



JUDO FOR REFUGEES

An Initiative of the International Judo Federation



PREAMBLE

The current global geo-political situation sees a series of changes occurring within the structure of society all over the world. Society undergoes massive changes due to the immigration phenomenon and this impacts a wide range of areas, from economy to education and sport.

Social integration of immigrants, regardless of their background and origin, is crucial in order to maintain a balanced and harmonious society. Sport is an integrating part of humanity's social life, ensuring wellbeing and promoting healthy lifestyles.

Furthermore, sports play their part in educating younger generations, building bridges between different members of society and promoting the Olympic values of friendship, respect and fair play.

There are two main types of immigrants to be considered when it comes to social integration and the use of sport as a tool for education: Refugees and economic migrants



1. Judo for Refugee

For people uprooted by war or persecution, regardless of their age or origin, sport is much more than a leisure activity. **It's an opportunity to be included and protected; a chance to heal, develop and grow. Sport can also be a positive catalyst for empowering refugee communities, helping to strengthen social cohesion and forge closer ties with host communities.**

The International Judo Federation has been working hard to implement various initiatives in order to best utilise the unique ability of judo to achieve better outcomes for displaced and stateless people and their communities, especially youth.

Thus, we identified two main directions to reach the best results possible, also with the involvement and active participation of the IJF member national federations. The first one is aimed at **reaching refugees who live in refugee camps**, by introducing them to the practice of judo, while the other is aimed at **identifying judoka who live as refugees in various countries around the globe and who have the necessary level to integrate with the IJF Olympic Refugee Team** and perform at an elite level.

1.1. Judo in Refugee Camps

Sports are popular activities among displaced children and youth but organised sports programmes go a step further. They work to **develop life skills and address the specific protection risks that children and the youth face, within a fun, safe and supportive environment**. Judo is an inherently educational sport, teaching the youth beyond the sport itself, to be respectful, resilient, courageous, modest and always ready to help another.



The International Judo Federation initiated its first Judo in Refugee Camps programme as early as 2014, in cooperation with the Turkish Judo Federation, in the city of Kilis, Turkey, at the border with Syria. Seven years later, **more than 2000 children have participated in the programme and in recent years the programme has seen an increase in girls' participation.**

The collaborative aspect of the Judo in Refugee Camps initiative is vital, as the local workforce and knowledge of the national federations is key to a successful outcome. Further **on-site cooperation with local governments, UN agencies or NGOs can bring additional value to the programme and ensure its positive and wide-spread impact.** As the initiator of the programme, the IJF is providing continuous support and monitoring, as well as yearly visits and extra activities, such as competitions or judo-related excursions/visits to other locations, for training and getting to know the sport better.

The IJF has implemented the Judo in Refugee Camps programme in several other settlements on the African continent, including:



- **Zambia:** Meheba and Mayukwayuka (the oldest refugee settlement in Africa, dating back to the 1960s)
- **Malawi:** Dzaleka
- **Zimbabwe:** Tongogara (started in Sept. 2021).

The most complex and diverse refugee-dedicated programme of the IJF is in **South Africa**, in **Johannesburg** and it involves mainly refugees who are already living in the country but are facing social integration issues.

In order to set up and run this project the IJF deployed one of the alumni of the IJF Academy who is both the coach and the coordinator of the programme. In only a few years it expanded and is now reaching hundreds of young people in

several dojos across the city, in the areas where refugees live.

A number of young refugee coaches were instructed in coaching and are now working within the programme actively, which has earned a lot of recognition, nationally and internationally. Cooperation is now regular with various NGOs targeting the area, with the Johannesburg programmes attracting their own additional resources.





1.2. IJF Olympic Refugee Team

Under the guidelines of the International Olympic Committee and based on the excellent example of the first ever Olympic Refugee Teams who participated in the Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, the **International Judo Federation decided to reach out to the international judo community and make sure that all athletes with refugee status, with no possibility to represent their country of origin, as well as their country of residence, are integrated with the judo circuit of their country of residence, as well as the international circuit.**

The International Judo Federation has put in place a rule that clarifies the conditions under which these athletes can participate in national and international competitions, which also gave them the chance to qualify for the Olympic Games in Tokyo 2020 or at least to be integrated in the wider Refugee Team of the IOC. Our goal is to give all athletes the opportunity to practise judo, participate in competitions and possibly, to integrate in a judo team which could compete in the Judo Mixed Team event in the Olympic Games.

The following rules have been published and sent out to all IJF member national federations: *“For events organised by the IJF or under its auspices, the IJF Executive Committee, in order to protect the interest of the athlete, can authorise that the athlete can compete under the IJF flag for any reason (for example: non-official refugee status of the athlete, non-recognition of the NOC by the IOC, suspension of the national federation etc.).*

Judoka with an official refugee status, hosted by a country, can qualify themselves for IJF or continental union competitions through their host country national championships and thus will compete under their host country flag. The judoka and the national federation requests must be sent, with the official refugee status document, to the IJF General Secretariat (gs@ijf.org). If the documents sent are compliant, the agreement will be given automatically by the IJF General Secretary following confirmation by the IJF President.”

In the previous Olympiad, the International Judo Federation reached out via all its channels to the global judo community and requested information about judoka who are eligible for this programme. Following an immediate and very positive



response, we identified the most talented senior refugee judoka and also a large number of children judoka.

After inviting them to competitions and assessing their level, for those judoka with clear potential and a clear legal situation in their host country, **the IJF initiated a grant programme, offering 2000 USD/month to these athletes, so they can leave their jobs and spend more time training and preparing for competitions.** The IJF also prepared a competition schedule for these athletes, in accordance with their level, allowing them to advance in the world ranking and prepare for the Olympic Games. All costs related to their participation in these competitions were also covered by the IJF. The grant programme was in place until the end of August 2021, after Tokyo 2020.

During the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, the Refugee Team members participated in both the individual and the Mixed Team event, as part of the IOC Refugee Olympic Team, in what they described as the highlight of their career and undoubtedly the most important event that occurred since their refugee status was confirmed.

For Paris 2024, the International Judo Federation has restarted this programme, by assigning a refugee coach to coordinate the project. The coach will have the role of scouting and identifying the best 6 judoka, 3 men and 3 women, to train and participate in competitions in order to prepare their best performances on the Olympic tatami. The financial support of this programme will be determined in accordance with the needs of the team. In this initial phase, the IJF is covering the salary and expenses of the coach.

2. Judo Economic Migrants

In the current configuration of the world economy, there are many people who choose to work and live in a different country in order to make a better living. These people move to their host country accompanied by their families and thus, often with their children. While there is nothing to stop these children and youngsters from practising any sport, there are many impediments and an unclear sports legislation/regulation with regards to possibilities for competing and practising the sport at higher level.

Participants, as well as clubs, national federations and international federations are at a loss when the persons affected reach out to them for help but there is no clear method or solution that can be applied. On the other hand, participants are bound by geographical boundaries and have no chance to attend national competitions in their country of origin.

In order to solve this impasse and give opportunities to those affected by this process, the International Judo Federation published the following rule:

“1.7.2.2 Junior and younger immigrants

Juniors and younger foreign judoka living in a host country can participate in their host country national juniors and younger championships and thus qualify themselves for IJF or Continental Union Juniors and younger competitions. They can be registered by the national federation of the host country, into IJF or Continental Unions Juniors and younger competitions if they meet the following requirements:

- *To prove their residency in the host country (at least 1 year),*



- To prove the integration of their parents in the host country (at least 1 year),
- To prove their integration in the school or university system (at least 1 year),
- To prove their integration in a judo club of the host country, duly affiliated to the national federation which is an IJF member.

If the national federations of host countries wish to register these athletes, they must send their request each year to the IJF General Secretariat (gs@ijf.org), with the above mentioned documents. Additionally, the national federations shall attach the agreement of the judoka and the authorisation of the parents, if minor.

The IJF will review the submitted documents and if deemed compliant, the IJF will approve the request and the General Secretary will send a certificate for the registration in Judobase.

In case of approval, the concerned judoka will compete under their host country flag.”

In the 2 years since publication of this rule, the IJF has registered 33 such young judoka who are now able to compete in national competitions in their host country and have the opportunity to also qualify for international participation.

