



Promoting physical activity in EU countries: where do we stand?

Last Updated : 18 May 2018

A recent study led by the World Health Organization (WHO) assessed the development, implementation, and surveillance strategies of physical activity policies across the 28 EU countries. The analysis revealed that twenty one countries covered at least half of the EU recommendations on health-enhancing physical activity but only 1 country implemented all of them.

Linked to a number of important [health issues](#), physical inactivity remains a problem in most of the European countries. Numbers speak for themselves: one out of three European adults are insufficiently active and physical activity among adolescents is declining, with only 34% of the 13 to 15-year-olds complying with the WHO recommendations for children and teenagers. To tackle this rather sedentary lifestyle, an unprecedented EU strategy promoting daily-life physical activity was put in place in 2015. The objective is to encourage all types of physical exercise, from sports to walking and gardening; and to enhance the EU population's well-being and health. As a result, the EU countries started to take action at a national level to promote health-enhancing physical activity in various sectors, including sport, education, working environment, urban planning (cycling and pedestrian infrastructures) and for various target groups such as senior citizens. To know where EU members stand, a monitoring framework was put in place by the EU council in order to identify good policy practices and to see where further improvements are needed.

A survey tool was created based on 23 physical activity indicators. It aims to gather information in each of the 28 EU countries on their respective actions and promotion strategies related to health-enhanced physical activity. All state members were responsive, except for Greece. The first round of data presented in the WHO study revealed that:

- Only 1 country (Finland) fully addressed and implemented all indicators
- 4 countries implemented more than 87% of the indicators
- 22 countries implemented at least 43% of the indicators

After this first round of monitoring, the study concludes that 21 countries have efficiently implemented at least half of the EU recommendations on health-enhancing physical activity but only 1 country implemented all of them. There is, therefore, much room for improvement. More specifically, an effort should be made to improve the promotion of physical activity in the senior community and in the work environment. Improving and building upon the current cycling, pedestrian, and leisure infrastructures could be a way to achieve this.

References

1. [João Breda et al. Promoting health-enhancing physical activity in Europe: Current state of surveillance, policy development and implementation. Health Policy Journal \(2018\).](#)