



World Health
Organization

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Europe



PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Current status and success stories from the European Union
Member States of the WHO European Region

A high-angle, wide shot of a marathon race taking place on a paved road that curves along a rugged coastline. The road is filled with hundreds of runners, mostly men, wearing various colored athletic gear. The road is bordered by a white line on the left and a yellow line on the right. To the left of the road is a steep, rocky cliffside with some sparse vegetation. To the right is the sea, with a rocky outcrop visible in the distance. The sky is clear and blue. The overall scene conveys a sense of a challenging outdoor athletic event.

KEYWORDS

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

WORKPLACE

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

EXERCISE

SPORT

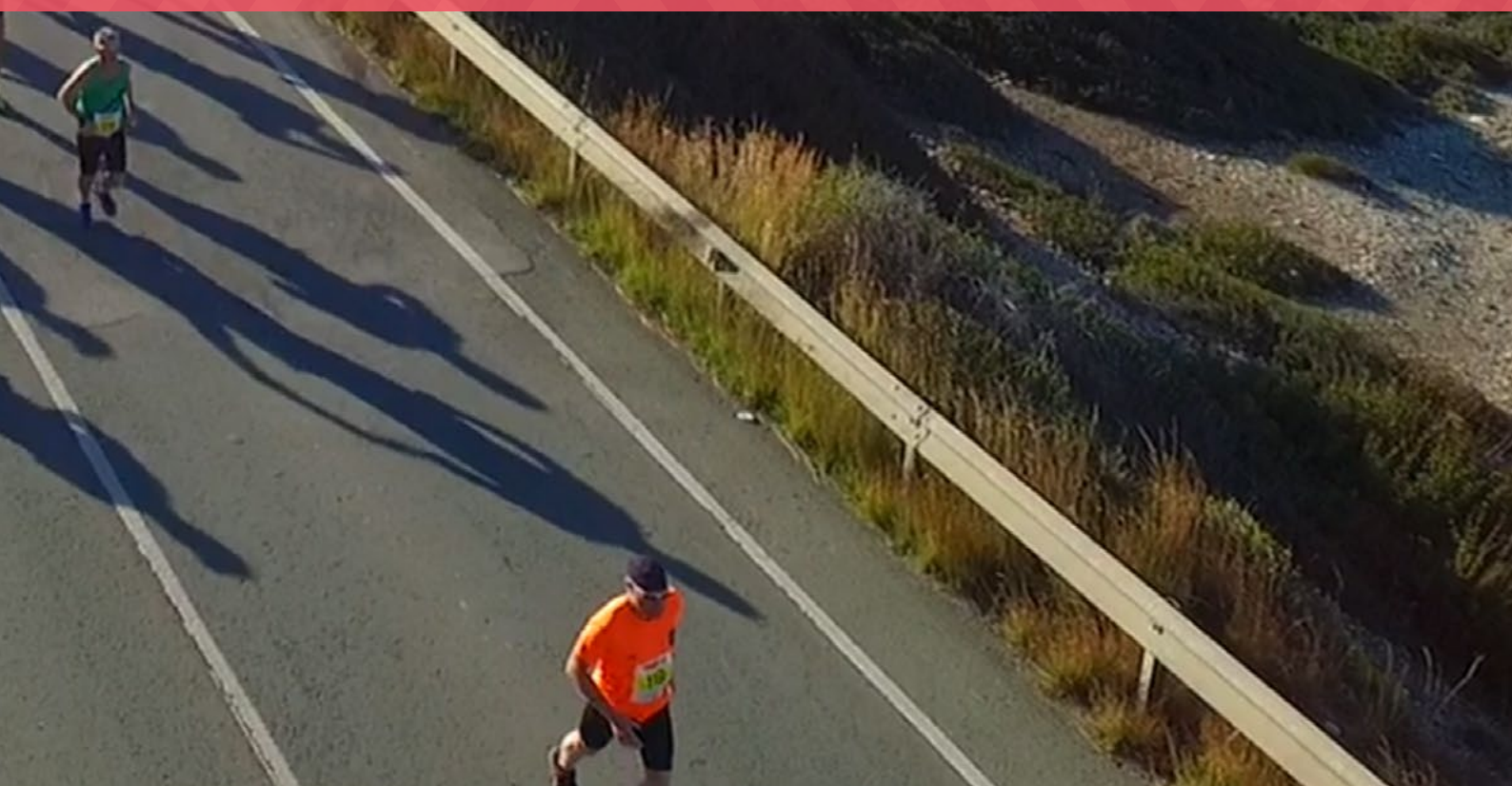
HEALTH POLICY

EUROPEAN UNION



ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a collaboration between WHO, the European Commission and European Union Member States. Information was collected by a network of physical activity focal points using a questionnaire with 23 indicators established to monitor implementation of the European Union physical activity guidelines. In addition, success stories or examples of good practices in the promotion of physical activity in workplaces were compiled through a follow-up brief survey related to two indicators in 2019. The background, methods and complete results of this exercise are presented in the publication *Physical activity factsheets for the European Union Member States of the WHO European Region*, published in 2018. The definitions, operationalization and the data used to define the indicators are available in a European Commission working document that also describes the monitoring framework.



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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	1
Results	3
Success stories	5
Austria	5
Belgium	6
Croatia	7
Cyprus	8
Estonia	8
Finland	9
Germany	9
Greece	10
Hungary	10
Ireland	11
Italy	11
Lithuania	12
The Netherlands	13
Portugal	13
Spain	14
Sweden	15
United Kingdom	16
Discussion	17
References	19

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a collaboration involving WHO, the European Commission and European Union (EU) Member States. Information was collected by a network of physical activity focal points using a questionnaire with 23 indicators established to monitor implementation of the EU physical activity guidelines (1). Success stories or examples of good practices in the promotion of physical activity in workplaces were compiled through a follow-up brief survey related to two indicators – programmes to encourage active travel to work, and programmes to promote physical activity at the workplace – in 2019. The background, methods and complete results of this exercise are presented in the publication *Physical activity factsheets for the European Union Member States of the WHO European Region*, published in 2018 (2). The definitions, operationalization and data used to define the indicators are available in a European Commission working document (3) that describes the monitoring framework.

The nature of contemporary occupations, the increasing use of technology and more sedentary modes of transport have contributed to a decrease in physical activity globally (4). Physical activity is important for the prevention of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including mental health conditions, and improved well-being (5). Sedentary behaviour is an independent risk factor for the development of NCDs (6). Results from the Eurobarometer show that 41% of Europeans report spending 5.5 hours or more sitting down on a daily basis and only four in 10 Europeans exercise or play sport at least once a week (7), indicating a need to decrease both sedentary behaviour and physical inactivity.

Despite efforts to promote physical activity, insufficient levels of physical activity have essentially remained unchanged in recent decades in most countries globally (8). There are many settings that are important for the promotion of physical activity. The WHO Global Action Plan on Physical Activity and the WHO Physical Activity Strategy for the European Region both emphasize the importance of the workplace in increasing population physical activity, particularly through initiatives that are relevant and inclusive for individuals with diverse abilities (9).

Workplace initiatives for physical activity promotion can provide benefits for employees and for the workplace. For example, studies suggest that team sports can bring benefits not only to individual health, but also to group cohesion and can lead to increased work performance (10). Sedentary occupations, long working hours and limited opportunities to be active at the workplace, however, pose a challenge to maintaining sufficient levels of physical activity and reducing sedentary time (5).

Active travel to work through, for example, walking or cycling can contribute to achieving the WHO global recommendations on physical activity for health, which recommend adults achieve at least 150 minutes of moderate-vigorous physical activity per week

(11). Adults who commute actively to work generally are more physically active and more likely to maintain a healthy body weight (12), and active commuting can benefit health independent of time spent on physical activity for leisure or recreation (13). Workplaces can support and motivate employees to commute actively to work, but an environment supportive of active transport is essential. Policies that improve road safety, promote compact urban design and prioritize access by pedestrians, cyclists and users of public transport to destinations should therefore be a priority for city planners (14). Achieving these broader changes to the urban environment will require integrated, whole-of-government policies, systems and practices.

Physical activity opportunities during working hours are also key to increasing activity levels among the working-age population (15). Multicomponent initiatives at the workplace are likely to have the best outcomes (16). These can involve the provision of information, advice and counselling to increase physical literacy and change behaviour, while establishing policies and practices that provide supportive physical and social environments and norms. Sustainable results can be achieved if initiatives are embedded as part of daily practices and workplace culture and meet the diverse and specific needs of individuals.

This report provides a snapshot of efforts to promote physical activity through workplaces in Member States of the EU. It presents a collection of case studies and data collected as part of the monitoring framework of the European Union Physical Activity Focal Points Network, focusing on two indicators:

- Indicator 19, reported schemes to encourage active travel to work
- Indicator 20, reported schemes to promote physical activity at the workplace.

Indicator 19 asked countries to report whether they had a national scheme to encourage active travel to work. Such schemes may be implemented by employers (such as financial incentives or a requirement for mobility plans for staff above a certain number) or led by a nongovernmental organization (incentives or subsidies to employees who use active forms of commuting, for instance). Active travel was defined as all non-motorized forms of travel, such as walking and cycling.

Indicator 20 asked countries to report national schemes designed to promote physical activity at the workplace. These could include structured offers, such as sports or walking programmes during lunch time, provision of appropriate infrastructure (such as a gym, showers or walking tracks), systematic inclusion in all work processes (including stand-up desks and walking meetings) or incentives or subsidies for employees who use such offers.

RESULTS

As of September 2018, 17 out of 28 EU Member States (61%) reported that a national initiative to promote active travel to work was in place. At the same time, 16 of 28 countries (57%) had established national schemes to promote physical activity at workplaces.





SUCCESS STORIES

Member States provided several success stories or examples of workplace physical activity initiatives through the European Union Physical Activity Focal Points Network. The most common schemes were promoting active travel to work and programmes to provide healthy workplace certificates to companies that promote physical activity among their employees. Other examples consisted of incentives for employees or employers to promote physical activity as well as the organization of workplace sports leagues or competitions. These examples are intended to offer further guidance and inspiration for policy-makers, implementers and researchers who intend to develop initiatives to promote physical activity among working populations.

AUSTRIA

Health and physical activity promotion at work: Austrian Company Sport Federation (Österreichischer Betriebssportverband – ÖBSV)

The Austrian Company Sport Federation serves as the primary contact point for companies who want to implement physical activity measures, establish company sports clubs or seek general guidance concerning physical activity capacities at the workplace. The Federation aims to promote health and physical activities in companies through a range of measures.

The Federation offers free initial counselling to workplaces to inform them about the variety of potential sport activities available and support them to implement physical activity measures in working environments. It also works to raise awareness about the positive impact of physical activity at work and enable employees from different companies to engage actively in the Austrian corporate sport championships. In 2019, 15 corporate sport championships of various sport disciplines were held, including athletics, badminton, beach volleyball, trail-running and golf. The main aim of the championships is to strengthen a sense of community, particularly in large companies, and increase social exchange among employees, which can also help increase social cohesion and reduce feelings of loneliness.

 <https://firmensport.at/>

Cycling to Work – a practical example for companies

Cycling to Work was an Austrian initiative that aimed to encourage people to commute to work by bicycle. More than 40 000 people participated in the initiative between 2011 and 2018. Incentives to participate included a company ranking system and the award of trophies and small prizes in the form of a cycle lottery. Individuals were motivated to participate by highlighting the benefits of active travel to work, such as energy expenditure, increased well-being and strengthening of team spirit.

CO₂ savings were published on a dedicated website to highlight the benefits for the environment. Results from an evaluation of the programme showed that 50% of participants who were already regularly cycling to work motivated others to join them during the initiative. A large majority of participants reported that they would continue cycling to work even after the end of the initiative.

Due to the success of Cycling to Work, the concept was expanded. Since 2019, the focus has not been limited to travel to work. The initiative is now called Austria Cycles!



<https://www.radelt.at/>

BELGIUM

Sport contributing to improving well-being at work

The headquarters of the National Social Security Office (NSSO) in Belgium has set up a sports facility to promote its employees' well-being, as high levels of inactivity had been found among workers due to lack of time or motivation. The NSSO is committed to helping promote workplace physical activity by allowing employees to practise supervised sports activities at their workplace and supporting those who were recommended exercise as part of a medical prescription. The purpose of the initiative is to improve employees' health, relieve stress and burnout and promote social cohesion. The initiative is run by the communications department.



A sports area consisting of two sports rooms and locker rooms equipped with spinning bicycles, bodybuilding and rowing machines, weightlifting apparatus, treadmills and elliptical cross-trainers has been created. A survey was then conducted to understand the needs and desires of employees in terms of sport activities. A sports coach was hired to coordinate the planning and coaching of the various physical activity classes, which were based on the requests of the employees. Employees are welcome to use the fitness room without prior registration and can register for free to join collective classes in activities such as spinning, CrossFit, yoga and tai chi, and customized classes based on defined objectives or physical issues. Along with the sports room, the NSSO also coordinates sports teams in tennis, football, volleyball, basketball, cycling, running, table tennis and aqua gym.

A web and mobile application were developed to enable employees to make reservations for sports activities and inform staff members of new developments. The initiative is evaluated through attendance and a satisfaction survey to ensure the sports activities on offer continue to match the needs of employees.



<https://onss.be/fr/jobs/travailler-lonss>

Physical activity at the workplace (Sport op het werk) (Flanders)

In 2017, Sport Flanders (Sport Vlaanderen) launched a campaign to promote physical activity and active mobility to and from work. This included a media campaign on national television, social media and other media channels, the goal of which was to promote and stimulate physical activity and sport at the workplace.



The campaign included a three-step programme to support companies:

- › **Step 1**, an analysis of the sportive profile of the company through a digital survey called Sportscan;
- › **Step 2**, a meeting with the company to determine the results, based on a comprehensive report with the results from Step 1; and
- › **Step 3**, the call to action, in which the company is advised on the actions it could take to start promoting physical activity (the choice depends on the outcome of the survey, financial possibilities and the characteristics of the company in terms of size and location).

The three steps are free of charge and are accompanied by an extensive web platform where companies can find relevant information regarding the possible actions they can organize. Promotional tools for sensibilization, including informative stickers, footstep stickers to promote taking the stairs and prints, are available for companies free of charge.

Since 2017, 394 scans have been performed, representing over 37 674 respondents, and a Flemish report on the sportive profile of employers is being prepared. Sport Flanders is preparing a compilation of good practices from sportive companies to serve as inspiration for other companies wishing to promote more physical activity and is working through an Erasmus+ project called "Healthy employee mobile and active (HEMA)" to aim for a European-wide scan of workplaces.



<https://www.sport.vlaanderen/ondernemingen/sport-op-het-werk/>

CROATIA

Health-friendly Company

The Health-friendly Company initiative aims to enable work environments to encourage the adoption of healthy habits and demonstrate an interest in the health of their employees, consumers and clients. This is done through a special certification process that companies obtain for two years at a time if they meet certain criteria established by experts from the Croatian Institute of Public Health (CIPH).

The process of obtaining the certificate involves CIPH evaluating the company's work environment in the areas of nutrition, physical activity promotion, health protection, smoking, alcohol, landscaping, and consumer and client health protection. In relation to physical activity, CIPH observes if a company offers exercise opportunities at the workplace, co-finances physical activities for employees, promotes active travel to work by foot or bicycle (with secure bicycle parking places) and organizes social activities that include physical activity.

The initiative provides companies with an education module tailored to its needs in different health promotion areas. The goal of the physical activity module is to familiarize participants with the importance of physical activity for health maintenance

and disease prevention. It consists of several thematic units and workshops that provide demonstrations of possible workplace physical exercises. In addition to the education module, support materials and expert advice are provided. A significant number of companies from different sectors across the country have shown interest in participating. Through certification, employers establish cooperation with the public health system and receive continuous support and recommendations for improving their health promotion activities. They also have the added benefit of being able to advertise themselves to potential and current employees as a Health-friendly Company.

The initiative is part of the Healthy Living national health promotion programme and is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund. The Health-friendly Company initiative is expected to continue, as it has proven to be of great value to all involved.



<https://www.hzjz.hr/sluzba-promicanje-zdravlja/tvrtka-prijatelj-zdravlja>

CYPRUS

The dynamic development of corporate runs

It has become common for companies in Cyprus to encourage their employees to participate in recreational sporting events in the country, as well as abroad. This typically is done by forming sports teams, sponsoring the employment of fitness professionals and coaches, or by taking part in corporate runs. The Cyprus Sport Organization provides financial support to company sporting events throughout the country via direct event sponsorship, and financial support to local municipalities organizing sport events and to recreational running clubs.

Previously, corporate running events were rare in Cyprus. Nonetheless, recent years have seen an unprecedented sharp increase in participation in such events throughout the country, both through local and international initiatives. Mass participation in running events indicates that workplaces are increasingly recognizing the importance of a more active lifestyle and the promotion of physical activity among their employees.

ESTONIA

Walk2work (Kondimootoriga tööle)

The campaign Walk2work, or Kondimootoriga tööle, aims to encourage people to commute to work with what is called their “bone engine” (active transport modalities) and use motorized options like cars or buses less often to promote more physical activity. It is run by the Estonian Company Sport Union and is being implemented nationwide.

The popular campaign takes place during the month of April, with all welcome to take part. Aside from cycling and walking, Nordic walking, jogging, cycling, rollerblading and rollerskiing are promoted by the campaign. Each year, participants register as a team on the dedicated webpage. Each member of the team can be awarded points for commuting actively: for example, they are awarded one point for going to work on foot and another for returning home by foot. The aim with the point system is to create a motivating competition with the opportunity to win prizes.

FINLAND

Finland's most active workplace

The Finnish Olympic Committee organizes a competition for Finland's most active workplace. The aims of the initiative are to support workplaces' efforts to promote physical activity among their workers and raise awareness of the importance of physical activity to improve health and productivity. The first active workplace award-winner was nominated in 2006. All participating organizations complete a survey covering nine good practices and receive a comprehensive report, including feedback and recommendations for action by a specialist. If the measures are met, the organization is granted a certificate and the winner of the year is awarded at the National Sports Gala.

More than 100 workplaces have joined the initiative, the best of which have shared their success stories in the media and through seminars. For the companies, having an active workplace certificate is a way to strengthen a positive corporate image.

The concept is supported by diverse partners that can provide workplaces with their expertise and services in relation to occupational health and employee exercise and well-being. In the future, the Olympic Committee and the partners will focus on new ways of communicating and offering training and other activities to encourage more workplaces to develop effective physical activity programmes.



<https://suomenaktiivisintyopaikka.fi/>

GERMANY

Regional coordination units for workplace health promotion (regionale BGF-Koordinierungsstellen)

Regional coordination units for workplace health promotion have been established to enable the health insurance industry to provide advice and support to strengthen workplace health promotion in small- and medium-sized companies. The health insurance companies cooperate with local business organizations to promote regional networking. They set up access to these benefits through regional coordination units for workplace health promotion (regionale BGF-Koordinierungsstellen). Experts

provide advice to companies free of charge on implementing health strategies based on individual company structures. Cooperation agreements have been established with various types of businesses, such as employers' organizations, chambers of crafts and chambers of commerce and industry. Further developments will focus on further disseminating information about the offer to motivate more companies to implement the activities.



<https://www.bgf-koordinierungsstelle.de/>

GREECE

Nikos Galis, a corporate basketball championship

Nikos Galis is a non-profit basketball league championship for corporate companies that runs between October and June in Athens. The main purpose is to enable employees to continue to play sports and take part in exercise, but it also aims to encourage employees to adopt a more active lifestyle and improve their physical condition through their work.

Company teams include both men and women. By signing up for the championship, they have the opportunity to train daily within the Athens athletics infrastructure. Seminars on health promotion are also held during the championship league. At the end of the championships, mixed teams are created, comprising players from all the original company teams invited to participate in the European or world basketball veteran championships, depending on their age. Over 102 corporate basketball teams and more than 2000 employees participated in the corporate basketball championships in 2018–2019. Participation has been shown to strengthen relationships within companies as well as between colleagues from different workplaces.

Although the games take place in Athens, future implementation and connection throughout Greece is being discussed. Nikos Galis is implemented by the Centre of Athens Labour Unions and supported by the General Secretariat of Sports of the Ministry of Culture & Sports.

HUNGARY

Bike to Work (Bringázz a munkába – BAM)

Bike to Work aims to create a healthier and happier community and living environment by maximizing commuting to work by bicycle. This community-based campaign builds on workplace relationships, social networks and grassroots cycling movements. The organizers encourage individuals to use bicycles as a means of transport in the city, highlighting that it is a quick, efficient, cheap, healthy and enjoyable way to commute to work. Participants are encouraged to use the so-called bike citizens application to record their routes and submit to the Bike to Work campaign to win prizes. Participants who sign up can participate individually or as a team.

The initiative originally was developed by the Ministry of Economy and Transport, but is now coordinated by the Hungarian Cyclists' Club, which organizes campaigns in spring and autumn.



<https://www.bringazzamunkaba.hu/>

IRELAND

Limerick Sports Partnership Company Health and Well-being initiative

The Limerick Sports Partnership Company Health and Well-being initiative aims to provide opportunities to workplaces for promoting health and well-being. It is guided by the national physical activity plan and Limerick Sports Partnership's (LSP) strategic plan for 2016–2020.

LSP engages with the corporate sector to promote health and well-being through a variety of initiatives based on three key functions: inform, educate and enable. Information is provided through national awareness initiatives, physical activity programmes and information booklets, information stands at events, and by providing information resources. Education is offered through workshops on physical activity, nutrition, mental health and first-aid training. Enabling is achieved through a variety of competition events, such as the company marathon challenge, training programmes and a social sports series connecting adults with sports clubs and physical activity groups. Other activities are team-building workshops and a 40-day online social media challenge in which participants complete 30 minutes of physical activity per day and share their experiences on social media.

Over 100 workplaces have engaged in the initiative, and 45 have participated in the company marathon challenge and four-week training programme, resulting in over 1000 employees taking advantage of these offers. Feedback from participants has been positive, highlighting how the events can make fitness achievable for everyone and provide a great social opportunity.

National initiatives like European Week of Sport, National Fitness Day, Workplace Well-being Day and Bike Week are used to engage with new companies and attract additional employees from companies already participating in the initiative. LSP continues to explore how to enhance and deliver more initiatives to promote positive physical, mental and social well-being through surveys and focus-group interviews



<https://www.limericksports.ie/what-we-do/allprogrammes/company-health-and-wellbeing>

ITALY

Companies Promoting Health

The Lombardy region implemented a programme called Companies Promoting Health, with the main objective of promoting organizational changes in workplaces to enable working environments to promote healthy behaviours. The programme

supports companies in implementing effective and sustainable actions, including structural changes aimed at improving eating habits and promoting active lifestyles, in combination with recommended interventions for corporate welfare, work–life balance and sustainable development.

Companies participating in the programme started an internal process of continuous improvement that aims to ensure the active participation of employees and collaboration with health protection agencies. The agencies provide methodological expertise and guidance on the selection and planning of the most effective interventions, in line with existing opportunities in the company.

Companies can implement a variety of actions to promote physical activity, matching the needs of the specific work context with economic resources. Examples include promoting the use of stairs instead of elevators, encouraging bicycle use for commuting to and from work, organizing company walking groups with a walking leader and arranging corporate sports initiatives. The interventions are accompanied by training activities by a competent medical officer responsible for health and safety at the workplace, according to national laws. These include brief advice and motivational counselling to raise awareness among employees, particularly those who are more sedentary. According to data from 2015, 375 companies and an estimated 178 599 employees in the Lombardy region participated in the programme.

Manual for workplace promotion of physical activity

The manual *Experiences and tools for the promotion of physical activity in the workplace* was produced by the Piedmont region in collaboration with the Piedmont and Dors Physical Activity Network as part of the 2013 regional prevention plan. The manual offers practical and operational support to facilitate the development and implementation of projects that encourage and support workers in introducing physical activity into their daily workplace routine. Focusing on the benefits of physical activity for health promotion and disease prevention, the manual includes suggestions on how to stay healthy and promotes psychological well-being through techniques to reduce anxiety and depression.

The manual describes: what company management can do and what the employee can do; areas to implement the activities, such as active commuting to and from work, and workplace and leisure time; and implementation costs, effectiveness, main actions and operational suggestions. The manual also presents programmes and projects to promote physical activity in the workplace based on recommendations from scientific literature.



<https://www.puntosicuro.it/sicurezza-sul-lavoro-C-1/tipologie-di-rischio-C-5/rischio-ergonomico-C-116/promozione-dell-attivita-fisica-nei-luoghi-di-lavoro-un-manuale-AR-14653/>

LITHUANIA

Health-enhancing Workplace Awards

The Health-enhancing Workplace Awards are used in Lithuania to encourage employers to provide better conditions for their employees' physical and mental health. The first

national award contest was organized in 2016 with the theme of "Health promotion at any age" and has taken place on a regular basis since then.

The contest aims to evaluate and select good-practice examples of companies with health-enhancing policies for all age groups, with a particular focus on physical activity in the workplace. Employers are provided with methodological tools and have access to special consultancy for implementing health-promoting initiatives. Participating workplaces include public institutions, business enterprises and companies, and nongovernmental organizations.

The awards ceremonies for the contest take place during international conferences organized by national and international stakeholders. Past award winners have supplied workers with equipment such as lifting desks, active balanced "Sit Fit" chairs and ergonomic back support chairs, and have provided employees with showers to use after physical activity breaks.

 <http://www.hi.lt/uploads/pdf/leidiniai/Rekomendacijos/Fact%20sheet%20LT%204.pdf>

THE NETHERLANDS

Healthy Workplace initiative

The Healthy Workplace initiative is a collaboration involving young people, social and scientific partners and commercial businesses, including a health insurance company and a company that specializes in vitality management. The initiative aims to promote work environments in which vitality is the norm and the healthy choice is the easy choice.

The initiative provides resources for workplaces to promote physical activity, healthy nutrition, a smoke-free lifestyle, and relaxation and stress-reduction techniques. It also offers guidance on ergonomic- and environmentally-friendly practices for workplaces. Particular attention is paid to the physical work environment to ensure it promotes health and offers opportunities for people to be physically active and reduce their sedentary behaviours.

 <http://www.gezondewerkvloer.nl>

PORTUGAL

Promotion of physical activity in the Public Administration

The Social Services of the Public Administration is a governmental organization that provides social support for public administration workers. It has developed an internal physical activity promotion programme for its employees as part of a larger health-promotion plan. The main activities in the programme are group walks and regular exercise classes, including micromovement gymnastics, to improve posture and seating positions during working hours. The programme includes internal seminars and conferences about different aspects of healthy lifestyles, provides health-promotion information and organizes sessions to monitor health markers such as

blood pressure, haematologic markers and body composition. The programme has been actively promoted to other governmental organizations to extend its health and quality-of-life benefits to other workers of the public administration.

Some positive outcomes of this initiative, as reported by employees, are improved seating posture, reduction of pain associated with long sitting times, increased well-being, mood improvement, better group dynamics and improved perceived productivity.



Fit@work

The Fit@work project aims to disseminate and promote active and healthy lifestyles at the workplace and promote employees' health, well-being, quality of life and work ability. Other aims are to prevent and decrease the risk, prevalence and severity of work-related accidents and diseases.

An online awareness campaign, including the dissemination of a video, posters and leaflets, was run as part of the project, and a workplace-based exercise programme was provided to employees. The materials used are part of the Fit@work project developed by the European Commission and were replicated with their permission. Portugal was the first EU Member State to replicate these materials and to translate the video, posters and leaflets into the local language.

The project is part of the national action plan for physical activity coordinated by the Portuguese Intersectoral Commission for the Promotion of Physical Activity and is led by the Portuguese Authority of Working Conditions in partnership with the Faculty of Human Kinetics of the University of Lisbon.



SPAIN

Healthy Companies Network

The "Empresas Saludables" ("Healthy Companies") initiative, coordinated by the National Occupational Health and Safety Institute (INSST) and inspired by the work carried out by the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP), took place in Spain in 2013. Since then, the INSST recognizes the work companies carry out to improve their workers' health and well-being. The goal of the Healthy Companies Network is to increase the number of companies committed to specific actions and programmes to promote healthy lifestyles.

To become a "Healthy Company", a company must attain accreditation for implementation of best practices for promoting occupational health (abbreviated as PST in Spanish). PST encompasses proposals for improvements at the workplace, including health-promoting shift and break scheduling, changes to the workplace environment (including healthy nutrition and social spaces), personal development activities such as support to quit smoking, and the fostering of healthy habits like



bicycle use and engagement in sports and exercise. An event is held every year to award certificates to companies and disseminate initiatives to foster workplace health.

Proposals regarding physical activity and sports in the company are assessed by the INSST in collaboration with the Spanish Agency for Health Protection in Sports.

“Climbing up the stairs: I’m in!” (“A subir por las escaleras: me apunto”)

The initiative “Climbing up the stairs: I’m in!” (“A subir por las escaleras: me apunto”) was implemented by the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality to foster physical activity in the workplace through staircase use.

Using staircases provides an everyday opportunity to help individuals achieve physical activity recommendations. Based on evidence supporting the efficacy of using messages to promote staircase use and success stories from other countries, the initiative was implemented in Spain by providing workplaces with a set of materials to signpost staircase access effectively and promote staircase use through messages shown on posters in the workplace.

 <http://www.insst.es/red-espanola-de-empresas-saludables>



 <http://www.msccbs.gob.es/profesionales/saludPublica/prevPromocion/Estrategia/UsoEscaleras.htm>

SWEDEN

Promoting physical activity at the workplace: tax relief or reimbursement

In Sweden, physical activity and wellness activities offered by an employer to all employees and which are simple and inexpensive to provide are tax-free. This offer is optional and is funded by employers to encourage employees to engage in more physical activity. The possible activities are predefined in a list determined by the Tax Agency and include gymnastics, strength training, spinning, dance and racket sports. Regular team sports such as volleyball, football and ice hockey are also included.

The offer can be in the form of a so-called nature benefit or a health-care grant. A nature benefit is used when the employer decides on, provides or pays for the activity. This applies when the activities are provided at, or closely linked to, the workplace, such as free access to a gym, swimming pool or massage service. The health-care grant can be used if the employer offers a specified amount that employees may use for physical activity or wellness. The same amount and conditions must apply to all staff equally for the allowance to be covered by the rules on tax exemption.

Employers at governmental, regional, municipal and private levels in Sweden commonly dedicate a number of regular working hours to physical activity and health care. A characteristic model is to offer employees the opportunity to spend one hour a week during paid working hours on an activity of their choice that is included in the predefined list of the Swedish Tax Agency.

 <https://www.skatteverket.se/privat/skatter/arbeteochinkomst/formaner/personalvardmotionochfriskvard.4.7459477810df5bccdd4800014540.html>

UNITED KINGDOM

England: active travel to work

The fashion retailer Next promotes sustainable travel options for its staff. The retailer began working with organizations, including Living Streets, a charity that promotes everyday walking, to run a range of promotional activities encouraging staff to walk and cycle. These included a travel clinic where Living Streets advised staff how they can build more walking into their day and collected pledges from staff who committed to walk a certain distance each day. They also started offering staff a daily £1 travel voucher they can redeem in staff shops. After implementing the initiative, Next has seen an increase in the number of employees walking and cycling and travelling sustainably on a daily basis.



https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/603527/cycling-walking-investment-strategy.pdf

Northern Ireland: Leading the Way with Active Travel

Leading the Way with Active Travel is a workplace active travel programme based in Belfast and the north-west, funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA) and delivered by the organization Sustrans. The initiative was developed to help decrease overweight, obesity and physical inactivity and to reduce car usage by tackling barriers to active and sustainable travel to and from work. A shift away from car use towards active travel and public transport has been found as a result of the programme. Plans are in place to develop a proposal for approval to extend the programme to regional level, with the potential to include it in other PHA-commissioned active travel programmes targeting schools and communities to promote more holistic active travel offers.



<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/projects/2019/northern-ireland/engaging-northern-ireland-workers-with-active-travel/>

DISCUSSION

To address the high levels of physical inactivity across Europe, it is essential that employees are provided with opportunities to be active before, during and after the working day. Many initiatives designed to promote physical activity among the adult working population have been established across EU Member States. At national level, active-travel-to-work schemes and programmes delivered at workplaces were reported by more than half of countries. This, as well as the collection of success stories provided by Member States, indicates that the importance of using this setting to promote physical activity to adults is well recognized. While these findings are encouraging, increased efforts are needed to fully take advantage of the potential of workplaces as physical activity-promoting settings in Europe.

The promotion of active travel to work can be a challenge, as the necessary changes to the environment may require significant planning, resources and collaboration between sectors and across levels of government. Efforts should be ongoing to increase active travel through a range of measures, including the construction and maintenance of infrastructure (such as walking and cycling paths), reductions to motorized traffic volume and instigation of traffic-calming measures. Increased use of public transportation has also been found to encourage walking and cycling as a form of mixed-mode commuting (17). Higher rates of cycling are often seen in areas with lower automobile speed limits, limited car parking and higher costs of car ownership (17). Providing incentives for employees who choose active travel to work may also be an effective measure to increase physical activity levels (18).

Facilitating a diversity of options to enable activity within and around workplaces can lead to better and more inclusive outcomes for physical activity promotion. The provision and maintenance of spaces in which people can be active, including recreation facilities and green and blue spaces, alongside organized sports and exercise activities, are important in enabling workplaces to offer opportunities for physical activity. Facilities may also include cycle racks, changing rooms, lockers, showers, gymnasiums and accessible stairways. If no such spaces are available at the workplace, the use of public spaces and measures to link with community and grassroots sports organizations can be considered as means to facilitate use of existing spaces and infrastructure. The use of devices such as pedometers or mobile phone applications can enable monitoring of physical activity levels while increasing motivation to be physically active. Providing ongoing support from health professionals may also help improve adherence to a programme or initiative (19). Involving employees in the planning of interventions is also important to ensure their specific needs are addressed (20).

Financial incentives can be effective in supporting workplaces and municipalities to implement programmes to promote physical activity. The development of infrastructure can be encouraged through the establishment of regulations, guidelines or financial aid for companies to develop these facilities (21). Other financial mechanisms can include subsidized gym memberships and incentives to bicycle, walk or use public transportation to commute to work (18).

A comprehensive and multicomponent approach is necessary to promote physical activity effectively among working populations. Programmes must be diverse and adapted to local contexts and availability of resources, while providing options for all, regardless of existing fitness levels, gender, culture and age.



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¹ All weblinks accessed 7 July 2020.

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The image shows two women seated at a table, participating in a wellness activity. They are both in a seated position with their legs crossed, hands pressed together in a prayer position (Anjali Mudra) at chest level. The woman on the left is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt with colorful embroidery and glasses. The woman on the right is wearing a dark blue floral patterned top. Both are wearing blue lanyards with ID badges. The table in front of them has a red cloth with white text and a crest. Several informational brochures are scattered on the table, including one with a green header and another with a brown header. The background is a simple indoor setting with dark walls.

*In a bad mood? Taking a walk
helps lift your spirits*

The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

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