

IV

(Notices)

NOTICES FROM EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS, BODIES, OFFICES AND AGENCIES

COUNCIL

Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on lifelong physical activity

(2021/C 501 I/01)

THE COUNCIL AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL

RECALLING THAT:

1. The Council Recommendation of 26 November 2013 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) across sectors recommends, *inter alia*, that Member States 'work towards effective HEPA policies by developing a cross-sectoral approach involving policy areas including sport, health, education, environment and transport, as well as other relevant sectors and in accordance with national specificities'.
2. The Council conclusions of 15 December 2015 on the promotion of motor skills, physical and sport activities for children call on Member States to 'consider implementing cross-sectoral policies, with the education, youth and health sectors among others, to promote physical activities and motor skills in early childhood'.
3. The Council conclusions of 29 June 2020 on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery of the sport sector call on Member States to 'promote cross-sectoral cooperation and consultations in areas that are relevant to sport at all levels, including with the sport movement, the sport-related business sector and other relevant stakeholders'.
4. The Council Conclusions of 4 December 2020 on promoting cross-sectoral cooperation for the benefit of sport and physical activity in society highlight that 'cross-sectoral cooperation can play an important role to create or optimise the conditions for an active and healthy lifestyle'.
5. The European Union Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024 recognises that promoting physical activity is a key topic within the priority area 'Promotion of participation in sport and health-enhancing physical activity'.

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT:

6. Physical inactivity is causing extensive health problems in today's lifestyle. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has ranked physical inactivity among the leading risk factors for mortality⁽¹⁾. The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasised the health risks of physical inactivity.

⁽¹⁾ World Health Organization (2020). WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour.

7. Europe is facing a significant increase in the already noticeable trends of physical inactivity of its entire population, especially among younger people. European policies encourage Member States to promote and monitor physical activity; however, implementation should be further strengthened ⁽³⁾.
8. Other European and international documents ⁽³⁾ have also identified the critical importance of monitoring the level of physical activity as part of a holistic approach to HEPA. Monitoring of physical fitness subject to compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) ⁽⁴⁾ can provide a reliable evidence-based outcome of physical activity as well as draw attention to any possible health risk behaviour.

RECOGNISING THAT:

9. Physical activity is one of the most important and effective factors in maintaining physical and mental health throughout life. It also has a positive impact on the prevention of certain health conditions and diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, etc.
10. Physical fitness monitoring systems can assess the scale of the physical inactivity problem and evaluate the effectiveness of any policies, action plans or initiatives adopted at local, national or EU level.
11. The concept of lifelong physical activity should be based on regular physical activity throughout one's life that can be supported by evidence-based lifelong monitoring of physical fitness to maintain the health of each individual throughout life.

EMPHASISING THAT:

12. Regular and sufficient ⁽⁵⁾ physical activity is important for the healthy development of children and adolescents, both physically and with regard to their mental and social abilities.
13. In the context of an active and healthy lifestyle of adults, regular physical activity is particularly important, even if an individual does not start exercising until adulthood. Regular physical activity is also an important factor in preventing a decrease in performance levels at work. Given that adults spend a third of their lives at work, the work environment is extremely important in promoting employees' physical activity.
14. Disadvantaged groups ⁽⁶⁾ across all age groups are often insufficiently physically active due to fewer opportunities and limited access, which puts them at a higher risk of developing certain diseases. We should provide these target groups with equal opportunities, enabling them to participate in tailored regular physical activity and sport programmes.
15. In accordance with the concept of lifelong physical activity, the long-term impact should be more physically active European citizens with the aim to improve the physical and mental health, and to reduce pressure on our health systems and health-related costs ⁽⁷⁾. Wherever possible, policy agendas should be coordinated and cross-sectoral cooperation encouraged in order to achieve the best possible outcome.

⁽³⁾ Report from the Commission on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors, COM/2019/565 final.

⁽⁴⁾ For example, the World Health Organization's 'Physical activity strategy for the WHO European Region 2016–2025', the 'EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity 2014–2020' and a 'Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030' (World Health Organization (2018)).

⁽⁵⁾ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) (OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1).

⁽⁶⁾ World Health Organization (2020): WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour.

⁽⁷⁾ Definition according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE): 'Groups of persons that experience a higher risk of poverty, social exclusion, discrimination and violence than the general population, including, but not limited to, ethnic minorities, migrants, people with disabilities, isolated elderly people and children'.

⁽⁸⁾ International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA): 'The economic cost of physical inactivity in Europe: an ISCA/Cebr report', June 2015.

CONSIDERING THAT:

16. Healthy lifestyle: in many countries, public health and sport policies aim first and foremost to encourage their citizens to adopt an active and healthy lifestyle throughout their lifetime and to take part in physical activity and sport ⁽⁸⁾. Several European project initiatives also aim to embed physical activity into the healthcare curriculum to ensure better advice and support for physical activity in the clinical setting ⁽⁹⁾.
17. Monitoring: some countries monitor changes in the physical fitness of their population and may also provide feedback to each person on a voluntary basis on the development of their fitness levels. Certain countries have systems in place with which they can annually monitor and evaluate the physical performance of schoolchildren and young people ⁽¹⁰⁾.
18. Cross-sectoral cooperation: the promotion and monitoring of physical activity should be addressed in a cross-sectoral manner in compliance with the GDPR. Not only sports-related institutions play a role in promoting physical activity and monitoring of physical fitness, but also institutions related to public health, infrastructure, education and training, the work environment, youth, etc. It should therefore involve the whole of government, civil society, sport clubs, local communities, etc.
19. Behavioural change is a matter of long-term development and following the physical activity guidelines ⁽¹¹⁾ which call for integrating sufficient physical activity into everyday life. This means that policy should also be implemented in an integrated manner and focus on different times of the day and different contexts of daily life.
20. Media: the media can play a role in promoting social responsibility, sporting activities and campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the benefits of physical activity and reducing inactivity.
21. European initiatives and projects: various European projects and initiatives contribute to the development of policies aimed at promoting healthy lifestyle and to the development of monitoring systems for physical fitness to provide comparable, valid and reliable data across EU Member States. This can help policy-makers to enable lifelong physical activity and achieve a greater impact on health.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES, IN LINE WITH THE SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE AND AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

22. Continue promoting and encouraging the lifelong physical activity of the population, including disadvantaged groups, focusing on reducing physical inactivity through sharing best practices, for example, the use of mobile and wireless technologies as well as the media and other communication channels.
23. Support initiatives and campaigns at national, regional and/or local levels that encourage physical activity, the development of monitoring systems, and sport participation of all, such as the European Week of Sport, HealthyLifestyle4All, the Eurobarometer on sport and physical activity, the European Health Interview Survey - Physical Activity Questionnaire (EHIS-PAQ), etc.
24. Where appropriate and in line with the GDPR, establish and promote evidence-based national, regional and/or local physical fitness monitoring systems that motivate the population to lifelong physical activity with appropriate individual feedback reports and the tracking of fitness changes on a voluntary basis, and provide valuable information for policymaking ⁽¹²⁾.
25. Support, with a cross-sectoral approach, policies at all levels regarding the creation of accessible and sustainable public areas where all citizens may engage in sporting activities or lifelong physical activity, such as neighbourhoods, newly-built areas, side-walks with bicycles or jogging lanes, sport facilities in schools and universities etc., for example through the Cohesion Policy Funds.

⁽⁸⁾ At EU level, for example, the European Commission launched a 'HealthyLifestyle4All' initiative as a two-year campaign that aims to link sport and active lifestyles with health, food and other policies. The Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle was launched in 2017.

⁽⁹⁾ World Health Organization (2018): Promoting physical activity in the health sector.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Such as Cyprus (expected soon), Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, etc.

⁽¹¹⁾ World Health Organization (2018): 'Global action plan on physical activity 2018–2030: more active people for a healthier world'.

⁽¹²⁾ For example, by providing fitness monitoring tools that allow examination of population health trends, the effects of national fitness policies and interventions on health at the local, regional and/or national level.

26. Identify and synchronize at all levels, with involvement of all relevant public authorities and the scientific community, those policies and measures that aim to inspire people to engage in sporting activities or lifelong physical activity, and encourage sectoral decision-makers to take greater account in their respective policies of the benefits that lifelong physical activity and the monitoring of the physical fitness of the population can generate.
27. Exchange good practices on how to motivate people to move and exercise during the day and exchange information on effective instruments and policy initiatives in different environments of daily life to stimulate physical activity, including in schools and workplaces.
28. Strengthen collaboration, where possible, with the health sector in providing exercise prescription and counselling given by healthcare and specialised professionals.

INVITE THE COMMISSION TO:

29. Explore the possibility of supporting the development of a harmonised system of data that enables the monitoring of physical activity at European level in order to assess more accurately the health, social and economic consequences.
30. Promote knowledge of and give visibility to evidence of the costs of the health risks linked to physical inactivity, in particular health expenditure, to help inform public decision-making on the investments to be made at European level in this area.
31. Support the exchange of the best practices of existing successful projects and networks on promoting lifelong physical activity and physical fitness monitoring, involving as appropriate the HEPA focal points network. In order to facilitate physical fitness monitoring across Europe and creating backbone for prompt evidence-based policy-making, promote these practices together with the HEPA focal points network on an appropriate European platform.
32. Consider EU funding, for example through the Erasmus+ programme, InvestEU, etc. which could support European cooperation to foster the establishment of national, regional and/or local physical fitness monitoring systems.
33. Inform Member States and the sport movement about relevant EU funding programmes and initiatives that can be used to support cross-sectoral projects related to sport and physical activity and to promote a healthy lifestyle, as well as the establishment of national, regional and/or local physical monitoring systems, for example through Erasmus+, the EU4Health programme, Horizon Europe, InvestEU, etc.

INVITE THE SPORT MOVEMENT AND OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS TO:

34. Consider using existing free-of-charge platforms ⁽¹³⁾, in line with the GDPR, for monitoring the physical fitness of citizens as a diagnostic and motivational tool for lifelong physical activity.
35. Further emphasise opportunities for the lifelong engagement of citizens in sport and physical activity in their activities, projects and initiatives, including for different target groups.
36. Cooperate closely with stakeholders from other sectors in tackling the existing gaps in the provision of opportunities for engagement in sport and physical activity in different contexts of everyday life.
37. Actively engage, if appropriate, in the development of national, regional and local physical fitness monitoring systems and strategies to increase citizens' lifelong physical activity.
38. Adapt communication tools, in line with the GDPR, to the target audiences based on concrete actions.

⁽¹³⁾ For example, an online platform that supports the establishment of physical fitness monitoring programmes which provide feedback on specific individual physical fitness outcomes.

ANNEX I

Definitions for the purpose of these conclusions:

Physical activity is generally defined as 'any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscle that requires energy expenditure' (¹). It refers to all movement, including leisure time, transport to get to and from places, or as part of a person's work.

Physical fitness is the ability to carry out daily tasks with vigour and alertness without undue fatigue and ample energy to enjoy leisure time pursuits and to meet unforeseen emergencies.

Lifelong physical activity is all physical activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving health, preventing non-communicable diseases, and maintaining a healthy weight, quality of life and well-being in personal, civic, social and/or employment terms.

(¹) Based on the World Health Organization (2020): WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour.

ANNEX II

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

1. Council conclusions of 27 November 2012 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA).
2. Council Recommendation of 26 November 2013 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors.
3. Council conclusions of 15 December 2015 on the promotion of motor skills, physical and sport activities for children.
4. Council conclusions of 29 June 2020 on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery of the sport sector.
5. Council conclusions of 4 December 2020 on promoting cross-sectoral cooperation for the benefit of sport and physical activity in society.
6. Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the European Union Work Plan for Sport (1 January 2021 to 30 June 2024), 2020/C 419/01.
7. European Parliament resolution of 10 February 2021 on the impact of COVID-19 on youth and on sport (2020/2864 (RSP)).
