



Nutrition and physical activity - essential routes to better health

EU support to promote healthier eating and more exercise

Poor diet and lack of exercise are major contributors to rising levels of obesity and non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer, which kill more EU citizens than all other causes combined. As part of a multi-sector, pan-European response, the second EU health programme 2008-2013 encouraged health-promoting behaviour change in food consumption and physical exercise.

Lifestyle and avoidable ill-health

Given their impact on quality of life and life expectancy, on health systems and on economic productivity, improving diet and promoting physical activity are key public health priorities. However, as they are influenced by a host of biological, social and environmental factors, responses must encompass diverse policy areas, from food industry regulation to urban planning, as well as health.

In 2007, the European Commission adopted a Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related health issues. This was followed by EU Guidelines and a Council Recommendation addressing health-enhancing physical activity (2013/0603) and by an EU Action Plan on childhood obesity and Council Conclusions on Nutrition and Physical Activity. Two key groups have been supporting implementation of the strategy: the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity brings together national competent authorities and the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health unites industry, NGOs and academia.





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A coordinated response

Health promotion has been central to each of the EU health programmes, and support for healthy lifestyles is one of the four overarching aims of the third health programme, launched in 2014.

Health programme actions have addressed all six priorities identified in the Strategy for Europe:

- better informed consumers;
- making the healthy option available;
- encouraging physical activity;
- work with priority groups and settings (including children);
- developing the evidence base to support policymakers;
- developing monitoring systems to assess progress and evaluate the effectiveness of programmes tackling obesity.

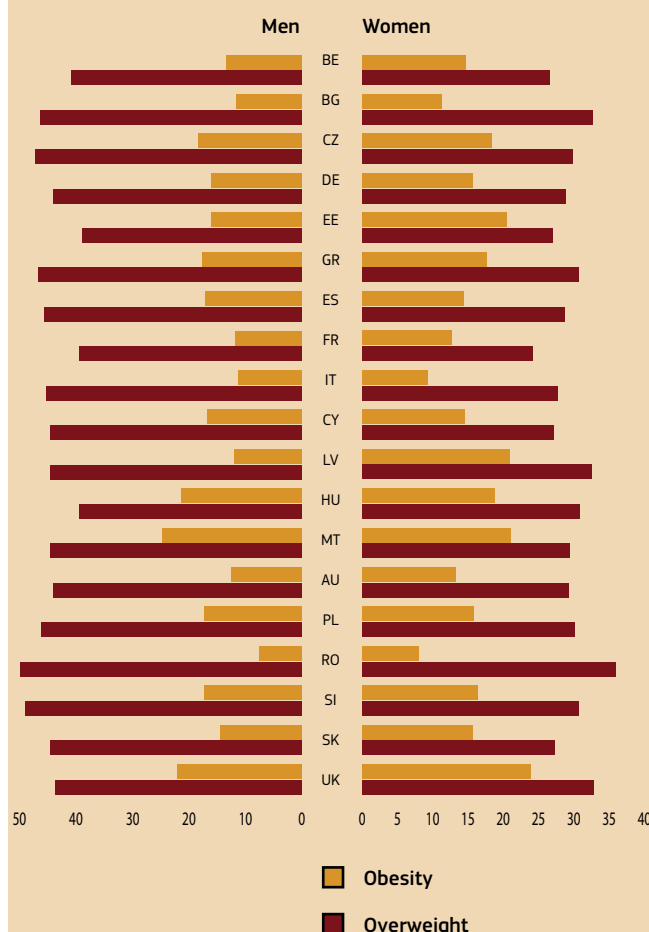
The complexity of the issues has led to a strong emphasis on the ‘health in all policies’ approach and on strengthening collaborations between policy sectors.

The programme’s work has included partnerships with the WHO Regional Office for Europe. This has led to the development of reference databases in priority areas and encouraged harmonised approaches, for example in health recommendations, as well as promoting the sharing of information and expertise.

Strategies are shaped according to the subsidiarity principle and benefit from being adapted to national, regional and local conditions. The health programme creates EU added value of use to all EU countries, addresses cross-border issues and supports national policymaking. This includes coordinated action to collate and harmonise information across the EU, sharing experience and expertise in policy focusing on nutrition and physical activity, and identifying and disseminating models of effective practice and interventions.

1 in 3 children in the EU are overweight or obese.

Overweight and obesity in women and men as a percentage of the population, 2009.



Source: Eurostat, some statistics come from the ‘Aspects of daily living survey’ (Italy) and the ‘Health Survey for England’ (United Kingdom).

Better information for better policymaking

Project name: Monitoring the implementation of the European Strategy for Nutrition and Physical Activity (**NOPA II**)

Number of partners: single beneficiary direct grant.
EU funding: €700 000. **Duration:** 24 months.

During the 2008-2011 period, the European Commission provided funding to the WHO Regional Office for Europe to monitor the implementation of the European Strategy for Nutrition and Physical Activity (NOPA I project). After 2011, the NOPA database was refined and expanded in a two-year follow-up, NOPA II.

The database provides a definitive source of data on nutrition, obesity and physical activity issues, including surveillance data, policy documents, actions to implement policy and examples of good practice.

NOPA II built on this foundation, adding new information and functionalities. It has also fostered contact between information focal points and built connections to relevant data collection initiatives and information resources. Covering 53 countries, the database enables policymakers to identify gaps and needs in data collection and policy development.

Visit: www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/nutrition/activities/monitoring-and-surveillance/joint-whoec-project-to-monitor-progress and data.euro.who.int/nopa/

Practical guidance for interventions targeting young people

Project name: Promoting healthy eating and physical activity in local communities (**HEPCOM**)

Number of partners: 21 from 15 countries: BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, LT, NL, AT, PT, FI, UK.
EU funding: €1 000 000. **Duration:** 42 months.

HEPCOM aims to increase the number and quality of interventions addressing overweight and obesity in young people.

Launched in 2013, HEPCOM is developing an online learning platform to provide stakeholders — communities, schools, school authorities, policymakers and others — with practical tools, information and resources to design and imple-

ment strategies for health promotion in young people. Its toolbox focuses on eating, physical activity and psychosocial health.

The tools can be used to guide policy development, strategic planning and operational planning of interventions and health-promoting activities, and evaluation.

To ensure the platform meets users' needs, 45 local pilots are being carried out to generate practical guidance and good practice examples.

Visit: www.hepcom.eu



Enhancing supply and nudging demand for healthier eating in the workplace

Project name: Fighting Obesity through Offer and Demand (**FOOD**)

Number of partners: 18 from 6 countries: BE, CZ, ES, FR, IT, SE. **EU funding:** €499 642. **Duration:** 28 months.

The project aimed to promote healthy and balanced nutrition in the workplace by addressing both supply and demand — encouraging healthier decision-making by employees but also targeting food outlets to enhance the supply of healthier options.

After surveying employees and restaurants, the project established six straightforward recommendations for employees and one for restaurants, applicable across all European countries. These formed the basis of communication tools designed to inform employees and food outlets about a balanced and healthy diet.

The project reached 4 million employees and almost 200 000 food outlets. Its tools are available on its website in nine languages, and — highlighting both its value and its sustainability — project partners have agreed to continue the initiative and add two new country members.

Visit: www.food-programme.eu/



Making space for physical activity

Project name: Improving Infrastructures for Leisure-Time Physical Activity in the Local Arena (**IMPALA**)

Number of partners: 12 from 11 countries: CZ, DK, DE, ES, FR, IT, LT, NL, AT, PT, FI. **EU funding:** €517 919. **Duration:** 24 months.

The project focused on the development and management of local infrastructures for physical activity.

Sport and other physical activity require suitable facilities and spaces. How urban areas provide such resources can therefore significantly affect local levels of physical activity.

IMPALA analysed policies linked to the provision of such spaces and facilities and found too few examples of strategic or cross-sectoral approaches to their development. To address this gap, it developed a set of guidelines for improving local infrastructure.

Available online in five languages, those guidelines have been integrated into the EU monitoring framework for the implementation of policies to promote health-enhancing physical activity.

Visit: www.impala-eu.org/

Teaming up to get older people moving

Project name: Building Policy Capacities for Health Promotion through Physical Activity among Sedentary Older People (**PASEO**)

Number of partners: 14 from 13 countries: CZ, DE, EL, ES, FR, IT, LT, NL, AT, PL, PT, FI, SE. **EU funding:** €800 000. **Duration:** 30 months.

Despite well-documented benefits, levels of physical exercise are low among older people. This project established a network of influential academics, policymakers and NGO representatives with the objective of developing capacity to promote physical activity in older people.

Intersectoral collaboration and organisational capabilities were developed, for example by consulting with older people and establishing nationwide partnerships.

Each country developed and began implementing national action plans, and many national alliances are continuing beyond the end of the project.

Activities funded under PASEO are being continued through the European Network for Action on Ageing and Physical Activity.

Visit: www.eunaapa.org/

Good advice for targeted health promotion

Project name: Promoting Physical Activity — Networking and action on healthy and equitable environments for physical activity (**PHAN**)

Number of partners: single beneficiary direct grant. **EU funding:** €500 000. **Duration:** 24 months.

In the PHAN project, the European Commission and the WHO Regional Office for Europe collaborated to enhance national capacities to promote health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) in two key populations — young people and socially disadvantaged groups.

The project was based on networking across countries and between sectors, including transport, urban planning, sport and leisure. It drew on several existing networks, with HEPA Europe acting as a shared 'network of networks'.

It identified good practices, developing and disseminating case studies and policy guidance. A network also examined transport infrastructure in cities, developing tools to promote urban planning that enhances opportunities for physical activity.

The project also consulted young people to identify ways in which physical activity can be made more appealing to them.

Visit: www.euro.who.int/PHAN



Find out more

Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related health issues

ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/documents/nutrition_wp_en.pdf
Action Plan on Childhood Obesity

ec.europa.eu/health/nutrition_physical_activity/docs/childhoodobesity_actionplan_2014_2020_en.pdf

Directorate-General for Health and Food safety of the European Commission (DG SANTE)

ec.europa.eu/health/nutrition_physical_activity/policy/index_en.htm

Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency (Chafea)
ec.europa.eu/chafea/index.html

Database of actions co-funded under the EU health programmes
ec.europa.eu/chafea/projects/database.html

