

THE PROJECT

The European Commission and the WHO Regional Office for Europe jointly funded this project on the promotion of networking and action on healthy and equitable environments for physical activity, with a particular focus on children and disadvantaged groups.

The project provides Member States with intelligence, guidance, tools, examples of good practices and exchange platforms on physical activity promotion. In addition the project supports Member States in creating stronger collaboration with other sectors (such as urban planning, transport, education, tourism, sport and leisure) and provides new tools and approaches to physical activity promotion in urban environments.

The PHAN project ran from February 2010 to January 2013.

The main reports and deliverables from the project can be found at

<http://www.euro.who.int/PHAN>



Networking for Physical Activity

Results of the PHAN project on networking and action on healthy and equitable environments for physical activity



For more information please contact:

World Health Organization
Regional Office for Europe
UN City, Marmorvej 51
2100 Copenhagen
Denmark
physicalactivity@euro.who.int
<http://www.euro.who.int/phan>

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THE CHALLENGE

Scientific evidence shows that physical inactivity is a leading risk factor for ill health. Effects of adequate levels of physical activity (PA) go beyond preventing weight gain and also benefit physical and mental well-being by substantially reducing the risks of heart diseases and type-2 diabetes, hypertension, some forms of cancer as well as stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness. The most recent WHO Global Burden of Disease study estimated that physical inactivity has become the fourth largest cause of death in high-income countries. In recent years PA promotion has increasingly been recognized in Europe as a public health priority and many countries have responded by developing policies and interventions. One approach is the promotion of supportive environments that allow all parts of the population to make the healthy choice the easy choice. This, however, poses challenges, including:

- **Mobilizing different disciplines** and stakeholders, ranging from academia to governments and civil society;
- **Developing capacities and guidance** to effectively engage and reach target groups, such as socially disadvantaged groups (SDG) and youth; and
- **Working effectively across different sectoral policies**, such as urban development, transport, education, understanding their priorities and arguments to win their support.



THE ANSWERS

Mobilizing different disciplines

The project built on the European Network for the Promotion of Health Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA Europe) and established topic specific networks on youth, socially disadvantaged groups, tools for the economic assessment of regular PA and local implementation. These cross-sectoral networks continue beyond the scope of the PHAN project and expand the HEPA Europe platform. HEPA Europe is a network which works for better health through PA among all people in the WHO European Region, by strengthening and supporting efforts to increase participation and improve the conditions for healthy lifestyles.



Developing capacities and guidance to effectively engage and reach target groups

The challenge of PA promotion in SDG lies in the complexity of understanding the multifactorial nature of 'social disadvantage'. Social disadvantage relates to socioeconomic, sociocultural and sociogeographical aspects and to age. SDG may actually be affected

by more than one of these dimensions. A review of policy documents indicated a low awareness of the issue and a relatively narrow focus on sport, not considering other sectors, such as transport and environment). There is potential for more multisectoral approaches. Key principles for intervention design, delivery and evaluation, for policy action and formulation, and for research are outlined in the *Physical activity promotion in socially disadvantaged groups: principles for action. Policy summary*.

Another population group requiring particular attention is the youth. Physical activity patterns acquired during adolescence are an important determining factor for levels of PA in later life.



The *Blueprint for making physical activity appealing to youth* is a resource for physical-activity promoters, with a focus on supportive urban environments and settings where children and young people spend time, structured around 18 elements that make PA appealing to youth. An important innovative aspect of the Blueprint is the direct engagement of young people in its development.



Working effectively across sectoral policies

Although the transport and urban planning sectors play a paramount role in promoting policies that can facilitate walking and cycling, these policies are often of comparatively lower importance and priority for these sectors. It is therefore important to develop user-friendly tools that can help these sectors to see the promotion of cycling and walking not just in terms of a desirable public health intervention, but, very importantly, as an integral part of the policy menu available to achieve more efficient transport and better quality of urban life. PHAN contributed to this through the development and improvement of the *Health economic assessment tools (HEAT) for walking and cycling* (www.euro.who.int/heat).

HEAT is a user-friendly online resource to estimate the economic savings resulting from reductions in mortality as a consequence of regular cycling and/or walking. As such, HEAT can be used when planning new cycling or walking infrastructure, evaluating current levels of cycling or walking or providing input into comprehensive economic appraisal exercises. It is based on best available evidence, and refined through practical experience made with it at local level, with parameters that can be adapted to fit specific situations.

