

Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 27 November 2012 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA)

(2012/C 393/07)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES,

1. RECALLING THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO THIS ISSUE AS SET OUT IN THE ANNEX, AND IN PARTICULAR:
 1. The European Union Work Plan for Sport for 2011-2014 ⁽¹⁾, adopted on 20 May 2011, which identified health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) as a priority theme for EU level cooperation in sport and which established an Expert Group on Sport, Health and Participation mandated to explore ways to promote HEPA and participation in grassroots sport;
 2. The Commission's White Paper on Sport of 7 July 2007 ⁽²⁾, which highlighted the importance of physical activity and set out a plan for the Commission to propose physical activity guidelines by the end of 2008; and the Commission's Communication on Developing the European Dimension in Sport of 18 January 2011 ⁽³⁾, which recognised that sport constitutes a fundamental part of any public policy approach aiming at improving physical activity and called for continued progress toward the establishment of national guidelines, including a review and coordination process;
2. TAKING NOTE OF:
 1. The EU Physical Activity Guidelines, welcomed in the Presidency Conclusions of the Informal Meeting of the EU Ministers responsible for Sports in November 2008, which encourage the implementation of cross-sectoral policies to promote physical activity, for the whole of the population, regardless of social class, age, gender, race, ethnicity and physical capacities ⁽⁴⁾;
3. CONSIDERING THAT:
 1. The WHO has recently identified insufficient physical activity as the fourth leading risk factor for premature mortality and disease globally ⁽⁵⁾.
2. Physical activity is one of the most effective ways to prevent non-communicable diseases and combat obesity ⁽⁶⁾. There is also growing evidence on the positive correlation between exercise and mental health and cognitive processes ⁽⁷⁾. The lack of physical activity causes detrimental effects not only for people's individual health but also for health systems and the economy at large, because of the significant direct and indirect economic costs of physical inactivity ⁽⁸⁾. Through its benefits with regard to prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, physical activity has benefits at every age and particular relevance in the light of Europe's ageing population and the maintenance of a high quality of life at all ages.
3. Because of the increasing awareness about the importance of HEPA throughout life, physical activity promotion has been stepped up at different levels and through different strategies, policies and programmes. Important efforts have been made in some EU Member States to enable and to encourage citizens to become more physically active. Awareness-raising to promote physical activity, with the involvement of the sport sector, can be useful to reach out to citizens.
4. Overall, the proportion of EU citizens who reach recommended physical activity levels has not increased in recent years; in some countries, physical activity levels are falling. ⁽⁹⁾ The current high rates of physical inactivity constitute a major concern for the EU and its Member States, both from a health, social and an economic perspective.
5. Effective promotion of physical activity leading to increased physical activity rates must involve different sectors as set out below in paragraph 6, including the sport sector given that sporting activity and sport for all are among the major sources of physical activity.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 162, 1.6.2011, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ doc. 11811/07 - COM(2007) 391 final.

⁽³⁾ doc. 5597/11 - COM(2011) 12 final.

⁽⁴⁾ EU Physical Activity Guidelines: http://ec.europa.eu/sport/library/documents/c1/eu-physical-activity-guidelines-2008_en.pdf. French Presidency Conclusions on sport and health: http://ec.europa.eu/sport/library/documents/b21/ue08pfue_conclusions_presidence_definitives_en.pdf

⁽⁵⁾ Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health, WHO, 2010.

⁽⁶⁾ http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/global_health_risks/en/index.html

⁽⁷⁾ <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/Report/pdf/CommitteeReport.pdf>

⁽⁸⁾ WHO Europe (2007): A European framework to promote physical activity for health.

⁽⁹⁾ European Commission: Special Eurobarometer 183-6 (December 2003), 246 (November 2006), 213 (November 2004) and 334 (March 2010).

6. The EU Physical Activity Guidelines provide a good basis to encourage cross-sectoral policies aimed at promoting physical activity, in particular in the fields of sport, health, education, environment, urban planning and transport, by offering guidance to the Member States in the development of their national strategies for HEPA.
 7. Some Member States already implement the Guidelines or certain principles underpinning them within their own national policies and strategies. Overall, however, there are great disparities between Member States' approaches and the implementation of HEPA policies as envisaged by the guidelines could be further improved.
 8. A set of recommended measures regarding specific aspects of more effective HEPA promotion has been identified by the Expert Group on Sport, Health and Participation, in line with its mandate. They include ⁽¹⁾:
 - input for an EU initiative to further the implementation of the EU Physical Activity Guidelines in the Member States by means of a light monitoring scheme;
 - guidance for strengthened cooperation between the sport and health care sectors in the Member States;
 - a set of principles about the contribution of physical activity to active ageing in the EU and its Member States.
4. CALL ON EU MEMBER STATES TO:
1. Continue progress in developing and implementing strategies and cross-sectoral policies aimed at physical activity promotion taking into account the EU Physical Activity Guidelines or the principles underpinning them.
 2. Encourage and support initiatives at the appropriate level aimed at promoting physical activity within the sport sector, such as, for instance, specific guidelines to improve physical activity offers in local sport clubs, specific programmes introduced by sport organisations within a given sport and by sport for all or specific actions in fitness clubs, that could be applied by the sport movement and the fitness sector and that could facilitate cooperation with other sectors, especially in the fields of education and health.
3. Encourage the inclusion of physical activity in supporting active ageing in national policies and funding schemes for sport and consequently consider projects aimed at promoting HEPA among older people while taking into account different levels of functional capacity.
4. As appropriate and according to the national health care system, promote closer cooperation between the sport, health care and other sectors, taking account of best practices developed in some Member States.
5. Consider the use of awareness-raising and provision of information, both at national and local level, to stimulate the interest of citizens in adapting a more active lifestyle.
5. INVITE THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION IN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE TO:
1. Intensify cooperation between those policy areas that, in line with the EU Physical Activity Guidelines, have responsibility for promoting physical activity, in particular the sport, health, education, environment, urban planning and transport sectors.
 2. Regarding the European Year 2012 for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, ensure that the principles for physical activity supporting active ageing developed by the Expert Group on Sport, Health and Participation are taken into account, where appropriate, in the political follow up to the Year and in national sport for all strategies.
 3. Improve the evidence base for policies designed to promote HEPA and participation in sport in the EU and its Member States, such as by including physical activity in the European Statistical Programme 2013-2017.
6. INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:
1. In the light of previous work in this field, in particular the EU Physical Activity Guidelines, make a proposal for a Council Recommendation on HEPA, and consider including a light monitoring framework to evaluate progress with the help of a limited set of indicators that builds to the largest possible extent on available data sources, as identified by the Expert Group on Sport, Health and Participation.
 2. Issue regular surveys on sport and physical activity, and take account of HEPA-related research in a future EU research programme.

⁽¹⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/sport/news/20120803-eu-xg-shp-fin-rpt_en.htm

3. Promote and support the sharing of best practices in the EU regarding HEPA and participation in sport, inter alia through support for projects and the dissemination of their results under relevant EU funding schemes and programmes. The sharing of best practices could relate to:
 - Education, information and public awareness raising at all appropriate levels;
 - Cooperation between relevant policy sectors and involvement of relevant stakeholders to implement existing guidelines;
 - The role of the sport movement, the clubs in particular, and sport for all organisations;
 - Successful strategies, policies and programmes, including evaluation results;
 - Possible policy and legislative measures that have proven effective at tackling physical inactivity in individual EU Member States.
 4. Consider establishing an annual European Week of Sport (bearing in mind its financial and organisational aspects) as a means to promote physical activity and participation in sport at all levels taking into account similar national initiatives and in cooperation with relevant sport organisations. Such a week should build upon existing awareness-raising campaigns, by taking into account lessons learned from them and by adding value to them, and should utilise the legacy of related projects financed through the 2009 Preparatory Action in the field of sport, as well as the results from projects financed through the related call for proposals under the 2012 Preparatory Action covering awareness-raising in sport.
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ANNEX

- Council Conclusions of 1 and 2 December 2011 on closing health gaps within the EU through concerted action to promote healthy lifestyle ⁽¹⁾;
 - European Commission White Paper 'A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues' ⁽²⁾;
 - Decision No 940/2011/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2011 on the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012) ⁽³⁾, including the role of physical activity in this context.
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⁽¹⁾ Doc. 16708/11.

⁽²⁾ Doc. 9838/07 - COM(2007) 279 final.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 246, 23.9.2011, p. 5.