

Council conclusions on the promotion of motor skills, physical and sport activities for children ⁽¹⁾

(2015/C 417/09)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EU AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF MEMBER STATES

I. RECALLING THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND AS SET OUT IN THE ANNEX AS WELL AS THE FOLLOWING

1. The Council conclusions of 27 November 2012 on 'promoting health-enhancing physical activity. (HEPA)' ⁽²⁾ underlining that *'through its benefits with regard to prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, physical activity has benefits at every age'*.
2. The Council Recommendation of 26 November 2013 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors ⁽³⁾, which invited Member States to develop cross-sectorial policies and integrated strategies involving sport, education, health, transport, environment, urban planning and other relevant sectors and underlined that *'Physical education at school has the potential to be an effective tool to increase awareness of the importance of HEPA, and schools can be easily and effectively targeted to implement activities in this regard'*.
3. The second European Union Work Plan for Sport (2014-2017) ⁽⁴⁾, adopted on 21 May 2014, which identified the practice of enhancing physical activity for health as well as education and training in sport as priority themes of the EU cooperation in the field of sport and which set up the expert group on HEPA to propose recommendations to encourage physical education in schools, including motor skills in early childhood, and to create valuable interactions with the sport sector, local authorities and the private sector.

II. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT

4. The importance of play and recreation in the life of every child has long been acknowledged by the international community. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) of 1989 explicitly states in Article 31 that 'States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.' All activities for children, including sport activities and physical education, must always be carried out in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
5. The EU Guidelines on Physical Activity ⁽⁵⁾ pointed out that young children's daily habits have changed in recent years due to new leisure patterns (TV, internet, video games, smartphones, etc.) and that this has led to their decreasing physical activity. Furthermore time, social and budgetary constraints, changes in lifestyle or a lack of appropriate sporting facilities in the vicinity may also explain this trend. The EU Guidelines stressed that there was considerable concern as to whether physical activity among children and young people had been replaced by more sedentary activities.
6. Despite the general propensity of children to be physically active, their physical activity has decreased over the past 20 years. This change has coincided with increasing rates of childhood overweight and obesity and health problems or physical disabilities such as musculoskeletal disorders. According to estimates from the WHO's Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI), around 1 in 3 children in the EU aged 6-9 were overweight or obese in 2010 ⁽⁶⁾. This is a worrying increase since 2008, when the estimates were 1 in 4 ⁽⁷⁾. In industrialised countries, for

⁽¹⁾ In the context of the present conclusions 'children' refers to children aged 0-12.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 393, 19.12.2012.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 354, 4.12.2013.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 183, 14.6.2014.

⁽⁵⁾ EU Physical Activity Guidelines: Recommended Policy Actions in Support of Health Enhancing Physical Activity. (2008) were welcomed in the Presidency conclusions of the Informal EU Ministers responsible for Sport. http://ec.europa.eu/sport/library/doc/c1/pa_guidelines_4th_consolidated_draft_en.pdf

⁽⁶⁾ EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity 2014-2020 (http://ec.europa.eu/health/nutrition_physical_activity/docs/childhoodobesity_actionplan_2014_2020_en.pdf)

⁽⁷⁾ COM(2005)0637.

children below the age of 5 the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased from 8 % in 1990 to 12 % in 2010 and is expected to reach 14 % by 2020 ⁽⁸⁾. The lack of physical activity also has negative effects on health systems and the economy as a whole. It is estimated that around 7 % of national health budgets across the EU are spent on diseases linked to obesity each year ⁽⁹⁾.

7. In order to prevent these childhood health and developmental problems all children (including children with disabilities) must be encouraged to be physically active. The years in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are important because key skills are developed in that period. Through play and physical activity, children learn and practice skills that they will need throughout their lives. This learning process called motor skill development does not always develop naturally. Therefore the promotion of awareness and the creation of opportunities for children to be physically active are of the utmost importance.
8. The WHO has identified insufficient physical activity as the fourth leading risk factor for premature mortality and disease globally ⁽¹⁰⁾. The benefits of physical activity are well known. Physical activity is one of the most effective ways to prevent non-communicable diseases and combat obesity, and to maintain a healthy lifestyle ⁽¹¹⁾. There is also growing evidence on the positive correlation between exercise and mental health and cognitive processes ⁽¹²⁾.

WHO reports ⁽¹³⁾ have demonstrated that involvement in regular, moderate to intense sporting or physical activity ⁽¹⁴⁾ (at least 60 minutes per day for children of school age and 3 hours for children in ECEC) creates a long-term predisposition towards physical activity that increases during adolescence and adulthood ⁽¹⁵⁾. Studies have also demonstrated that when children begin to exercise from an early age, they tend to perform better academically, have fewer behavioural and disciplinary problems, and can pay attention in class longer than their peers ⁽¹⁶⁾.

9. The education environment plays a particularly important role in this context, as children engage in physical activity and sport in school. For this reason, schools and teachers facilitate children's physical activity, along with educators in ECEC settings and sports clubs. For children, the parents, family and the wider community play an important role too.
10. According to experts, suitable physical activity for children under the age of 12 years should be arranged by age group ⁽¹⁷⁾. Activities at ECEC and primary level include structured and unstructured activities that help children to develop skills such as running, jumping or throwing.

⁽⁸⁾ www.toybox-study.eu.

⁽⁹⁾ EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity 2014-2020.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health, WHO, 2010

⁽¹¹⁾ Lee IM, Shiroma EJ, Lobelo F, Puska P, Blair SN, Katzmarzyk PT, Lancet Physical Activity Series Working Group. Effect of physical activity on major non-communicable disease worldwide: an analysis of burden of disease and life expectancy 2012 Jul. *Lancet*.

⁽¹²⁾ Strong, WB, RM Malina, CJR Blimkie, SR Daniels, RK Dishman, B Gutin, AC Hergenroeder, A Must, PA Nixon, JM Pivarnik, T Rowland, S Trost, F Trudeau (2005), 'Evidence Based Physical Activity for School-Age Youth', *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 146(6):732-737.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Report, 2008. (<http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/Report/pdf/CommitteeReport.pdf>)

Study of University Saint-Gallen conducted in 2011.

⁽¹³⁾ Global recommendations on Physical Activity for Health, World Health Organisation 2010 (http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44399/1/9789241599979_eng.pdf),

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Report, 2008. (<http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/Report/pdf/CommitteeReport.pdf>)

Study of University Saint-Gallen conducted in 2011.

⁽¹⁴⁾ e.g Department of Health and Aging: National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; 2014 or UK Physical activity guidelines and National Health Service (NHS) in England: Physical activity guidelines for children (under five years) (<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/physical-activity-guidelines-for-children.aspx>)

⁽¹⁵⁾ G.J. Welk, J.C. Eisenmann, et J. Dolman, 'Health-related physical activity in children and adolescents: A bio-behavioural perspective', *The handbook of physical education*, eds. D. Kirk, D. Macdonald and M. O'Sullivan, London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2006, p. 665-684

⁽¹⁶⁾ Physical Activity May Strengthen Children's Ability To Pay Attention <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/03/090331183800.htm> and 'The Association between school-based physical activity, Including Physical education and academic performance' U.S. Department of Health and human Services July 2010 http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf

⁽¹⁷⁾ Categories proposed by the Canadian concept of Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD).

11. Some Member States have already developed various national strategies, to varying degrees, to encourage the development of motor skills in early childhood and physical and sporting activities for children under 12, mostly in cooperation with the sport sector and sports clubs or federations ⁽¹⁸⁾.
12. In line with its mandate, the Expert Group on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA XG) proposed a set of recommendations in June 2015 for encouraging physical education in schools, including motor skills in early childhood.

III. CALL ON EU MEMBER STATES TO:

13. Consider implementing cross-sectorial policies, with the education, youth and health sectors among others, to promote physical activities and motor skills in early childhood taking into account, in particular, the following recommendations of the HEPA XG:
 - Raising awareness of the period before attending pre-school and school as a potential opportunity for promoting physical activity for children, namely through the development of basic motor skills and physical literacy.
 - Making all stakeholders in the school and extra-curricular sectors (teachers, coaches, parents, etc.) aware of the importance of developing physical and sporting activities suitable for children.
 - Building relationships between schools and relevant organisations (sport, social and private sectors, and local authorities) to promote and increase the availability of extracurricular activities.
 - Encouraging schools to establish a cooperation framework with sports organisations and other local (national) sport providers with a view to promoting both curricular and extra-curricular activities and ensuring the availability of high-quality, safe infrastructures and equipment for physical education and extra-curricular or after-school activities, and on implementing local awareness campaigns.
 - Consider initiatives to encourage local authorities to create the conditions for developing active transport to and from school.
14. Encourage and support initiatives for all the stakeholders involved (teachers, parents, schools, clubs, educators, etc.) at the appropriate levels aimed at promoting appropriate motor skills and physical activities.
15. Encourage appropriate sport and physical activity from the earliest childhood through to ECEC and primary school, in accordance with the specific needs and ages of the children while providing guiding instructions to instructors/educators.
16. Encourage the use of awareness-raising and provision of information, at national, regional and local levels, to stimulate interest in motor skills and physical education activities for children:
17. Encourage parents, family and the wider community, to actively participate in physical activities with their children using appropriate facilities (e.g. cycle paths and safe playgrounds).
18. Consider supporting initiatives to improve sports infrastructure for children especially within educational institutions, while fostering cooperation between schools and sport clubs on the provision of equipment and facilities for children on the local level.

⁽¹⁸⁾ For example: France and multisport federations (Ufolep, Usep) or unisport federations (gymnastic or swimming) with special training for 0-6 years old children. In the Netherlands special classes are offered for toddlers in sports such as gymnastics and swimming. In Austria, the programme 'Move Children Healthily/Kinder gesund bewegen' aims to build cooperation between sport clubs and kindergartens/primary schools and to promote an active lifestyle by offering physical activity for children between 2 and 10 years old.

19. Consider providing incentives to sports organisations and clubs, schools, educational establishments, youth centres and other community or voluntary organisations that promote physical activities for children.
- IV. INVITE THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION IN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE TO:
20. Take note of the HEPA XG recommendations as a basis for further political action at both the EU and Member State levels, since they provide evidence-based facts and practical paths to follow.
 21. Intensify cooperation between the policy areas responsible for promoting motor skills and physical education for children, in line with the recommendations of HEPA XG, in particular the sport, health, education, youth and transport sectors.
 22. With a view to the European Week of Sport, consider giving special focus to initiatives supporting and promoting school-based and extra-curricular sporting activities.
 23. Promote, where appropriate, the implementation of national monitoring systems, studies or evaluations in order to identify children's levels of physical activity and habits.
 24. Reflect on how the promotion of motor skills development in early childhood and strategies to discourage sedentary lifestyles among children can be addressed more effectively in the context of future work at the EU level.
 25. Encourage financial support for motor-skills and physical education-related initiatives through existing EU programmes, such as Erasmus+, and the European Structural and Investment Funds and welcome additional information from the Commission regarding the application of EU funding programmes for the benefit of sport.
- V. INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:
26. Promote and support the sharing of best practices on motor skills and physical education for children in the EU context.
 27. Improve the evidence base by supporting the collection of quantitative and qualitative data ⁽¹⁹⁾ related to physical activity, fitness markers and sport participation of children within and outside ECEC or schools, in close cooperation with WHO.
 28. Develop physical activity guidelines for children in ECEC settings, schools and sport clubs, in collaboration with scientific experts including the WHO, targeting in particular policy makers, local authorities, parents, family and wider community.
- VI. INVITE THE SPORT MOVEMENT TO CONSIDER:
29. Offering a range of non-competitive sporting activities suitable for children, adapted to the appropriate level, with a view to improving their health and personal development.
 30. Supporting the organisation of activities promoting school-based and extra-curricular sporting activities as well as motor skills in early childhood, including in the context of the European Week of Sport.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Based on the monitoring framework defined in the Council Recommendation on HEPA (26 November 2013).

31. Contributing to the development of close partnerships, joint objectives and communication campaigns with the municipalities and communities and the education, youth, health sectors among others, on combating sedentary lifestyles by promoting sport within and outside school.
 32. Making a stronger commitment to promoting sporting and physical activity initiatives which aim at combating the sedentary lifestyles of children through partnerships and cooperation with private and public sectors.
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ANNEX

Political Background

1. The European Year of Education through Sport (EYES 2004), which stressed the role of sport in education and drew attention to the wide-ranging social role of sport;
2. The White Paper on Sport of 11 July 2007, presented by the European Commission, which insisted on the importance of physical activity and indicated that 'Time spent in sport activities at school and at university produces health and education benefits which need to be enhanced' ⁽¹⁾.
3. The strategy for Europe on nutrition, overweight and obesity-related health issues adopted by the European Commission in 2007 ⁽²⁾ which encouraged physical activity and made children and low socioeconomic groups the priority whilst underlining that '*childhood is an important period to instil a preference for healthy behaviours, and to learn the life skills necessary to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Schools clearly play a crucial role in this respect*' ⁽³⁾.
4. The European Parliament report on the role of sport in education of 30 October 2007 ⁽⁴⁾ and the eponymous resolution that followed and called on 'Member States and the competent authorities to ensure that greater stress is placed on health development in school and preschool teaching programmes by encouraging specific forms of physical activity suitable for the later age group'.
5. The European Commission Communication 'Developing the European Dimension in Sport', dated 18 January 2011, which recognised the need to '*support innovative initiatives under the Lifelong Learning Programme relating to physical activity at school*' ⁽⁵⁾.
6. The 'Declaration of Berlin' (MINEPS V) adopted by the Sport Ministers Conference on 28-30 May 2013 '*Highlighting that physical education is a an essential entry point for children to learn life skills, develop patterns for lifelong physical activity participation and health life style behaviours*' and fostering '*the important role of inclusive extracurricular school sport in early development and educating children and youth*'.
7. The EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity 2014-2020 launched by the European Commission in 2014 ⁽⁶⁾. Among the 8 key areas for action the European Commission highlighted the promotion of healthier environments, especially in schools and pre-schools, and the encouragement of physical activity.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2007) 391 final.

⁽²⁾ COM(2007) 279 final.

⁽³⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/documents/nutrition_wp_en.pdf

⁽⁴⁾ A6-0415/2007.

⁽⁵⁾ COM(2011) 12 final.

⁽⁶⁾ 24 February 2014 (updated 12 March and 28 July 2014).