



Comments of the Finnish National Sports Council on the WHO draft global action plan on physical activity

The draft document is comprehensive and thorough. It deals with the significance of physical activity participation, the key challenges in the area, and the development of measures to improve the situation in a sustainable manner. The National Sports Council acknowledges that the need for long-term and systematic work for the promotion of physical activity has been recognised in the policies: cross-sectoral cooperation, impact assessment, development of everyday environments, communication, and multisectoral know-how of the professionals in the field of wellbeing, health and physical activity are required. The draft action plan also touches upon the fact that several other programmes and processes are connected to and affect the achievement of the objectives set in the draft.

Societal actors are connected to sports and physical activity primarily through the promotion of the population's wellbeing, health and physical functional capacity. The effects that physical activity has on the public health and wellbeing at work and, through these, on the national economy, productivity and competitiveness are rather well known today. Sports and physical activity are seen as significant civic activity with impact on the social cohesion, integration of immigrants and the wellbeing of children and young people. Along with the increased emphasis on sustainable development, combating of climate change and the requirement to reduce transport emissions, walking and cycling as forms of active travel have in recent times received ever more attention. Sports and physical activity constitute also a significant field of business. From the perspective of the effectiveness of the efforts to promote physical activity, the ability of the actors in the field to justify the importance of physical activity as part of the large-scale development of society is crucial.

As several strategies and programmes have already addressed the issue of physical inactivity, it would be essential to understand what kind of added value the action plan at hand is capable of producing in addition to the current situation. The National Sports Council is of the opinion that the following questions are crucial for the significance of the action plan: what kind of impacts the document will have on the financial steering of the actions and on the operations of the diverse group of actors in the different countries and at the different levels of action, as well as who will implement the policies defined in the action plan and with what kind of funding. The key objective shall be to pay more attention to physical inactivity in the general health promotion work.

The National Sports Council particularly wishes to emphasise the following two issues:

- 1) **By adopting an approach that emphasises effectiveness, the resources allocated for physical activity will produce the best possible benefits.** The objectives, progress indicators, impacts of the actions, and indicators of success presented in the action plan do not seem to form a logical entity quite yet. It is essential to be able to describe what is the role and significance of the action plan in the achievement of certain performance targets in comparison to the possible situation without the effects of the action plan.
- 2) **Equal access to sports and physical activity shall be promoted by applying a double strategy.** When it comes to actions promoting physical activity participation, certain target groups must be separately examined and the approach that takes account of equality and non-discrimination must be mainstreamed in all decision-making and preparation of decisions concerning physical activity. The key

questions in the mainstreaming efforts are, among others, how we can learn to identify societal structures that exclude certain groups from engaging in physical activity and how we can learn to tolerate diversity in all its forms. In addition, organisers of sports and physical activity shall consult residents in their area when making the most important decisions.

Furthermore, we propose that the following actions be added to the action plan:

- Proposed Action 3.1: We propose that **physical activity during school days be enhanced**, both quantitatively and qualitatively (cf. *Finnish Schools on the Move*, <https://liikkuvakoulu.fi/english>)
- We propose the establishment of a **separate programme intended for older people with reduced functional capacity** (cf. *Strength in Old Age Programme*, <http://www.voimaavanhuuteen.fi/en/>)



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