
The Refugee Olympic Team, global bearers of the Olympic spirit

In the context of the Olympic spirit and Olympism, numerous experts and sports historians contend that the [Refugee Olympic Team](#) epitomises the universal sentiment of harmony and peace. The Team was created by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2015 with the objective of participating in the 2016 XXXI Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. In Paris, the team will thus be participating in the Olympic Games for the third consecutive time. The team comprises 37 athletes from a multitude of backgrounds who reside in 15 host countries, and will compete in 12 sports. This represents an increase from the original 10 athletes in the 2016 Games and the 29 athletes in Tokyo 2020. In Paris, the Team will symbolically represent the 100 million or more forcibly displaced persons worldwide. After an inaugural welcome in the French city of Bayeux, where they joined the celebrations marking the 80th anniversary of the Normandy landings, the athletes will proceed to the Olympic Village in Paris ahead of the competitions. They will also attend the opening ceremony on 26 July, which features a newly introduced national teams' cruise on the Seine. Depending on the scheduling of the respective competitions, some athletes will have the option of returning to their country of origin or to a training camp of their own choosing, thus ensuring optimal preparation for the Olympic Games. The Refugee Olympic Team and the Refugee Athlete Support Programme, both operated by the [Olympic Refugee Foundation \(ORF\)](#), facilitate the participation of athletes who are hosted by a country as political refugees or asylum seekers, and who would otherwise be precluded from competing in the Olympic Games. The majority of athletes were selected from the group of refugee athletes sponsored by the IOC through a programme for sports assistance in refugee camps. This programme is financed by the IOC's Olympic Solidarity Programme and managed by the ORF. All 36 selected athletes are hosted by the National Olympic Committees of Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA. The athletes will compete in a range of disciplines, including track and field, badminton, boxing, breaking, canoeing, cycling, judo, shooting, swimming, taekwondo, weightlifting and wrestling. The project, which is initiated in educational institutions, also contemplates the formation of athletic teams at a subsequent stage. In a statement, Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said: "The Refugee Olympic Team is a testament to the resilience, courage, and hope of those who have been displaced due to war and persecution." "These athletes exemplify the remarkable resilience, courage, and determination of the human spirit in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity." According to Grandi, "Sport can provide a sense of respite from daily concerns, a sense of security, and a moment of enjoyment." "It can facilitate the restoration of physical and mental wellbeing, enabling individuals to resume their role within the community." For the first time, the Olympic Refugee Team will compete under its own emblem, a unifying symbol that unites the diverse athletes on the team and gives the team its distinctive identity. The emblem's central motif is a heart, derived from the logo of the Olympic Refugee Foundation, which symbolizes the sense of belonging that the team aims to foster and which athletes and displaced persons worldwide have discovered through sport.



REFUGEE OLYMPIC TEAM



[Masomah Ali Zada, the head of mission for the Refugee Olympic Team and an Afghan cyclist, highlighted the following: “This emblem brings us all together. We are all unified by our experience – though all different, we have all embarked on a long journey to get to where we are. The athletes are not representing a specific country, they are representing the Refugee Olympic Team – having our own emblem creates a sense of belonging and empowers us to also stand for the population of more than 100 million people who share this same experience. I look forward to wearing it proudly!” Masomah Ali Zada is also a refugee. She was granted asylum in France in 2016. She fled Afghanistan, where she was subjected to death threats from the Taliban regime for her participation in sporting activities. In 2020, she represented the Refugee Olympic Team at the Tokyo XXXII Olympic Games. During the official presentation ceremony of the team, she delivered the following welcoming remarks to the athletes: “Each of you had a dream, and today that dream of competing in the Olympic Games is closer than ever. Despite the challenges you have faced, you now have the opportunity to inspire a younger generation, stand for something bigger than yourselves, and demonstrate to the world what refugees are capable of.” The Refugee Olympic Team comprises athletes from diverse nationalities, cultures, faiths and backgrounds. Each athlete comes from a different corner of the world, each with their own unique experiences of adversity and recovery through sport. They share the trauma of war, hunger, physical and cultural oppression with the 100 million refugees they represent. Building on this commitment, the Olympic Refugee Foundation \(ORF\) was established in 2017. The Foundation operates in place of a traditional National Olympic Committee, managing the Refugee Athlete Scholarship holders and the IOC Refugee Olympic Team for Paris 2024. The ORF aims to build a movement where displaced people can enjoy the benefits of sport wherever they are, and through which sport can be embraced at all levels as a tool to support refugees. The Foundation was created after the Rio 2016 Games, in light of the enormous media coverage that the refugee team received on that occasion, far exceeding the nonetheless remarkable results achieved in the various sports competitions. Since its creation in 2017, the work of the ORF has resulted in almost 400,000 young people having access to safe sport in their places of residence as refugees.](#)

