

# LATVIA PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FACTSHEET

This is one of the 28 European Union Member States factsheets on health-enhancing physical activity, developed as a part of a joint initiative between the European Commission (EC) and WHO Regional Office for Europe in the context of the implementation of the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors and the European Noncommunicable Diseases Action Plan 2012-2016.

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**World Health  
Organization**  
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## LATVIA

PREVALENCE (%) OF ADULTS THAT CARRY OUT 30 MINUTES  
OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT LEAST 4-6 TIMES PER WEEK, 2014

%	ADULTS (15-64 YEARS)
MALES	11.3
FEMALES	8.5
BOTH SEXES	9.9

Total population: 1 986 096

Median age: 42.4 years

Life expectancy at birth males: 69.3 years

Life expectancy at birth females: 78.9 years

GDP per capita: €11 600

GDP spent on health: 6.5% (1)



# Monitoring and surveillance

## Physical activity in adults

Latvia established its national health monitoring and surveillance system in 1998 (2), through the Health Behaviour of Latvian Adult Population survey, with the Latvian Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDPC) as the leading institution. Data on physical activity are collected every second year and the physical activity aspects measured include frequency, duration and intensity of physical activity, across various domains (leisure time, transport, work, household), cycling and/or walking and sedentary behaviour in different age and socioeconomic groups.

The country's national recommendation and cut-off point for adults reaching the recommended physical activity levels for health are based on WHO's *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health* (2010) (3) and those of the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (4) and the American College of Sports Medicine (5). The national recommendations address young people as well as adults, and provide guidelines for pregnant women, people with disabilities, and people with chronic health conditions (6).

According to the latest national data from 2014 (7), 9.9% of adults (aged 15–64 years) are physically active for at least 30 minutes 4–6 times per week (equal to 120 minutes or more). Against this measure, males on average are more active (11.3%) than females (8.5%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Prevalence (%) of adults that carry out 30 minutes of physical exercise at least 4–6 times per week, 2014

%	ADULTS (15–64 YEARS)
MALES	11.3
FEMALES	8.5
BOTH SEXES	9.9

Source: Grinberga et al., 2014 (7).

The WHO Global Health Observatory (GHO) data from 2010 for the Latvian adult population (aged 18+ years) (8) show that 76.2% are meeting the WHO recommended physical activity levels and the likelihood of meeting the physical activity recommendations is higher among males, with 80.7% for males and 72.7% for females.

## Physical activity in children and adolescents

As is the case for the adult data, Latvia's cut-off point for children and adolescents reaching the recommended physical activity levels is based on WHO's *Global recommendations on physical activity for health* (2010) (3).

Physical activity levels in adolescents are assessed through the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study (9). According to the data from the HBSC 2009/2010 survey (10), 22.9% of the adolescents (aged 11–15 years) reaching the recommended physical activity levels for health. Boys are significantly more active (24.4%) than girls (16.0%) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Prevalence (%) of adolescents reaching the recommended physical activity levels, 2009/2010

%	ADOLESCENTS (11-15 YEARS)
MALES	24.4
FEMALES	16.0
BOTH SEXES	22.9

Source: Pudule et al., 2012 (10).

The WHO GHO 2010 estimates for Latvian adolescents (defined as aged 11–17 years in relation to WHO data) present similar results to the HBSC 2009/2010 survey, with 20.3% reaching the WHO recommended physical activity levels for health. Boys continue to be significantly more active than girls (23.0% versus 17.7%).

Box 1 describes some physical activity promotion activities carried out through public awareness campaigns in Latvia.

### Box 1. Promoting physical activity through public awareness campaigns

The CDPC carries out campaigns and activities to promote a physically active lifestyle within the general adult population, as well for children and youth. One example is the “Summer of Health” campaign, held during 2014 as part of the Family Health Year, aiming to promote a healthy active lifestyle at all ages and to inform society about the importance of physical activity to promote and preserve health (11). The campaign provided specific examples of the most suitable types of exercise for various age groups: youth (aged 14–17 years), adults (aged 18–64 years), and the older adult population (aged 65+ years). The CDPC also held training for leaders of physical activity in local communities on the promotion of active lifestyles and the best ways to organize accessible sports activities (for example northern walking and exercising outdoors). This was carried out in cooperation with the National Healthy Municipalities Network (12).

## Policy response

### Major policy documents adopted by government bodies

The Sports Policy Guidelines for 2014–2020 were created by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2013 (13). This document addresses Sports for All promotion, including youth, paralympic and elite sports. The policy aims to: promote physical activity, including the preparation of athletes within competitive programmes; improve disabled people access to sports; and promote the development of the sports infrastructure. The Public Health Strategy 2014–2020 by the Ministry of Health highlights the importance of physical activity within public health, as well as the need to (a) expend around 250–300 calories a day in exercise, and (b) increase the current levels of exercise carried out by the Latvian population (14, 15). The Action Plan for Cardiovascular Health Improvement 2013–2015 was implemented

by the Ministry of Health in 2013 (16). This encourages individuals to lead a more active life in order to reduce the high prevalence of cardiovascular disease among the Latvian population.

The Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia has developed the Education Development Guidelines 2014–2020 (17), which address the integration of physical activity in education. This includes general (primary and secondary) education, along with vocational higher education, and also focuses on ethnic minorities, low socioeconomic groups, and children and youth.

The Ministry of Transport has devised the Transport Development Guidelines for 2014–2020, implemented from 2013 (18). These address strengthening the public transport infrastructure and encouraging people to use more active modes of transport. The Regional Policy Guidelines devised by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development in 2013 address how regional development projects and local public services can improve public infrastructure in order to also improve opportunities for physical activity (19).

## Guidelines and goals

The Latvian National Healthy Municipalities Network is a group of local governments that focuses on the topic of physical activity promotion for all. In 2012, the Ministry of Health published *Health promotion guidelines for local governments*, which include information about the crucial role of physical activity promotion and various suggestions for different population groups (new mothers, the working-age population, preschool and school-age children, and elderly people) (20). To date, 37 out of 119 municipalities in Latvia have joined the network.

Table 3 presents a summary of the key measures in place to monitor and address physical activity in Latvia.

Table 3. Summary of key physical activity initiatives in Latvia

HEALTH	SPORTS	EDUCATION	TRANSPORT	MONITORING	GUIDELINES
Counselling on physical activity as part of primary health care services	Existence of a national Sports for All policy(ies)	Mandatory physical activity in primary and secondary schools	National or subnational schemes promoting active travel to school and/or workplace	Physical activity included in the national health monitoring system or separate routine survey	Existence of a national recommendation on physical activity
YES	YES	YES	YES*	YES	YES

\* Expected to be implemented by 2017 as a result of the re-establishment of the Health Promoting School Network in Latvia.

## Additional information on action in key areas

### Physical activity counselling

One of the targets of the Public Health Strategy 2014–2020 (14) is to reduce noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and one of the planned activities to achieve this is physical activity promotion among older adults. The implementation plan involves each municipality promoting a healthy and active lifestyle, including providing guidance on physical activity in older adults. In 2014, the CDPC facilitated training for local municipalities and leaders of physical activity groups in local communities, in order to provide them with information on how to promote physical activity and active lifestyles, along with the best ways to organize accessible sports activities. This project was carried out in collaboration with the National Healthy Municipalities Network.

Exercise Prescription for General Practitioners is a scheme started by the National Sports Medicine Centre in 2014 (21), which aims to emphasize the role of physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle, along with its importance for disease prevention. This involves counselling patients on the physical activity recommendations. Counselling and advice are also provided for specialist patient groups, such as those suffering from cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, overweight, cancer, pulmonary diseases, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis and sarcopenia, as well as certain population groups, such as elderly people, pregnant women and children. This service is carried out by general practitioners and nurses who undergo voluntary training in order to be able to provide such counselling.

### Physical activity in the workplace

Another target of the Public Health Strategy 2014–2020 is to reduce NCDs and one approach to achieving this is through the promotion of physical activity in the work place. For this, the implementation plan involves each municipality promoting a healthy and active lifestyle, focusing specifically in physical activity in the workplace.

### Physical activity in schools

It is mandatory for primary schools to include 2 hours of physical education (PE) in the curriculum. Educational institutions have the right to increase the number of hours dedicated to PE per week, and many schools choose to provide more than 2 classes of PE per week. The content of PE is determined by Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers for basic and secondary schools. These regulations determine the aims and objectives of PE, its compulsory content and what learning goals must have been met upon completion of forms 3, 6, 9 and 12 in the Latvian school system (22).

The CDPC is responsible for the promotion of physical activity among various target groups, through public awareness campaigns (11). For example, it established a pilot project entitled Move Your Brain in 2014, which was carried out in 20 schools across Latvia, engaging almost 4000 pupils (23). The main aim was to promote physical activity breaks during classes, as a method of recreation, exercising and team-building. It included interactive educational activity for pupils and teachers, as well as lectures and practical activities, to show the impact of physical activity on educational outcomes, behaviour, and the health and well-being of pupils, both through lectures and practical demonstrations. Active breaks during school lessons and the promotion of active travel in schools are planned to be implemented in the near future, as a result of the re-establishment of the Health Promoting School Network in Latvia.

In 2014, a public awareness campaign and countrywide sports events were carried out in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (such as the “Street Basket” initiative) in order to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles and to encourage useful spending of leisure time among the adolescent population during the summer holidays. More than 20 649 participants were involved in various events (summer camps, street dance and gymnastics, street basketball tournaments, powerlifting contests, health and sports days for families, and so on). The idea to continue this approach in the coming years is currently being discussed.

## Physical activity in marginalized groups

For municipalities that are engaged in the National Healthy Municipalities Network, the Ministry of Health published *Health promotion guidelines for local governments* in 2012 (20), which include suggestions for the promotion of physical activity through recreational activities, including how municipalities can invest in the creation of environments conducive to physical activity for various population groups (such as population groups at risk of social exclusion).

# Successful approaches

## The Ghetto Games

The Ghetto Games are the most notable example of a movement to integrate street culture and sports for young people in Latvia. More than 70 events per season are organized, representing an opportunity for children and young people to spend their leisure time engaged in physical and healthy activities. Street football, street gymnastics and other street ball games (such as floorball, street ball, etc.) are the most attractive open-air activities. It is worth noting that the participants of the Ghetto Games are responsible both for organizing themselves during activities and for refereeing the games.

## The National Sports Council

An example of well-established cross-sectoral cooperation in the area of sports and health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) is embodied in the National Sports Council. This is a public consultative institution that participates in the development of government sports policy, helping to facilitate sports development and cooperation in policy implementation. The Council consists of governmental institutions and NGOs involved in the sports arena. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science (responsible for sports in Latvia) are members of the Council, which meets to discuss all the main issues concerning sports and HEPA, including the budget, drafts of the policy planning documents, and key initiatives.

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