



POSITION PAPER ON PARTICIPATION AND HEALTH-ENHANCING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Summary

- ENGSO is of the opinion that participation and health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) needs to be at the forefront of future EU sports policy. Physically active and healthy citizens can perform better in all areas of their lives; they could contribute better to growth and to a healthier physical and social environment. Therefore, health-enhancing physical activity and participation would contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart sustainable and inclusive growth. With these priorities all European citizens would be in the target group of the Sport Chapter and the activities would reach grassroots level.
- The future EU sports policy and the Sports Funding Chapter should focus on physical activity as a preventive measure and support activities to identify best practise in fostering participation. ENGSO believes that the current Council Expert Group on Sport, Health and Participation should continue its work in the future. However the focus of its work should be to find efficient ways to enhance participation in physical activities. Increasing participation will be a key to a successful European HEPA policy.
- ENGSO believes that schools and sports clubs play a crucial role in fostering participation. Early engagement in physical activity is many times a guarantee of a lifelong physical activity. Thus, ENGSO urges this issue to be high on the EU sports political agenda. ENGSO is of the opinion that either the Expert Group on Sports, Health and Participation should explore the ways to enhance the participation through sports clubs and schools, or a completely new Expert Group on Physical Education should be created.
- ENGSO wishes to highlight the importance of the cross-sectoral approach to promoting physical activity and enhancing participation. Co-operation between different sectors both at non-governmental, but especially at governmental side, at all levels is needed. ENGSO encourages the incorporation of the cross-sectoral approach into the future HEPA agenda at EU level, and this approach should be also taken into account in the possible future Council Recommendations on health-enhancing physical activity.
- Another important issue to be included in the future HEPA agenda, and possible Council Recommendations, is urban planning. Adequate access to sport facilities is a crucial factor in facilitating the physical activity of citizens. ENGSO believes that urban planning should focus on the development of an alternative infrastructure which supports physical activity and encourages people to be active.



Introduction

Benefits of physical activity

From a physiological perspective, regular physical activity enhances the optimal functioning and increased physical working capacity of the human organism. Physical activity reduces the risk of several illnesses, such as some forms of cancer, hypertonia, obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, infectious diseases, digestive system diseases caused by stress, nervous system disorders, the symptoms of depression and stress as well as the diseases of the respiratory and the musculoskeletal system¹. Sport improves the emotional and cognitive capacity and develops the morality of the individual (e. g. through fair play), leading to mental well-being. The skills gained through sport are transferable to other aspects of life. In a wider sense, sport contributes to the physical and mental health of the society as a whole. From an economical perspective, physical activity increases the social insurance savings as well as productivity, and leads to a healthier and more social working environment, which affects individuals, businesses and nations².

Since physically active and mentally healthy citizens can perform better in all areas of their lives, they can contribute better to growth and to a healthier physical and social environment. In this way, health-enhancing physical activity could empower the improvement of business environments for global competition. European citizens could better develop their skills throughout the lifecycle as well as participate to a greater extent in the labour market and mobility. Therefore, HEPA would contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

ENGSO wishes to emphasize that in order to achieve the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy and to fight against the growing problems of inactivity, such as obesity, health-enhancing physical activity needs to be one of the main priorities of the EU sports policy in the future. To achieve these positive effects of physical activity and to implement a successful HEPA policy in Europe, ENGSO is of the opinion that the EU should focus more on the issue of participation in sports/physical activity. Many studies show that there is a growing problem of inequality in sports/physical activity participation.

Participation and health-enhancing physical activity in the future EU sport policy

ENGSO welcomes the Council Conclusions on promoting health-enhancing physical activity which identifies several crucial elements and measures to enhance the physical activity in the EU in future. ENGSO is of the opinion that the next Council Work Plan on Sport should prioritise HEPA and participation as one of the central topics. As a next step after the endorsement of the Council Conclusions, Council Recommendations should be adopted and an Expert

¹ WHO (2009). Global Health Risks – Mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks (P. 18): http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/GlobalHealthRisks_report_full.pdf

² Eurobarometer 334 (2009). Sport and Physical Activity (P. 9&35)



Group should be established from 2014 to continue the work of the current Expert Group on 'Sport, Health and Participation'. The future Expert Group should especially focus on participation and a cross-sectoral approach on HEPA.

With regards to the upcoming EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, ENGSO wishes to highlight that HEPA and participation should be one of the main funding priorities of the Programme. Through promoting health-enhancing physical activity and participation in sports, all European citizens become the target group of the Programme. The Chapter on Sport should focus on physical activity as a preventive measure, e.g. against obesity and non-communicable or chronic diseases that include heart disease and stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes, and target special groups, such as children, youth and elderly people. It should finance activities to identify best practices on enhancing participation and special focus should be on the most vulnerable, such as overweight children and inactive people living in deprived areas. The Chapter on Sport should also enhance the participation by supporting sports clubs at grassroots level to develop tools and best practice to foster participation.

European Week of Sport

In general ENGSO welcomes the initiative on the European Week of Sport. However, in order to make it a successful initiative ENGSO is of the opinion that it is essential that it is supported by a range of stakeholders, especially by the sports bodies, also at national and regional level. Otherwise it will just remain as an activity of the EU which has no European added value. The initiative should be implemented in cooperation with national and regional sport bodies and governments and also include the media. Already existing practises, such as national sports days or weeks, should be taken into account. EU should support these national practises and projects, which in some countries are successful, and not create any competing activities. A European Week of Sport should be built on these existing initiatives but with a common concept. Broad influence to the national societies can't be guaranteed if the initiative is implemented with a top-down approach. However, it is important that there is one instance which is responsible for the coordination and implementation of this initiative also at national level. It is also important that the week has clearly defined desired outcomes and that it has a lasting legacy or value which goes beyond the week. Financing of the initiative should be ensured preferably from another source than the upcoming Sport Chapter.

One of the ideas to promote the European Week of Sports could be to have a European grassroots sports torch relay which would go through all the EU member states with a message to all Europeans to engage and participate in sport and physical activity. However, the sports movement should be included in the torch relay to make it successful. This could be linked to the possibility to try all kind of sports free of charge, organised by different federations or local actors. Another important factor for a successful implementation would be to find famous elite athletes as ambassadors of the initiative. This would enhance the media attention.



Role of schools, education and early engagement

ENGSO would like to highlight the role of schools and education in engaging people at early stages of their lives to become physically active. Early engagement is one of the most efficient ways of fostering participation in lifelong physical activity. The future EU sports policy should identify ways and best practice to promote participation in sport through schools, especially focusing on the role of schools in educating children and their families healthy lifestyles through sport. The Council Expert Group and future Sports Funding Chapter should concentrate on identifying these practises. Physical activity and sport in schools can also be a good way of reducing school absenteeism and empowering girls or vulnerable groups. Promoting and identifying best practices related to these topics should be also on the agenda of the HEPA policy.

ENGSO supports the idea of using elite sport and mass sport events as an educational platform to promote positive health messages³. These events could include educational programmes for children and youth. Identifying elite athletes, who are interested in promoting physical activity and sports as ambassadors, would be also a good way to increase sports participation.

Role of sports clubs and grassroots sport organisations

About 60% of Europeans play sports and around 60 million are members of sports clubs⁴. Sports clubs are in close interaction with citizens at grassroots level, as they have an important role in forming social relationships and activating the European population. Common physical activity strengthens a sense of participation and belonging, which are the fundamentals of different values such as solidarity, social cohesion, equal opportunities, social inclusion and volunteering.

“Health is the main consideration for EU citizens when it comes to exercise, although other factors like personal appearance and pure enjoyment are also significant”⁵. Positive experience and enjoyment are important motivators and guarantee a lifelong physical activity. Sports clubs offer this enjoyable atmosphere, thus they play a crucial role in enhancing the physical activity of EU citizens. Especially important is the role of sports clubs in activating children and youth. When physical activity becomes a habit at an early stage, it is more likely to stay a habit throughout the whole lifetime. Sport clubs and grassroots level actors also possess a great number of good ideas and initiatives to guarantee lifelong physical activity of EU citizens at all age level.

ENGSO believes that co-operation between sports clubs at grassroots level in Europe is needed in order to promote these examples and initiatives in different member states. Furthermore, the future EU sport programme should

³ United Nation Sport for Development and Peace, SDP IWG (2008) Chapter 2: Sport and Health: Preventing Disease and Promoting Health

⁴ Eurobarometer 334 (2009). Sport and Physical Activity (P.9 & 24)

⁵ Eurobarometer 334 (2009). Sport and Physical Activity (P.29)



support sports clubs at grassroots level to enhance the physical activity of EU citizens, fostering participation, forming social relationships and cooperating with each other at EU level.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

Urban planning is a good example of cross-sectoral approach enhancing physical activity of citizens. Co-operation between different sectors both from the non-governmental, but especially the governmental side, at all levels is needed. Genuine improvement of the level of physical activity will require a close collaboration between sport, health, educational, environmental and social affairs ministries or administrations at the municipal, national and European level.

ENGSO encourages the incorporation of the cross-sectoral approach into the future HEPA agenda at EU level and the identification of good practice examples. Furthermore, the cross-sectoral approach should have a high priority in possible future Council Recommendations on health-enhancing physical activity.

Urban planning and sport facilities

Appropriate urban planning and adequate access to sport facilities stimulate EU citizens to become physically more active. With the help of good networks of cycling paths, walkways and other alternative infrastructure, which enables people to get to a destination being physically active at the same time, physical activity becomes a means of transportation more easily.

Thus, ENGSO believes that urban planning should focus on the development of an alternative infrastructure which supports physical activity and encourages people to be active. Adequate access to sport facilities is also an important factor in facilitating the physical activity of citizens. Swimming and sport halls, parks, sport venues, playing fields and other facilities should be in close proximity to the citizens and available for free or only for a nominal fee. Urban planning needs to be taken into account in the future EU HEPA policy, especially in the work of the Expert Groups and Council Recommendations on health-enhancing physical activity.

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