



STAY TUNED

BOOSTING THE FREQUENCY OF QUALIFICATION

Solution Story // Implementation Journey Sofia

The team from Sofia, Bulgaria, have implemented a project to use sport and interests as a route into continuing education and to the future labour market. Capitalising on Sofia being named European Capital of Sport for 2018, the city initiated a Youth Referee Academy to build on personal development and cultivate leadership qualities in young people.



01. WHAT WAS THE STARTING POINT?

Sofia municipality has long been very active in the field of using physical education, sport and youth activities as a route to education and work. Their focus was on social phenomenon of sports (activities) – using it as a lever for socialising, integration and early intervention in risk areas.

Sofia was selected for the European Capital of Sport for 2018 and was a host for various world championships and other international sport competitions.

In this context, Sofia wished to use sport as a clear way to engage youngsters at risk of Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) and harness their interests to keep them engaged through sports and related activities.

This was all set in the context of a broader set of activities within the city designed to reduce and prevent ELET.

02. WHAT WERE THEY WORKING TO IMPLEMENT?

In collaboration with National Federations, the National Sports Academy, the University for Sport, in 2018 the Municipality of Sofia started a special programme for Young Referees. This programme was highly relevant in the context of the European Capital of Sport and many important events in the city in 2018.

The idea was to help students learn how national federations prepare for and deliver a major championship, understand the role of sport referees and how to apply their sport

skills to ensure fair and sportsmanlike games. There is a big emphasis on leadership and how their jobs make a difference in local sport and major competitions alike.

This programme linked very closely to other areas of the city's work that sought to bring communities together, with schools as the focus. This particular project brought a sports focus dimension to that existing work.

Key Policy Themes for Sofia:
Vocational Education & Training (VET)
Informal Learning & Schools as Communities

03. WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION?

Many of the young people who are best helped by programmes like this are from high risk or disadvantaged groups.

Consequently, they can be both difficult to engage in such programmes or require additional support to complete the programmes, even when these are more aligned to their needs and aspirations than other, more 'traditional' routes.

Parental engagement was also a challenge. Many parents of the more 'at risk' students have difficulties to engage with the programmes, and this further increases the chance of failure of the students.

Dialogue between the different institutions in the city and at a local level was also a challenge. Collaboration was required in order for such a programme to succeed well.

Key Implementation Challenges for Sofia: Stakeholder Engagement

04. WHAT WAS THEIR DELIVERY APPROACH? HOW DID THEY TACKLE THE BARRIERS?

The team's first step was to prepare the educational programme with National Federations and professors from the National Sports Academy and teachers from schools.

Then, meetings with parents were held to help build involvement of the students and their families, not least to ensure consent to participation

Training for students followed, including theoretical and practical courses (in f.e. team-

building skills and supervision) and psychological advice.

An inspiring and engaging approach of setting up meetings and discussions with significant sports men and women (favourite national players from the Olympic games and sports journalists) also helped to motivate and provide inspiration. This was true for both students and their families.

Key Implementation Themes for Sofia: Open Working and Stakeholder Involvement Joint Delivery of Projects

05. WHAT WORKED? AND WHAT DIDN'T?

Having a defined personal development programme was also very important and helped students with additional needs in particular. The use of sport as a 'social' phenomenon, incentive was effective and enabled people to engage more effectively in new groups and their wider community. This

has become a core factor for the municipality in prevention, integration and socialisation.

The trainers involved in the programme were also successful in attending to the specific needs of the students, understanding their differences and diversities and using these to the students' advantage.

06. WHAT DID THEY LEARN?

A key learning point was the definition of the city and schools as places where people live, work and play.

Bringing together communities around schools was effective in inspiring people and engaging youngsters and their families. Using sport as a mechanism to foster engagement in learning and seeing their interests as a route to possible careers was inspiring to their peers as well as the students.

In the first cycle, 18 students qualified as part of the programme. In the future, the team hope to help young referees move on to become students in the Sport Academy (University) and to involve sponsors of major local events as investors in the prevention of ELET.

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