



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY POLICIES AT MUNICIPAL LEVEL IN EUROPE

Executive Summary
PASSPORT Survey



The PASSPORT survey executive summary

The relationship between physical activity and well-being is established beyond doubt, and the health costs and consequences of inactivity are now so severe that it is widely recognised as a major public health concern. The World Health Organisation estimates that physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality, with recent analysis suggesting that the impact of physical inactivity on mortality could be up to about 5.3 million deaths a year, rivalling tobacco use as a cause of death.

The PASSPORT survey was developed within this context. It was designed to provide an accurate account of physical activity policies in European cities and municipalities. Building on previous collaborative projects, including the PASS project (Physical Activity Serving Society) that were concerned with activity promotion at local government level, PACTE sought to take a further step towards more active cities across the continent. The focus on cities and municipalities was deliberate, and followed an extended study of physical activity policies and guidance, concluding that there is a clear need for information about physical activity policy and practice at the municipal level.

So, at the heart of the PACTE project was a Europe-wide representative survey of cities' and municipalities' physical activity policies and practices (PASSPORT) in order to identify status of their physical activity policies across Europe, and to investigate gaps in policy and practice. The PASSPORT questionnaire was developed as a standardized tool to provide a systematic approach to capturing details of relevant physical activity policies in European cities and municipalities.

Its aim was to understand the situation of those cities and municipalities regarding the physical activity of their citizens as a basis to help improve them. The development of this measurement instrument was informed by the limited number of pre-existing audit tools, then trialled in a heterogeneous group of European cities. The final version was translated into seven languages. Analysis of results was based on 663 completed surveys.



Key findings

1 Cities and municipalities are both important settings of physical activity and crucial mediators of public health messaging. Physical activity was widely recognised as an important area of responsibility, although there was some inconsistency regarding the 'ownership' of this responsibility. It was apparent that physical activity connected with many areas of responsibility for municipalities, including sport, health, education, community development, and city planning, and the delivery of physical activity policies often requires the involvement of these and other branches of local government.



2 Local governments fulfil a vital role in ensuring that all citizens have access to a variety of physical activity opportunities, although the extent to which this happens in practice varies considerably by geography and setting. In some cases, there appears to be a general acceptance of the importance of physical activity promotion at the level of municipalities. Examples of this acceptance include the support of families and younger children. Elsewhere, engagement is more mixed, such as in workplaces and high schools.

Lack of involvement with work environments and schools by cities and municipalities is a cause for concern, as these are the settings in which the greatest number of people can be reached with public health communication. The reasons for such disparity are unclear, and would require further investigation. Limited finances might be one factor; another might be inconsistent communication between different levels of government.

3 Most of the municipalities surveyed reported:



Having a physical activity policy



Having local recommendations



Target for the population to be physically active



Reported that their physical activity policy was a part of a national programme

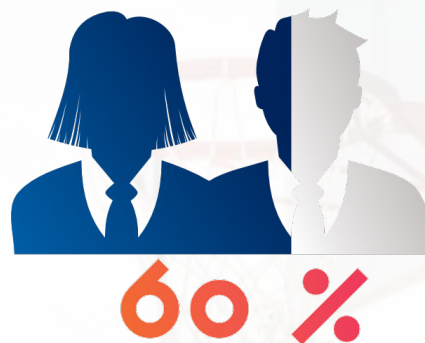
4 Policy documentation was indicated in a wider range of settings. The most positive response at the municipal level was with sport and leisure, urban design, environment, tourism, kindergarten, and primary school. Strongly positive responses of municipalities working with other levels of government included high schools, primary health care, transport, and tourism. Respondents also identified population groups that were targeted by specific actions or activities. Findings reinforce the account of wide variation in the role of Government intervention in physical activity promotion. The workforce receives relatively low support both at the level of municipalities and other forms of government. People with disabilities also receives relatively low levels of targeting. Overall, children, families, girls, boys, older adults, and low socioeconomic status groups were the groups most strongly identified as populations within the remit of cities and municipalities.



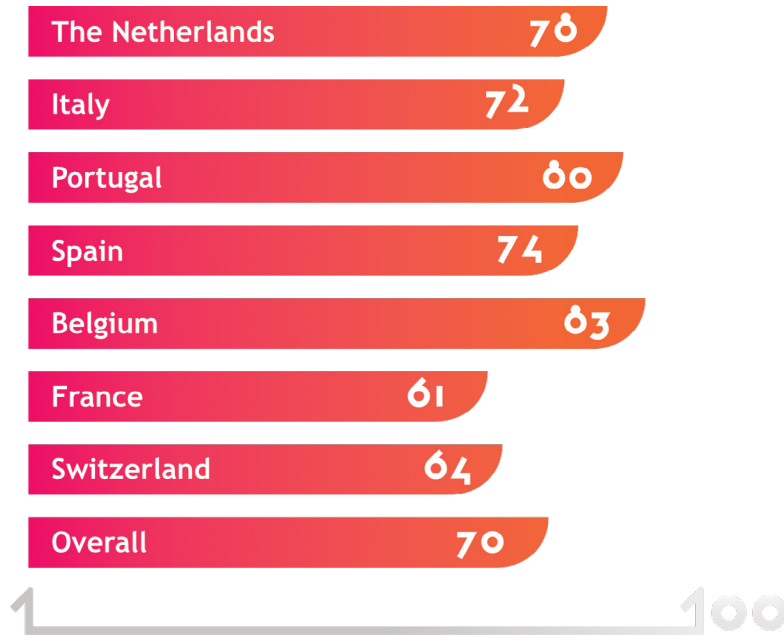
5 When it came to **monitoring and evaluation of the policy implementation**, on average more than **50%** of respondents reported that their cities and municipalities do not have it in place. Municipalities were also asked about the types of physical activity strategies they had in place. With the exception of 'Walking Bus' schemes (an organised group of children who walk to school together, accompanied by volunteers), all of the physical activity promoting strategies suggested - cycle lanes and cycle paths, cycle parking spots, designated walking tracks, active parks, skate parks, open-access sports pitches - were reported to be in place by the sample overall.



6 It was reported that **74%** of municipalities worked with a political leader/designated department for physical activity, with the figure varying from 95% in Belgium, to 48% in Italy. In almost every case, fewer municipalities had local level communication or mass media strategy aimed at raising awareness and promoting the benefits of physical activity.



7 Two questions about employees and businesses were answered with similar responses, with **60%** of the sample stating that they both work with private businesses or companies in the delivery of physical activity opportunities, and make physical activity available to employees.



8 Judgements about the importance of increasing the levels of physical activity compared with other areas of work in their municipality or city resulted in an overall score (on a scale of 1 to 100) of 70, suggesting a moderately strong response. The relatively low score from France and Switzerland is difficult to explain without further qualitative evidence.



9 The promotion of physical activity in cities and municipalities requires both a breadth of information about its state and status, and in-depth information about the personal and contextual settings in which physical activity policy making takes place. The findings of the PASSPORT survey provide a unique insight into the former. The latter requires further consideration, whether by subsequent surveys which go beyond scratching the surface of the current situation, or qualitative data gathering.



About PACTE Project

Promoting Active Cities Throughout Europe is a three-year project, supported by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, which focuses on physical activity rates across Europe from a municipal perspective and on the creation of Active Cities schemes. Previous projects and recent research have highlighted some alarming facts as concerns physical activity across Europe

210 million Europeans are
physically inactive



**This amounts to a minimal annual cost
of EUR 80 billion across the EU28**

66% of local European
decision-makers are
unaware of this situation

These findings have therefore unveiled physical activity policies at the municipal level as an area deserving much closer consideration for further work since it remains a sphere overlooked by physical activity researchers, and because local administration delivers more impactful physical activity policies than national ones do.



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