



**ENGSO Youth Response to the European Commission Green Paper:
Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight,
obesity and chronic diseases.**

Introduction

ENGSO Youth is the youth organisation of ENGSO (European Non-Governmental Sport Organisation). ENGSO Youth is the youth sport-for-all organisation at European level. It has 40 member organisations, which are national umbrella organisations from across Europe.

ENGSO Youth is a non profit organisation and has the aim:

- to represent the interest of people under the age of 35 dealing with sport in Europe
- to achieve, promote and support the implementation of the ENGSO guidelines for children and youth sport
- to develop the ENGSO policy in the field of children and youth to include finding the financial resources for these activities
- to represent the interest of young people in sport on the European level

The main activities of the ENGSO Youth are

- networking;
- exchange of ideas on national sports developments in the field of youth;
- offering a discussion platform for current sport political issues in the field of youth;
- seeking common positions on sport issues in the field of youth and publicising these positions;
- strengthening the cooperation with other bodies dealing with children and youth matters.

Questions

IV.3 Health across EU policies:

What are the concrete contributions, which Community policies, if any, should make towards the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity, and towards creating environments which make healthy choices easy choices?

Physical activity and sport can help to improve people's social, physical and mental health. Investment in sport can lead to lower health care costs and a healthier Europe. Physical activity and sport are essential tools for health promotion, therapy and active lifestyles.

Many national healthcare policies still focus on the treatment of illnesses and care of patients. European policy instead needs to lead the change from reactive to preventative healthcare. Therefore the Community should create a precedent and focus on programmes and actions that will prevent EU citizens from becoming overweight, obese or suffering from related diseases. Physical activity is therefore essential to the methodology of prevention vs. prescription and proaction vs. reaction.

It is also necessary that all DG's are engaged with the health agenda, to ensure that working, education and physical environments are also made more conducive to promoting healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that all EU policies and legislation make it easy for sport and recreation to occur.

A concrete action for the Community should be to introduce pre-legislation scrutiny on all Directives to ensure that they will not negatively impact the delivery of physical activities.

• On which areas related to nutrition, physical activity, the development of tools for the analysis of related disorders, and consumer behaviour is more research needed?

ENGSO Youth believes that more detailed research is vital to meet the needs of individuals in the sport and recreation sector:

- ❖ who in society is mainly involved in youth sports (boys, girls, young, old, disabled)
- ❖ which preconditions lead to being included in the sports system and being physically active (e.g. ethnic, gender aspects, regional differences, intelligence, poor vs. rich,)
- ❖ why do young people stop participating in physical activity
- ❖ what are the main barriers to physical activity amongst young people
- ❖ what sports/activities are most attractive to young people not currently engaged in physical activity

ENGSO Youth believes that funding for more research into health and civic action will be essential in defining future policies and work programmes.

IV.4 The Public Health Action Programme:

• How can the programme contribute to raising the awareness of the potential which healthy dietary habits and physical activity have for reducing the risk for chronic diseases amongst decision makers, health professionals, the media and the public at large?

To implement the platform on diet, physical activity and health has been a good start. Further networking is needed and concrete actions must follow. Although a representative from ENGSO is involved in the Diet and Health Platform and the expert group, sport-for-all organisations are in the minority. Further emphasis is needed on the organisations that are competent in physical activity and sport issues. Sport is the biggest social movement in Europe and plays an essential role in fighting health care problems.

ENGSO Youth would advocate a large scale EU campaign that raises awareness of the risks of obesity and provides a central point of information which people can contact to gain advice. The sports sector with its branches must be included in such a campaign since it can directly reach its members.

• Which are the most appropriate dissemination channels for the existing evidence?

It is vital that EU and national policy makers are aware of the facts relating to obesity and related diseases so that they can introduce successful and targeted campaigns and programmes, but without engagement with the general public then long-term lifestyle change will be impossible.

Here the sports system is a perfect partner. More than 700,000 sports clubs in the European Union offer a unique system to spread information about the consequences of unhealthy lifestyles. To prevent drop out, followed by tremendous changes in lifestyle and health - sport club members have to be included in information campaigns.

V.2 Consumer education:

• In the field of nutrition and physical activity, which should be the key messages to give to consumers, how and by whom should they be delivered?

The most important messages are:

- A combination of improved nutrition, decrease in food intake and exercise is the most effective way of controlling weight, improving health and ensuring a longer and healthier life
- Exercise can take the form of a variety of different activities; including competitive sport and play. There is something for everyone and most activities can be found close to your home.
- Small changes can have big effects, such as just 30 minutes of exercise five times a week and small changes to your diet – which can be easily incorporated into your existing lifestyle.
- More regular exercise will not only help your physical health but can also improve your mental health by reducing stress, providing social interaction and improving your personal confidence
- Lifelong physical activity is vital for a healthy lifestyle.

To ensure the maximum reach of healthy living messages a number of organisations must be involved, including: the EU, national governments, local healthcare providers, commercial fitness sector, commercial and national sports teams, local sport and recreation clubs, the educational sector, food retailers and both print and broadcast media.

V.3 A focus on children and young people:

- **What is good practice for the provision of physical activity in schools on a regular basis?**

ENGSO Youth believe the following recommendations will assist in achieving its responsibility of creating a healthier Europe:

- Enhance cooperation between sport clubs and schools, sport clubs and kindergarten, sport clubs and medical professionals as well as sport clubs and volunteer sector.
- Reinstate compulsory daily Physical Education in pre-school, kindergarten, primary and secondary schools taught by qualified Physical Education staff.

However, it is not just within schools that young people should be encouraged to be more physically active. Leisure time is also vitally important and parents should be encouraged to involve their children in local sport and recreation clubs. Evidence¹ from the UK has indicated that club membership encourages more children to remain physical activity as adults and can also contribute to better nutritional and lifestyle habits. ENGSO Youth² campaigns for greater involvement of young people in sports clubs and as a European body run by young people for young people would be a valuable source of further information and advice.

Furthermore, it is vital that the standard of physical education on offer in schools is of the highest quality, offering a range of activities to suit all children and encouraging them to continue their activities in their own time.

ENGSO Youth supports the opinion, that **physical literacy**³ should be given equal consideration to numeracy and reading and writing in our schools, due the importance it plays in developing strength and coordination that enables individuals to complete daily functions free of pain or restriction.

V.4 Food availability, physical activity and health education at the work place:

- **What measures would encourage and facilitate the practice of physical activity during breaks, and on the way to and from work?**

It is important to improve the environment to encourage physical activity as a part of everyday life: more cycling lanes, safer sidewalks, more open park space, playgrounds, and public access facilities. This must be considered in town planning. If there are no conditions for physical activities given the barriers to keep physically inactive are unnecessarily higher.

¹ <http://www.sportengland.org/young-people-and-sport-2002-headline.pdf>

² <http://www.engso.com/youth/Wc54f9fb2e05b0.htm>

³ <http://www.iapesgw.org/Margaret%20Whitehead.doc>

V.6 Addressing the obesogenic environment:

- **In which ways can public policies contribute to ensuring that physical activity be “built into” daily routines?**

Public policy has a dual role to educate and enable people lead healthy lifestyles. As well as providing people with the knowledge of how and why they need to eat well and be physically active, public policies should also investigate how physical activity can be made more accessible to all sectors of the community. In order to build activity into daily routines, public policies must change habits which are unavoidable, such as transportation.

Public transport must be made the ‘cheaper alternative’ to private modes of transport for both long haul and short journeys. A good example from the UK is the ‘walking bus’ a local initiative to walk children to school in groups, providing a safe, enjoyable and healthy alternative to being driven by car (www.walkingbus.com). However, most initiatives are developed by the community and voluntary sectors and more support is needed from Government policy makers to ensure that good examples are adopted more widely.

More effective can be national wide campaigns such as the sports adventure around the globe in Finland http://seikkailu.nuorisuomi.fi/whatis_sportsadventure. Sports Adventure Around the Globe is a three-week sports campaign directed at schoolchildren aged 6-12 years once a year. The aim of the campaign is to encourage schoolchildren to take more exercise. Drawing attention to children's inactivity is important since only one third of Finnish children exercise sufficiently from a health perspective. Alongside daily exercise, the children are guided in healthy eating and sleeping habits.

Schools are vital in promoting physical activity. Apart from physical education lessons children should also be encourage to make use of sport facilities at breaks and pre and after school activity clubs should be established. Similarly, care homes for the disabled and the elderly should be required to offer physical activity classes and there are a number of bodies which offer special courses.

Older pupils could offer courses for younger classmates to attend during afternoon or leisure time. Such a model was developed in Germany with great success. During a two year period pupils were offered the opportunity to work towards a youth leader licence, an officially recognised licence by the national sports organisation. Basic rules, law conditions, as well as teaching younger classes is included in the course and incorporated in the official school schedule.

- **Which measures are needed to foster the development of environments that are conducive to physical activity?**

Town planning must include standards to provide spaces for physical activity. Sports facilities such as gyms are essential. People have to feel comfortable and safe while practising sports or their leisure time activity in a gym. Therefore sports facilities have to be of a high standard. More walkways, cycle tracks and better use of public spaces for recreational purposes is need if the population is to be encouraged to take more physical activity.

New buildings and refurbishments should under planning guidance be obliged to provide easy communication via stairs and, if possible, to incorporate space for physical activity. Furthermore, new sports facilities should be situated near hard to reach communities and on public transport links.

A more concerted effort by city administrations to make use of parks and public squares to promote recreation would be beneficial to local communities and would be a cost effective way of using existing resources. Rural areas must also not be forgotten, especially as rural communities are often under resourced and have fewer recreational facilities. The countryside must be opened up for recreational activities, particularly those that don't involve walking, such as cycle tracks, boating and team sports. Rural areas have often an even higher rate of obese people than in local towns.

V.7 Socio-economic inequalities:

- **Which measures, and at what level, would promote healthy diets and physical activity towards population groups and households belonging to certain socio-economic categories, and enable these groups to adopt healthier lifestyles?**

There is a great disparity between the level of physical activity amongst people of different sex, age, race and social class. The reasons for individuals not participating in physical activity are numerous, however some key factors cross all groups. Cost and access are the two of the greatest barriers to participation, followed by education, ethnic background, time, cultural barriers and enjoyment.

Cost and access can be addressed by the Government ensuring that all members of the population are within a reasonable distance from a sports facility and that the facility is free to the most deprived. As well as providing cheaper local authority run gyms and clubs, the Government should also reduce taxes on grassroots sports clubs and provide them with funding for facility development and training so that they can provide quality services for the local community. Also volunteers that spent their time on coaching young children should have reduced taxes.

A shortage of time is often cited as a reason for not taking part in physical activity. Many low socio-economic groups are often employed in shift work and are therefore unable to access sporting facilities during opening hours. To combat this problem it is vital that facilities are open for longer hours and as already discussed, employers enable workers to participate in physical activity during the working day.

Cultural barriers are often the hardest to find solutions for and particularly affect minority ethnic communities and women. Problems such as the need to wear traditional dress at all times, to be in single sex environments and to avoid playing sports on religious days can all be overcome if sports facilities and local clubs work jointly with diverse communities.

Finally, the measure that will have the greatest impact upon an individual's willingness to participate in physical activity is its enjoyment. Regardless of cost or location, if people do not enjoy physical activity then they will not take part, and that is why it is vital the Government put more funding in developing local community clubs and organisations as they will offer the breadth of activities needed to sustain diverse communities. With increased funding for training and facilities, local clubs will be able to offer specialised activities and cater more effectively with increased demands.

V.8 Fostering an integrated and comprehensive approach towards the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity:

- **Which are the most important elements of an integrated and comprehensive approach towards the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity?**

A single agency, government or voluntary organisation will not be able to sufficiently reach enough people to radically improve health and fitness in Europe. However, a collective approach involving a number of agencies working towards a common goal, under a single banner, has a far greater chance of success.

The key players will be:

- ✓ The European Union
- ✓ National Governments
- ✓ The National Health Agency
- ✓ Education Sector
- ✓ Sport and Recreation Sector
- ✓ Voluntary Health Sector (including charities)

The most important elements will be:

- ✓ A single campaign with European and National Funding
- ✓ Cross-agency collaboration at EU and National level
- ✓ Engagement with the Voluntary Sector to advise and deliver programmes

- **Which role at national and at community level?**

The European Year of education through sport 2004 was a good example of how such a campaign could work. But the resources should not only be directed to some big projects that are highlighted. A nationwide campaign with certain regional projects would ensure an exhaustive covering.

There must be a national level strategic agreement between the key agencies and stakeholders. This will involve joint working to develop the programme, funding, priorities and to ensure that it has a nationwide scope. At community level, local government and the voluntary sector (including local sports clubs and commercial facilities) must be engaged and sufficiently funded so that they can deliver the actions set at national level.

The majority of people participate in physical activity within their local communities; either through membership of a local sports club, use of local authority facilities or being active within the local environment. Community policies should recognise the importance of providing areas and facilities for physical activity that are both safe, good quality, affordable and accessible. Policies should also encourage and support local recreational groups and organisations, through providing funding (either directly or through local tax cuts) and providing information on the local activities available.

A community that offers a wide variety of physical activity opportunities and that has an environment conducive to physical activity will encourage its citizens to lead more healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, there must be an ability to set local priorities according to the health and physical activity levels of diverse populations. In the UK there is disparity between the age, race, wealth and activities of people in different geographical locations and any programme must be tailored to local needs.

V.10 Cooperation beyond the European Union:

- **Under which conditions should the Community engage in exchanging experience and identifying best practice between the EU and non-EU countries? If so, through which means?**

Cultural attitudes are central to both nutrition and physical activity levels. Whilst not all programmes and schemes are transferable to other countries, it is important that the EU shares best practice examples and information with non-EU countries. Furthermore, schemes from outside the EU will be helpful in designing initiatives to target minority ethnic communities in Member States.

Much of this exchange of information should occur at EU and national agency level, to ensure that it is incorporated in strategic planning. However, engagement between the voluntary sector in different countries is also important, and many charities and voluntary sector organisations already have close links and partnerships with operations in non-EU countries.

For example, ENGSO – the European umbrella organisation for sport for all. 40 national sports organisations from Europe (including non-member states) are members of ENGSO and use the network and meetings to share best practice on a wide variety of issues. It is essential that organisations such as ENGSO and ENGSO Youth are used as a tool for dissemination and the collection of ideas in any EU health and physical activity programme.

V.11 Other issues:

- **Are there issues not addressed in the present Green paper which need consideration when looking at the European dimension of the promotion of diet, physical activity and health?**

Like our UK member - CCPR, ENGSO Youth believes that the use of sport as a tool to address both nutrition and physical activity has not been sufficiently addressed. There is a growing recognition that involvement in sports activities and clubs not only encourages people to be more physically active but also contributes to their all-round health. Governing bodies of sport train coaches to not only focus on physical activity but also to give advice on diet and healthy lifestyles; achieving optimum performance and aiding personal health goals.

Also it must be recognized that sport is highly effective in including minorities in society. Inclusion is essential for mental as well as physical health. This has to be acknowledged.

• **Which of the issues addressed in the present Green paper should receive first priority, and which may be considered less pressing?**

Primarily it is important to develop an EU-wide strategy for promoting nutrition and physical activity and to devote resources to this important issue. No increase in nutrition or activity can be achieved without the understanding and support of individuals, and therefore the education and awareness building of the general public is also a top priority.

Issues such as the physical environment and employers attitudes will require a significant ‘culture change’ and in some instances legislation. Therefore, it should be accepted that whilst work in these areas should start immediately, the positive results may not be seen for a number of years.

No area relating to nutrition and physical activity can afford to be delayed or ignored, and therefore ENGSO Youth advocates that all issues are addressed with the majority of resources being spent on public education and funding for interventions.

Conclusion

ENGSO Youth welcomes the EU level engagement with such an important debate, but believes that more emphasis needs to be given to the teaching and promotion of healthy and physically active lifestyles amongst children and young people.

The earlier that good eating habits and enjoyment of physical activity is instilled into a child, the more likely they are to carry those habits through life.

To effectively reduce the rise in obesity we must target those who are not yet obese – young children and ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge and tools to make informed choices about their health.

Sport and physical activity are cheap and effective ways to promote healthier lifestyles. ENGSO Youth hopes that you take into consideration the above recommendations to build an active Europe for the future.

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