sport doesn't represent only a physical

activity, rather his identity, and his sense of home and belongingness, which helped him in handling the displacement impact on his internal reality after losing his citizenship.

As for A2, who took his player identity card along his passport and official papers when he left his country, sport for him resembles a part of his identity. He reflected: *'from the official documents that I took from home, was the personal ID and a card of an international player that expired, I didn't like to leave it or throw it, so I kept it'*. The international player card for A2 was a document that represented him as an individual, reflecting his strong and ongoing attachment to his identity as an athlete. As we will discover, such card will be of an extreme importance in his next life phase as it's a factor contributing to how his reality prevailed.

Sport here helped in the processing of belongingness confusion after displacement as it gave them a sense of familiarity and stability within the changing circumstances around them.

In addition, it also assisted in overcoming the language barrier, which is one of the main personal barriers faced by refugees in their host countries (Spaaij, 2013). The interviewed athletes expressed how sport acted as a communication medium after resettlement, A1 explained: *'they won't understand my language here, but if we play sport, we will understand each other'*. A2 reflected back to when he still couldn't speak the language: *'I communicated through my sport movements and body language'*.

Sport has made the language barrier relatively easier for the athletes, as it was a context through which they communicated with other people. When A2 started to work as a trainer, he stressed how sport helped him in advancing his attempts to learn the host country's language: *'Sport made me a new life, I learned the language through sport, as I had players in different age groups, I always told them if I say anything wrong, please correct me. So, I gained friends and learned the language through them... my life changed once I started doing sport again here'*.

Thus, sport for him also provided a medium through which language learning was facilitated and therefore supported his integration in the new society. This relates to the possible role of sport in forming vertical connections and strengthening the bridging capital in society (Putnam, 1995), as it helps in forming bonds between people from different backgrounds.

Sport also acted as a social context through which people can establish networks, learn about culture, traditions and social expectations, which is crucial when arriving in a new community/country (Delaney & Madigan, 2009 in Pederson, 2018). A3 shared how his performance in the competitions helped him to feel included: *'I started my training and I got to know some people... I was a winner in my first competition, the next day I was in the newspapers'*

everywhere and then I had a lot of friends around... It was nice'. While A2 added: *'my coach introduced me to the customs and traditions, he taught me how daily life goes here*'.

Sport played an impactful role in expanding their (horizontal) network and connections, A2 shared how he got his current job: *'I met a person in my training place, he offered me a job, as he has a fitness hall, and he gave me his card to call him*'. He reflected on the fact that sport wasn't his main source of income back home and said: *'For my work, maybe if I was still back home, I would regret such decision to continue in sport, but when I came here, I saw the care they give to sports and to the person who has an athletic goal, they continue to support the person*'. Thus, sport opened new doors for him in his host country that wouldn't have been available to him otherwise.

For A1, the role of sport expanded beyond his own life, as he explained his initiative in his host country for refugees to practice sports, through which he chose to employ and share the skills he learnt from sport with others. He commented: *'the activities weren't exclusive to refugees only, but also citizens of the host country... a lot of refugees found work through the networks made while playing sport... I also held sports days to bring people together*'. Through the initiative, sport here boosted both the horizontal (within refugees) and the vertical (with citizens) networks.

In the first foundational event, sport helped in stabilizing the athletes' realities as a facilitator of the psychological challenges and the unstable environment surrounding them by the above-mentioned channels. Hence, it contributed to the processing of the belongingness crisis and enhanced the integration process through overcoming various personal and structural barriers (Olliff, 2008).

It's worth noting that through providing a zone for cultural exchange and mutual understanding in the new host countries, sport contributes to the 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital accumulation as it helps in enhancing the vertical and horizontal connections among different layers and social groups in the new society.

5.2 The 'Bumpy' Road to the ROT/RASP: The Second Foundational Event

In this section, the journeys of the athletes to reach the ROT/RASP is explored alongside the challenges they faced. In addition to their experiences as being a part of the ROT/RASP.

This section is divided into 8 subsections, representing the themes that emerged while grouping together the codes describing the different athletes' experiences in the ROT/RASP.

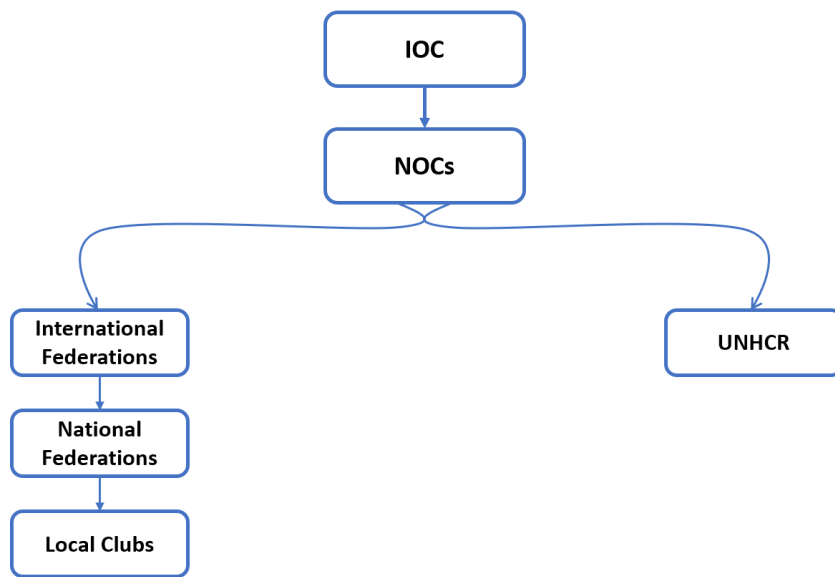
Drawing on the work of Agamben (1998), we will see how the ROT mimics a refugee camp; a de-politicalized exception that is a 'zone of exceptional laws and powers' (Agier 2004 in Novogratz, 2017).

5.2.1 The Awareness:

In the interview with the IOC, the adopted dissemination strategy for the ROT/RASP was explained. The creation and management of the program was based on the already-established organizational network: *'All UNHCR offices are aware of this and we also inform all NOCs so this is how we communicate about this program'*. She added: *'It's simple because when an athlete gets to a country, he will continue his sport and get in touch with a local club and the club is connected to the national federation, which is connected to both NOC and international federation, so this is how the Olympic Movement works, all the partners are aware of this program'*.

The IOC builds the dissemination scheme for the programs by depending on an assumed fixed trail of how the athletes' journeys would prevail, discarding the individuality in the refugee athletes' experiences. Due to the pre-assumed journey of the athletes, the IOC depends on its already-established hierarchal network for dissemination and management of the programs as shown below in figure 7.

Figure 7: The IOC's management and dissemination scheme for the RASP/ROT



Source: Done by author based on collected data

In reality, as discussed in the previous section, each athlete had a different experience after arrival, coping strategy, the timing and method for getting back to sport which wasn't 'simple'. Thus, the pre-assumed simplicity and straightforwardness towards the program awareness scheme from the IOC's side was nowhere to be found. Even for A2 whose awareness method falls into the IOC scheme, it was still considered as a coincidence to some extent as his coach happened to know people in the NOC. On the other hand, A1's awareness was purely coincidental through a source that wasn't related to the sport sector, he explained: *'I was working in a place, where there was a man that worked for the UN that I knew, he told me they want refugee athletes for the Olympics, first thing I thought about was I'm in a foreign country so which name will I play with, but now it's solved... back then I only dealt with the UNHCR, but they didn't know where to direct me. I'm not sure if they talk with IOC or not'*. However, A1 wasn't able to reach the application for the first team, even though he knew about it. He reflected: *'when I saw the Olympics and the ROT, walking in the opening ceremony, it was a shock for me, but I thought that okay I will prepare for the next opportunity'*.

As for A3's awareness, it was after he started winning competitions, that a journalist informed him about the program, which again isn't among the IOC dissemination network. Before knowing the program, the journalist used to support A3 in his efforts to reach the Olympics, A3 shared: *'he (journalist) told me you couldn't run under the name of the host country,*

because you don't have its nationality, but you have the minimum for qualification, you need the nationality, I asked him to help me, because I could participate for the 'host country', I have the enough time, we tried but it wasn't possible, I have to stay here 5 years, speak the national language and have to do the test to gain the nationality'.

The adoption of such system layout could be a contributing factor to the method that the IOC decided from the first place to include the refugee athletes in the Olympics through creating a special team. Even though the IOC's aim is to send a message of hope and inclusion to all the refugees around the world (IOC, 2015a), the adopted scheme's rigidity raises some questions on the actual adaptability of the Olympic system to the refugee's inclusion. As highlighted from the IOC interview, this system is unified for all of its programs, and that the ROT/RASP is no different from any other program that the IOC had. Then it isn't about updating the system to make room for the refugee athletes, rather it's about fitting them into the already established 'nation-state' system.

We will see later how the claimed 'inclusive' way of allowing the refugee athletes to participate, doesn't necessarily mean unexclusiveness, as yet forms of exclusion from the normal Olympic order are found. Hence, a serious question is raised regarding the meaning of the team and its stance towards the nation-state discourse (Pederson, 2018).

5.2.2 The Application:

A1 exerted a lot of effort to find out how to apply for the RASP, informed through a foreign channel that interviewed him, he explained: *'she (the channel representative) talked with officials from my home country, but they said there is nothing we can do.... She told me this way isn't possible to compete under my home country's name. But she can try and see the way through being a refugee'*. He added: *'after a while they called me and said that they talked with the IOC and that the host NOC in is the one to apply on behalf of it. Then all of a sudden, the NOC told me we are looking for you for a whole year! As if I am far from them, then someone contacted me from the NOC'*. He continued to reflect that he was the first case for such program in his host country: *'I would have benefited from the scholarship two years, trained better and participated in more championships, but because no one understood anything... even NOC when I went, they didn't know, they said it's the first time that such thing happens'*.

The difficulty isn't in the program application itself, rather it's in understanding how the process works, including who to contact and how to begin the process. As A1 described: *'the application was very easy, because they can go to the international website and see my championships'*. For A2, it was relatively more straightforward, he explained: *'my coach had direct contact with the IOC, national sport federation, and the NOC'*. He continued to add: *'IOC even contacted my back-home NOC to validate that that the player (me) was there and reached such accomplishments'*. A2's expired international player card played a key role in this stage, as he said: *'it included a number, through the website of the international federation, they were able to see my participation in the world championship I participated in back when I was still in my home country and this helped'*. Hence, helping him to realize his goals in the host country and to apply to the RASP, which would provide an additional perspective to his identity after getting accepted as being a 'scholarship-holder'.

From the perspective of the IOC, the application process is considered simple, and the smooth collaboration within the hierarchal scheme is also assumed. However, as we have seen with A1, the process wasn't clear even for the NOC at the beginning, which contradicts the IOC's claimed strong partnerships within its program network. This also highlights how the host country itself played a role in the process, in terms of the bureaucratic nature of the national systems as well as whether they had an experience with the previous ROT.

As for the application conditions, the IOC shared: *'First you need to have an official refugee status confirmed by UNHCR, this isn't negotiable, as you can imagine each country has its own system in terms of how they deliver permits, so UNHCR will confirm the refugee status in a country. Second, the athlete has to demonstrate a sporting level at international level and great potential, then a discussion starts between IOC, host NOC and we include ISF, to ensure there is a proper assessment of the application'*.

The partnership scheme with the UNHCR is crucial to avoid the subjectivity of national systems. However, 'potential' is included in the conditions which could reflect different meanings. The IOC clarified: *'we discuss a lot with ISFs who know their athletes perfectly and what level is required, so for some sports it's very easy, for example marathon running you have the time, so we know if you are close or not to qualify, it's more complicated for badminton or combat sport, where you don't have any time... we look at latest competition they have done and the result and we discuss'*. This gives a sense of a relatively fluid criteria for qualifying for

the ROT, that will be discussed later to understand how this lack of clarity affects the team candidates.

5.2.3 The Acceptance:

Acceptance into the program was a big milestone for the interviewed athletes, a memorable step in their Olympic journey, impacting their lives in several aspects.

After becoming scholarship holders, sport continued to have a role in their lives, as A1 highlighted: *‘there are many challenges that I was able to overcome in my life, and the main reason behind this ability is sport’*. As for A2: *‘it taught me to be responsible, to make this is as my profession here, to be able to be independent through it’*.

The program itself contributed to their external realities, as it helped in shaping their lives especially from the financial and physical (training equipment...) aspects. As for their internal realities, the athletes felt proud, more responsible and persistent to achieve their dreams. Hence, sport continues to be a contributor to how the athletes’ lives develop.

While the IOC added: *‘when you talk to them you see that sport has been a key in the way they connect with their new community, from mental and physical health it really helped to feel better as they had to wait for many weeks, not able to work nor study, so it was a difficult moment for them and sports was a way to stay healthy and active, they often say that the club is like their new or second family’*.

However, acceptance into the program caused a ripple effect on the athletes’ lives, impacting different aspects of their realities. One of the impacted aspects is the media representation in terms of the restrictions put to get in touch with the them as highlighted in the methodology chapter.

The three athletes weren’t completely free when it came to their interaction with media. A1 described: *‘They want media stuff to be through them, maybe you know as you had to take their permission, and of course they asked many questions about what are your purposes behind such interview... I talk in general, no specifications, and this is what they care about, that I don’t specifically talk about my host country in a way that would hurt the country I am staying in... IOC is very respectful and they also have their limits, but I cut such things, so I make them comfortable’*. Reflecting on his decision to accept specific interviews alongside the guidance of the IOC, A1 added: *‘for this interview, I asked the IOC and I also agreed with the decision, whatever they want, I will do it, I want to be here in the program for the time period that I*

need. A3 explained his experience: *'we have an agreement with the IOC, a contract, so I accept journalists who are coming through IOC... IOC is the boss'*.

Some of the athletes felt the need to satisfy whatever the IOC requests, which might be out of their own characters, as they are keen on keeping everything in line in terms of their scholarships and relation with the IOC.

While the IOC shared: *'we just give them the tools to be able to decide what is good for them, I always discuss with the athletes... I will never push... and of course, they can request a 1-on-1 session with me'*. Thus, she tries to help them assess what would be a 'good' opportunity, she added: *'we discuss is it worth the energy the time, of course it would be different if it's CNN, BBC, or NBC, or if it's a local newspaper, but sometimes for them it's very interesting to have their local newspaper talking about them'*. However, this gives a sense of subjectivity of what exactly a 'good' opportunity might be, which further restricts the freedom of the athletes' media interaction in comparison if they weren't affiliated with the IOC's programs, whether on which opportunities to accept or what to say/share within such opportunities.

5.2.4 Sport Results: Inclusion or Illusion?

Even though the team is treated as a national team from the IOC's point of view, A2 highlighted an important insight on a 'system' that is special to the ROT: *'normally scores are set by international federation in some championships where you collect points, the more points you get, the closer you get to qualification. But for ROT, such classification isn't for me, I'm not included in it, as I would take the opportunity from another person who is more worthy, since we have our own specific qualification system ... they tell me whichever championship you want to go to, we will pay for it, but not the qualifier championships since for these there are people who are more worthy. Since this is their only chance'*. It must be noted that this might be specific to some sports (A2's sport), and thus not applicable to all the ROT candidates.

I draw again on Haddad's (2008) term 'unstable exception' that I use to explain how the team is considered an exception for the IOC, however the claimed inclusivity of the team in the 'Olympic' order isn't found within all the technicalities. In other words, since one of the reasons behind creating the team is for the refugee athlete to feel the same as other athletes, such sameness is missing in what A2 described above. Since not being able to participate in specific championships highlights the unequal accessibility and exposure, which mirrors the refugee camps as described by Agamben (1998) in terms of exclusion of normal order of a

society. This portrays how A2, through such unstable exceptions, is a part of and apart from the internationally recognized scoring system (Novogratz, 2017).

While commenting on the criteria used to choose the next ROT members, the IOC stressed that athletic performance can't be the only determinant for qualification, she explained: *'we will look at the sporting level and this is a very important criteria, but not only because it's very difficult for the athletes, they might not be able to be part of competitions, especially now with the virus, they don't have access to competition because sometimes they can't travel, sometimes they were still in between their countries and the new host country, so there are many obstacles. It would be too easy to say this is a sporting criterion you are in, you are out, this isn't possible. That is why we look at the refugee status, sporting level and we look at representativeness in terms of region, sport, and gender'*. The selection mechanism highlights the subjective judgments of the IOC as there are no definitive quotas for the regions, sport nor gender.

However, the inability to participate in championships could be for many reasons, but one of those could be coming from the IOC's criteria/side, as highlighted through the narrative of A2 above.

This again highlights the difference between a 'normal' and a refugee athlete, such distinction keeps the refugee athletes from gaining competitive experience. This sheds light on the paradox of the IOC working to make the refugee athletes feel included however at the same time excluding them, as they give the athletes the chance to participate in the Olympics but through a different mechanism and a specific way that exclude them from the global athletic order and thus not having the needed competitive experience/exposure.

The fact that the athletic performance/result isn't the main criteria for qualifying for the team could highlight the exceptional nature of the ROT and how it's treated differently. But again, we must remember that the ROT isn't the 'usual' team, and this is highlighted through the answers provided by all the interviewed parties. However, the paradox arise as the IOC at the same time frames the ROT to be as any other team in the Olympics, which raises a conundrum on how should the team be perceived. Is it actually equivalent to a 'national' team competing in the games? What if the athletic qualifiers are not strictly followed by other national teams, would it be acceptable? What would that mean to the 'Olympic' order/system?

5.2.5 The Political Game

Through the provision of exceptions, the validation of international humanitarian organization occurs (Novogratz, 2017). Thus, the IOC enhances its situation on the global arena through taking a lead with a new intervention targeting the refugees' crisis (Pederson, 2018) validating its position in the SDP field. Such validation comes in handy with relatively new responsibility that is now on the IOC's shoulders instead of the UNOSDP's.

A1 shed light on an important perspective related to the IOC's team selection criteria of regions representativeness. He commented: *'it's kind of a show... so that they can say we are taking refugees from all over the world, and they highlight it in the media, so they might have other considerations than the ones that are known/announced... However, the champion, I mean the athletic results, might not be their main concern'*. A1 perceived the team as a show through which the IOC validates its role towards the crisis, rather than a normal athletic team, since the advantage of the objective athletic criteria that is normally used in the selections is lost due to the IOC's criteria subjectivity.

Even though the IOC reduces barriers to entry through providing an exception for the refugee athletes, however, as we have seen such inclusion is not simple as it's claimed and could lead to exclusion on some aspects.

5.2.6 The Team, The Message

The team provides the chance for the refugee athletes to compete in high-level competitions, which is seen as a message of hope for all refugees (IOC, 2016a).

All of the athletes appear to agree with such message of the team, A1 described the team as: *'the thing that makes all of this worth it, is that I am representing a category... my experience has to succeed so that others would look up to it and re-do it'*. While A2 shared: *'It represents big responsibility, since I represent a big category in the society, it's known that the asylum seeking is an old issue, and it's always difficult whether because of a war or financial circumstances.'*

A3 shared his experience as being a part of the 2016 ROT: *'For me it was special, because if I presented a country, I could only think of the competition, but I was thinking about having a good position because I am representing refugees around the world who are suffering and I have to show that we can do as normal people, if the opportunity is given, I did it and I was so happy'*. He continued to reflect on his experience after the team, he highlighted the activities that he does now: *'I worked with refugee people in the camps I was visiting, and encouraging them to start training, here in my host country'*. This is an example of how the team enabled

A3 to add value to his host country and boost inclusion for other refugees as well as himself. Moreover, this could ultimately promote the bridging social capital accumulation as it works on enhancing the vertical connections within the society.

As for the team meaning for the IOC, she added: *'it's IOC's commitment, to stand next to refugees and to help the refugee athletes to continue their careers in spite of the obstacles they faced. To continue competing and training in an international level, and to build their future thanks to sport... I am like behind the scenes to make sure that the athletes don't only reach their sporting performance but also find their personal balance and this is very rewarding to me... refugee isn't a negative word... listening to the stories, having shared some moments with them, it really helped me to put things into perspective and their resilience'*.

Even though the team's meaning and message have a sense of positive impact, the ROT seems to be an 'in-between' solution, since it provides the refugee athletes with the opportunity to participate without satisfying the condition of nationality, which showcases the IOC's 'commitment' towards the refugee crisis. However, such commitment conforms to the IOC's already established system, which mimics the International Refugee Regime, that was based on the idea that the refugees are a threat to the nation-state system, hence the stability of the system was needed to be restored.

Thus, the IOC's solution in terms of ROT/RASP highlights its stronger commitment to the nation-state order, from which any divergence would be seen as a threat (Pederson, 2018) to the IOC. Hence, the ROT/RASP is created as a 'suitable' solution that already fits in its system, while any other alternative for inclusion would be seen as a threat to the IOC's nation-state system.

5.2.7 Representation & Belongingness

Sport is said to boost the sense of belonging and nationalism (Luiz & Fadal, 2010), but when applied to forced displacement, confusion concerning belonging and representation might arise.

Patriotism towards the home country is detected, even though it's realistically difficult to represent it. It's important to highlight that there might be a difference between belongingness and representation, which could be confusing when conceptualizing sport as promoting

nationalism. As A1 shared that he had in mind, while starting the displacement journey, the idea of gaining another nationality and representing it to play under its name for better chances in sport. However, we will see below how he reflects on his continued belonging to his home country regardless of his representation. A3 as well, as discussed above, before joining the ROT was willing to represent his current host country (to gain its nationality) in order to be able to compete in the Olympics.

However, such openness to the possibility of representing a country other than their home countries (nationality), could be attributed to the strong desire of achieving their athletic and Olympic dreams, regardless of which country they are representing. Hence, it might not necessarily be related to the aspect of belonging to a country but maybe to the sport in general.

When asked in a separate question about who they feel they represent in sport, all the athletes shared their representation of the refugees, however they represented more than one party. A1 felt that he represented both his home country and the refugees all around the world, as he shared: *'Generally no one can take my 'nationality' away from me, I represent my home country in all cases but in addition to that, it's even more honourable to represent more countries... I represent all refugees around the world'*. While A2 expressed gratitude towards his host country and added: *'honestly, in general, from the perspective of the world or other people, I represent refugees or the sport federation, in the world championship: I participated under the flag of the international federation, but for me, I feel that I represent my host country because of the support I received was from it, I feel that representation should be for my host country'*. Here, there is an interesting take-away which is the difference between who he is expected to represent versus who he feels he represents.

This could be an example of the perception on how refugees are expected to feel/act in general, which might not always be true to their reality, as the globalization process has re-defined a sense of connection, that isn't completely dependent on geographic location, or a historical sense of belonging anymore (Papastergiadis, 1998 in Hirey 2009).

While A3 shared the same feeling of representing the refugees, he made an important remark in his comparison between how a 'normal' human feels versus how a refugee feels. The concept of refugees as 'others' comes to mind again while hearing his reply: *'I totally felt like normal human not like a refugee during my competition, but I was thinking that I have to show the power of refugees, so the people must change their mentality. They must stand with refugees'*

who are suffering around the world, because no one chooses to be a refugee, everyone can be one day a refugee, I was really happy to represent refugees around the world'. Here we can notice how A3 allocated external meanings to sport through his participation in the Olympics. According to Peachey et al (2015), participating in a mega sport event could help in generating a more collective sense of responsibility, solidarity and belonging. While the first two could be realized through the ROT participation in the Olympics, belonging might not. Since the ROT doesn't represent specific geographic borders like other national teams, rather it looks at 'belongingness' from a different lens that doesn't necessarily depend on geography.

In the Olympic Games, each team represents a country, hence participating through the ROT, gives rise to a 'refugee identity' (Novogratz, 2017, 83) which parallels a national identity under the hegemonic nation-state nature of the games/IOC. A3 described his experience on the 2016 ROT: *'The team for me was like a family, we created a family in the Olympics, I don't even think that we are a team, we were a family created by IOC'*. This gives the refugee athletes a sense of belongingness to the IOC (Novogratz, 2017; Pederson, 2018).

Belonging to no nation and to no nationalized community push the refugees to exist in symbolic isolation, other than the physical isolation, hence, a 'complex relation arises between exclusion and universal humanitarianism' (Novogratz, 2017, 69,72). The ROT/RASP provides the physical inclusion of the refugee athletes in the Olympics to signal the magnitude of the refugee crisis and to confirm that refugees are 'our fellow human beings' (IOC, 2020b), through the 'symbolic power of public 'spectacle'' (MacAloon, 1984 in Novogratz, 2017). However, in doing so, the refugee athletes could be perceived to be isolated symbolically due to the 'refugee identity', even though they are included physically in the games.

A3 also highlighted above the sense of togetherness he felt while representing the refugees, which is also felt by other national teams' members towards their countries, leading to stronger national solidarity (Brainer and Ho, 2013 in Novogratz, 2017). However, under the ROT, *'the impression of a common refugee identity is challenged, reinforced, and complicated'* (Novogratz, 2017, 11) because the refugees athletes' identities are compared here to the national ones and such comparison wouldn't hold in a non-Olympic background.

A paradox appears on whether the ROT equalizes the athletes to their peers representing national teams or does it categorize them into the 'other' and hence isolating them

symbolically. This shows how including them within the nation-state system could eventually mean their exclusion on some levels.

A3 drew upon a situation in the 2016 Olympics, when he met a member of his home country's national team; *'he (The national team-member) saw me with refugee logo jacket and he said are you going to compete for this country, oh my god, where is this country! I told him no this isn't a country, this is just called ROT, and I explained to him'*. This coincides with how the ROT is perceived by some scholars to be the same as a national team, which is normally made to represent a country. As Novogratz (2017, 86) highlighted how some trials for creating a nation for the refugees have been made, which would attribute to an exclusionary approach as it would force culturally different people into one legal formation. This doesn't offer a solution to the root of the refugee crisis, as she raises questions on nationalizing exclusion to transform the 'others' into the 'same' while forcing the 'others' into a 'national refugee identity'.

5.2.8 Neutrality & Normality:

Under the fundamental principles of Olympism:

'Recognising that sport occurs within the framework of society, sports organisations within the Olympic Movement shall apply political neutrality.' (Olympic Charter, 2020, 12).

In the opening ceremony, the team marched behind the Olympic flag: *'Having no national team to belong to, having no flag to march behind, having no national anthem to be played, these refugee athletes will be welcomed to the Olympic Games with the Olympic flag and with the Olympic Anthem'* (Thomas Bach in IOC, 2015a).

This was seen as symbol of political neutralization by A1: *'the flag was like a neutral country, a flag for neutrality for any athlete, so no belonging to a specific nation/flag, as athletes there is an opportunity to participate... I have no country to represent but with ROT there is something I can work for and one day I might reach it'*.

As for A2, it was more about normal inclusion; *'unfortunately no country name they are participating with... when the word refugee is added, he or she is deprived even more from more things, so one of the things is that we wouldn't be able to participate normally, so this chance as an athlete deprived from participating by name of a specific country, now maybe not at the same level to participate by the name of a national team, but it gave chance to people to participate let's say in a relatively normal way'*. He added later when asked about the relation

between the team and the IOC; *'refugees gained this right under whatever name it is ROT or whatever, because when we go to the competition, we are under the flag of Olympics, so this message is that this is the world of the IOC, as a person among this group, my message is not to let them down'*.

Leading a normal life came up again in the narrative of A3, who reflected on the difference he noticed in his host country after the games, he said; *'I think people understood something; refugee can do and achieve some great things, but they must help in camps, it shouldn't close the way for refugees and I think that helps, I saw here as an example in my host country, there is a change, which is we have to give chance for the refugees, also integrate with society and live a normal life as normal people..., I try to help for the media to tell them the reality, and I try to tell that people must stand with refugees.'*

We can see here how the athletes look up to the IOC as the provider of normality, equality and neutrality within the abnormal circumstances due to their displacement experience, as *'In times of conflict or instability, sporting activities can provide participants with a sense of normalcy'* (UN, 2016). They see such opportunity as a national soil within a globalized globe (Novogratz, 2017), which they used to enjoy back home but now are deprived of it in their host countries. Thus, the team mirrors the creation of depoliticized zones such as refugee camps (Agamben, 1998).

It's worth mentioning that through the IOC's and the athletes' narratives, the expression of normal participation is highlighted through the neutrality of the ROT/RASP. Such claimed ROT neutrality further solidifies the sense of belongingness to the IOC. However, this also gives a hint that there is an association between neutrality and refugees, which could reflect a paradox of whether being/representing/supporting refugees is a neutral act. This brings into question the possibility of the IOC's being apolitical and neutral when the core of the programs is one of the major humanitarian crises that our world is currently facing (Ismail et al., 2018).

The attempts to provide the 'normal' for the refugee athletes are represented by their ability to participate in the Olympic Games while not having a nation to represent. After the games, the sense of normality continued for A3. He explained how his life changed; *'sport changed my life in general, I am more sociable, more contacted, it gave me an experience and I have seen a lot of things, it was my dream to represent my home country, but I have a new experience with a new team, I never expected that. I am living a normal life here, so I am doing my training and I work, I learn, so I am quite happy'*.

There is a sense of ‘exception’ throughout the phases of the athletes’ affiliation with the program, in terms of how they perceive the program itself, as an opportunity that couldn’t have been available to them otherwise. As well as in terms of the duration they will stay in the program, an exception to their living conditions as compared to pre-joining the program, which might have a long-term effect on their lives/careers. However, through its mere existence, the programs position the athletes globally as abnormal, which again sheds light on the concept of symbolic isolation (Novograts, 2017). This leads us to question whether the refugee athletes had a real choice from the first place, surely, they were free to choose whether to apply or not, but there was no other alternative for them to be able to participate. Hence, there is a sense of being indirectly forced/pushed to compete on such team, again highlighting their exclusion from the normal order of society due to forced displacement (Agamben, 1998).

Chapter 6: Conclusion & Way Forward

The internal and external realities of the athletes interviewed were impacted by both foundational events described. As both events were considered to be an exception, sport played an important role in the athletes' lives in terms of their comprehension of the first event, as well as contributing to and processing of the second event. Since the success of the resettlement experience is measured in terms of social integration, which is strongly affected by sport as a processing factor and hence affecting the athlete's realities (Putnam, 1995; Hurrelmann, 2018). This could be also applied to the ROT/RASP whose success could be measured through the inclusion of the refugee athletes in the Olympics and in their host countries. However, as we have discovered, this isn't a straightforward process.

Allowing refugee athletes to participate in the Olympics is a step forward in terms of inclusion. However, the IOC succeeded in including them via its own normal order/system, within which they are excluded from the normal order of many other aspects of the experience.

Hence, when it comes to the practical parts of the program/team, a paradox is found in comparing the IOC's and the athletes' experience within the programs, which mirrors the unstable exception characterizing the nature of such programs. This brings into question many aspects of the team/program such as: Whether it's an exception for inclusion or does it lead to exclusion? Does the team boost a sense of belonging to the refugees or a sense of belonging to the IOC? Is it possible for the IOC to be apolitical?

Way Forward

More research is needed on the IOC's ROT/RASP, as the results above are based on limited literature available on the topic. Future research could focus on gathering more data, as within a short period of time, we will have around 20 refugee athletes²⁰ that will have gone through the experience of being on the ROT in the upcoming Tokyo Olympic Games.

It's worth mentioning that differences were noticed throughout the narratives of the athletes in relation to their host countries in terms of the support systems available in their host countries. Hence, the host countries' systems might have an impact on the experiences of the refugee athletes. Hence, the host country is a possible important factor to be focused on as well.

²⁰ The next ROT will be around 20, this is based on data collected through the interview with the IOC.

Even though the team is articulated as a temporary exception, there will still be teams in the 2024, and 2026 Olympics as the refugee crisis persists²¹, thus providing more chances for research on this topic in the future.

²¹ From the interview with the IOC.

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Annexes

Annex A: Discussion Guide for the in-depth interview with the 2016 ROT member

Good morning/afternoon/evening.

I am Rafal Ramadan, I am 26 years old. I am conducting research as a part of my graduation project under the supervision of Palacky University in the Czech Republic to be submitted in May 2021.

My research purpose is to understand the role that sport might have had in your different life phases, as well as your experience as an athlete in the IOC's 2016 Refugee Olympic Team and the Refugee Athlete Support Program.

Before starting with the questions, just as I have introduced myself, can you tell me a bit about yourself as we get started? (Can you introduce yourself?)

Ice Breakers: (Not necessarily all questions to be asked)

-How is your day going?

-Are you enjoying the weather? (Comment on the weather)

-Have you visited country X (where I am currently)? ... I have /haven't visited X country (his country), how is it? How is the area around you? What would you suggest me to visit over there?

-What would you do in a typical day?

-Where do you like to go on weekends?

-What is your favourite cuisine? (Comment with mine as well)

-Do you like to watch TV/movies? (If yes, what genre?)

Today we will talk about your journey as an athlete on the 2016 Refugee Olympic Team, in order to understand what were the challenges, what kept you going, whether sports have had an impact on your life. There is no right or wrong answer.

Core Questions to be asked in the interview:

1. Did you have more than one career back home? If no, what was it? If yes, what where they?
2. Can you tell me more about your journey starting from your athletic career (and if you had a career outside of sports) before reallocation?
3. How were your training conditions like before reallocation? (Frequency, location, facilities...)
4. Can you tell me the role that sports (if any) had on your life before reallocation?
5. Can you tell me more about the reasons behind the reallocation? When did you move? Can you tell me more about the choice of the host country? What factors were included into the decision concerning the host country?

6. After being forced to resettle, can you tell me about your resettlement experience? Before joining the RASP, being a professional athlete, did sport have any role in such experience?
7. Can you tell me how was your life like when you arrived to (Host) Country?
8. When did you start training again after arriving in the host country?
9. How did you start training again in the host country?
10. What was the bureaucratic work needed for you to train again?
11. How was your training like after reallocation but before receiving the scholarship? (frequency, location, facilities...)
12. Can you tell me about your career now? Is being an athlete is the main one? Is there something else?
13. Can you tell me what (if there is) was the role of sports in your journey starting from the beginning of reallocation to resettling in the host country?
14. How and when did you decide/How did it happen that you applied for the IOC Scholarship the first time? What were the different drivers behind your decision to apply for the scholarship program? Can you briefly tell us about the application process? What was the role of the NOC and IOC in the application process?
15. Did the NOC have a role? If yes, what was it? What about the IOC? What was the selection based on?
16. Who is the main contact point for you when you need to contact the International/National Olympic Committee?
17. When did you become a scholarship holder/ 2016 Refugee Olympic Team candidate? What was the role of the scholarship program in your career? From an athletic perspective, as well as psychological, personal, educational and professional ones.
18. And now what is the role that sports (If any) play in your life?
19. Did you need to re-apply to be a current scholarship holder for the 2020 Refugee Olympic Team?
20. Can you describe to us the scholarship program/Refugee Athlete Support Program in terms of the types of support you received from the IOC in both times?
21. Can you tell us more on how did you qualify to be on the 2016 team/to the Olympics? (What does it mean to qualify to be in the team? Does it mean you qualified for the Olympics in an international championship?)
22. Can you tell me more about the media coverage? Who do you need to take approvals from before you have any media coverage? IOC or NOC?
23. What does the team represent/mean to you?

24. Describe to me your experience of being on the team through the 2016 Olympic games? How was it? How did you feel? Who did you feel you were representing while competing? What about your results?
25. Describe to me your experience post the Olympic games? (As well as you prepare for the 2020 Games). How do you see your experience today? And how do you use it?
26. Please compare your life before joining the refugee Olympic Team and currently.
27. What messages and role do you think the 2016 team delivered to the world and how? What is your opinion on how these messages were delivered? How do you perceive such messages? What message do you deliver? How does your close environment see you?
28. Do you think there will be future teams? If yes, what do you think should be the messages of the upcoming team/s and why?
29. What do you think is the possible contribution of the creation of the team to the perception of the refugees, if there is?

Annex B: Discussion Guide for the in-depth interview with the 2020 ROT Candidates

Good morning/afternoon/evening.

I am Rafal Ramadan, I am 26 years old. I am conducting research as a part of my graduation project under the supervision of Palacky University in the Czech Republic to be submitted in May 2021.

My research purpose is to understand the role that sport might have had in your different life phases, as well as your experience as an athlete in the IOC's the Refugee Athlete Support Program.

Before starting with the questions, just as I have introduced myself, can you tell me a bit about yourself as we get started? (Can you introduce yourself?)

Ice Breakers: (Not necessarily all questions to be asked)

-How is your day going?

- Are you enjoying the weather? (Comment on the weather)

-Have you visited country X (where I am currently)? ... I have /haven't visited X country (his country), how is it? How is the area around you? What would you suggest me to visit over there?

-What would you do in a typical day?

-Where do you like to go on weekends?

-What is your favourite cuisine? (Comment with mine as well)

-Do you like to watch TV/movies? (If yes, what genre?)

Today we will talk about your journey as an athlete in the IOC's Refugee Athlete Support Program, in order to understand what were the challenges, what kept you going, whether sports have had an impact on your life. There is no right or wrong answer.

Core Questions to be asked in the interview:

1. Did you have more than one career back home? If no, what was it? If yes, what were they?
2. Can you tell me more about your journey starting from your athletic career (and if you had a career outside of sports) before reallocation?
3. How were your training conditions like before reallocation? (Frequency, location, facilities...)
4. Can you tell me the role that sports (if any) had on your life before reallocation?
5. Can you tell me more about the reasons behind the reallocation? When did you move? Can you tell me more about the choice of the host country? What factors were included into the decision concerning the host country?
6. After being forced to resettle, can you tell me about your resettlement experience? Before joining the IOC's Refugee athlete support program, being a professional athlete, did sport have any role in such experience?
7. Can you tell me how was your life like when you arrived to (Host) Country?
8. When did you start training again after arriving in the host country?
9. How did you start training again in the host country?
10. What was the bureaucratic work needed for you to train again?
11. How was your training like after reallocation but before receiving the scholarship? (Frequency, location, facilities...)
12. Can you tell me about your career now? Is being an athlete is the main one? Is there something else?
13. Can you tell me what (if there is) was the role of sports in your journey starting from the beginning of reallocation to resettling in the host country?
14. How and when did you decide/How did it happen that you applied for the IOC Scholarship? What were the different drivers behind your decision to apply for the Refugee Athlete Support Program? Can you briefly tell us about the application process? What was the role of the NOC and IOC in the application process?
15. Did the NOC have a role? If yes, what was it? What about the IOC? What was the selection based on?
16. When did you start being an IOC scholarship holder? And when from the time of the application?
17. Who is the main contact point for you when you need to contact the International/National Olympic Committee?

18. Can you describe to us the Refugee Athlete Support Program in terms of the types of support you receive from the IOC?
19. How is your training like after being a scholarship holder (frequency, location, facilities...)? What is the difference that the scholarship has made?
20. What does being an IOC scholarship holder represent/mean to you?
21. Can you tell me more about the media coverage? Who do you need to take approvals from before you have any media coverage? IOC or NOC?
22. How and when will you know if you qualify to the Refugee Olympic Team? Do you know what is the selection based on?
23. What is the role of the Refugee Athlete Support Program in your career? From an athletic perspective, as well as psychological, personal, educational and professional ones.
24. And now what is the role that sports (if any) play in your life?
25. What does team/program represent/mean to you?
26. What messages and role do you think the 2016 team delivered to the world and how? How do you perceive such messages? What message do you deliver? How does your close environment see you?
27. Do you think there will be future teams? If yes, what do you think should be the messages of the upcoming team/s and why?
28. What do you think is the possible contribution of the creation of the team to the perception of the refugees, if there is?

Annex C: Discussion Guide for the in-depth interview with the IOC

Good morning/afternoon/evening.

I am Rafal Ramadan, I am 26 years old. I am conducting research as a part of my graduation project under the supervision of Palacky University in the Czech Republic to be submitted in May 2021.

My research purpose is to understand the role that sport might have had in your different life phases, as well as your experience as an athlete in the IOC's 2016 Refugee Olympic Team and the Refugee Athlete Support Program.

Before starting with the questions, just as I have introduced myself, can you tell me a bit about yourself as we get started? (Can you introduce yourself?)

Ice Breakers: (Not necessarily all questions to be asked)

-How is your day going?

- Are you enjoying the weather? (Comment on the weather)

-Have you visited country X (where I am currently)? ... I have /haven't visited X country (his country), how is it? How is the area around you? What would you suggest me to visit over there?

-What would you do in a typical day?

-Where do you like to go on weekends?

-What is your favourite cuisine? (Comment with mine as well)

-Do you like to watch TV/movies? (If yes, what genre?)

Today we will talk about the IOC's Refugee Olympic Team and the Refugee Athlete Support Program, in order to understand the rationale behind their creation, the meaning, the message and their technical details. There is no right or wrong answer.

Core Questions to be asked in the interview:

1. Can you tell us more about your role in the IOC? How close is your work with the Refugee Olympic Team?
2. Can you tell us about when and how the idea of the IOC's Refugee Athlete Scholarship Program and the Refugee Olympic Team was initiated in the IOC?
3. Can you tell us about the reasons behind creating the IOC's Refugee Athlete Support Program and the Refugee Olympic Team?
4. Can you tell us more about the connection between the IOC's Refugee Athlete Support Program and the Refugee Olympic Team?
5. What does the Refugee Athlete Support Program offer to its holders? (types of support)
6. When did the athletes of the 2016 team started receiving the scholarship support from the IOC?
7. Does the host country of the athlete have any impact on being selected for the Refugee Athlete Support Program or the team? More complications in the terms of beaurocracy? Are there any quotas? If the athlete happens ot change his/her host country, would that affect their status of being scholarship holders?
8. What are the rules and regulations for the athletes to qualify for the Refugee Athlete Support Program? Are there specific things that might disqualify the athlete after being accepted into the program?
9. Can you tell us about the process of selecting the scholarship holders? How does the application process work? Who is involved in the process? The athletes themselves? NOC? The IOC?
10. When does the athletes start their application on average after arriving to their host countries? Is there a deadline for applying? How many applications were received for the IOC scholarship program for the 2016 team and Refugee Athlete Support Program for the 2020 team? If some were not accepted, what are the reasons?

11. What about the qualification and selection process of the team members out of the scholarship holders for the Refugee Olympic Team? How does it happen? Does it happen automatically when the athletes qualify for the Olympics?
12. Can an athlete who holds a refugee status, but is not a scholarship holder, be included into the Refugee Olympic Team? Why?
13. We have seen, that recently new athletes are being included into the scholarship program, what is the reasons behind such timing of the inclusion? As the Olympics have been moved to 2021 instead of 2020, would they have made the team if there was no postponement?
14. Can you tell us more about the first team? It's size, the backgrounds of its members? Were there more applicants (scholarship holders) that weren't selected? Is there a maximum size for the team? If yes, why?
15. What role do you think the backgrounds of the team members had on the team? And what could be the effect of having diverse background of the upcoming team?
16. What are your thoughts on who the different team members represented in the 2016 games? Do you think they represent the Refugee Olympic Team, their home countries or who?
17. Did the selection process differ between the last team and the current team to be formed? If yes, what are the changes that happened? And why?
18. Can you tell us more about the future of the Refugee Athlete Support Program and the team? Are there any plans for it to be a permanent part of the games? Why? What factors are taken into consideration for such a decision?
19. What do you think is the possible effect of having the team as a permanent part of the games?
20. What does the team represent/mean to you (The IOC)?
21. Describe to me the experience of the team through the 2016 Olympic games? How was it? How did the IOC react? What are your thoughts on the media coverage on the team?
22. How does the IOC feel about the athletic results of the athletes in the Olympics? How about the 2016 team results? What about your expectations of the 2020 team's results?
23. What about post the Olympics? When did the IOC decide that there was going to be a new team and why? What lessons were learned from the previous experience of the 2016 team?
24. What messages and role do you think the 2016 team delivered to the world and how? What is your opinion on how these messages were delivered? How do you perceive such messages? What message do you deliver?
25. What will be the messages of the upcoming team and why? Why is it different (if it is different)?
26. We have seen some of the 2016 team members representing the team on different media platforms, can you tell us more about this? How does the athletes feel and the IOC about media representation of the team?

27. What are the factors that is taken into consideration when selecting the team's media representatives?
28. What were the factors taken into consideration when selecting the flag bearer for the 2016 team in the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games? Who takes such decision? How about for the upcoming team?
29. What do you think is the possible contribution of the creation of the team to the perception of the refugees in general, if there is?
30. What do you think is the possible role that sports had on the lives of the athletes that were/are included in the program/team or professional athletes who faced forced displacement?
31. What do you think is the possible role of the IOC when it comes to current international development issues through using professional sports (Refugee Athlete Support Program / Refugee Olympic Team/ other programs)?