

# SWEDEN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FACTSHEET

This is one of the 28 European Union Member States factsheets on health-enhancing physical activity, developed as a part of a joint initiative between the European Commission (EC) and WHO Regional Office for Europe in the context of the implementation of the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors and the European Noncommunicable Diseases Action Plan 2012-2016.

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## SWEDEN

PREVALENCE (%) OF ADULTS REACHING THE  
RECOMMENDED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS, 2014

%	ADULTS (16-84 YEARS)*
MALES	67
FEMALES	65
BOTH SEXES	66

Total population: 9 644 864

Median age: 40.9 years

Life expectancy at birth males: 80.2 years

Life expectancy at birth females: 83.8 years

GDP per capita: €43 800

GDP spent on health: 9.5% (1)





# Monitoring and surveillance

## Physical activity in adults

The Swedish national health monitoring and surveillance system was established in 2004 and includes population-based measures of physical activity. The National Public Health Survey, entitled "Health on equal terms (HLV)", is led by the Public Health Agency of Sweden and collects data annually (2). Physical activity measures include duration, intensity, domains (leisure time, transport, work, household), sedentary behaviour in different age groups, and socioeconomic items.

Sweden's national recommendations on physical activity (3), targeting adults and older adults, are in line with WHO's *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health* (2010) (4), providing examples of how to achieve the recommend amounts of physical activity.

National data on prevalence of physical activity for adults use a cut-off point of at least 3 hours of moderate-intensity physical activity per week, or regular exercise. Data from the 2014 HLV survey demonstrate an almost even distribution of recommended physical activity levels among both sexes (67% for males; 65% for females) in adults (aged 16–84 years) (5) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Prevalence (%) of adults reaching the recommended physical activity levels, 2014

%	ADULTS (16–84 YEARS)*	OLDER ADULTS (65–84 YEARS)
MALES	67	63
FEMALES	65	60
BOTH SEXES	66	61

\* Adults include people aged 16–84 years, so the data also encompass the older adults age group.  
Source: Public Health Agency of Sweden HLV survey, 2014 (5).

The intercountry comparable physical activity estimates for 2010 for Sweden from the WHO Global Health Observatory (GHO) (6) show higher proportions of Swedish males than females meeting the WHO physical activity recommendations. The reported estimates are 68.9% for the total adult population, with 73.7% for men and 64.2% for women.

## Physical activity in children and adolescents

Sweden uses the cut-off points for children and adolescents that are specified in WHO's *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health* (2010) (4). No specific national survey exists for monitoring and surveillance of physical activity in children and adolescents. The latest available data among these population groups in Sweden originate from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey from the years 2013/2014 (7).

As Table 2 presents, boys are more active than girls, among both 11-year-olds (21% boys, 13% girls) and 15-year-olds (15% boys, 10% girls).

Table 2. Prevalence (%) of 11- and 15-year-olds reaching the recommended physical activity levels, 2013/2014

%	ADOLESCENTS	
	11 YEARS	15 YEARS
MALES	21	15
FEMALES	13	10

Source: HBSC survey 2013/2014 (7).

According to the WHO GHO 2010 estimates for Swedish youth (defined as aged 11–17 years in relation to WHO data), 13.9% reached the recommended physical activity levels for health (16.7% for boys and 11.1% for girls).

## Types of physical activity and modes of transport

The National Travel Survey (RVU Sweden) was conducted from 2011 to 2014, collecting information from the population aged 6–84 years by means of telephone interviews (see Box 1) (8).

### Box 1. National Travel Survey (RVU)

The findings of the National Travel Survey showed that the most common mode of transport in Sweden was by car, accounting for 65% of all travel. Walking and cycling were the next most popular modes of transport. On an average day, 50% of those interviewed travelled by car, 15% by public transport and 5% by both car and public transport. Men use cars to a greater extent than women, representing nearly 60% of journeys, compared with just under 50% of women's journeys. By contrast, women walk and cycle to a greater extent than men (8).

# Policy response

## Major policy documents adopted by government bodies

Physical activity is 1 of 11 objective domains of national public health policy (detailed in Government Bill 2002/03:35 on public health objectives (9)), with a focus on health-promoting living environments. The National Board of Health and Welfare has issued national guidelines for health professionals on the steps and action to take when providing advice in the area of physical activity in order to promote health and reduce risk of disease (10). The Swedish National Agency for Education is responsible for implementing the Swedish Education Act; physical education (PE) is mandatory in both primary and secondary schools in Sweden (11). Other policy documents with implications for physical activity include: an outdoor recreation policy, overseen by the Swedish National Environmental Protection Agency and dealing with public access to natural spaces (12); the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, addressing physical activity and built environments in its "Vision for Sweden 2025" and in particular issues relating to urban planning, car-free

zones and walkability (13); and, finally, transport policies (governed by the Swedish Transport Administration), affecting opportunities for physical activity and active transport, including children's travel to school (14).

The needs of certain target groups – such as older people and those from lower socioeconomic groups – are primarily mainstreamed in these documents, rather than addressed separately.

## Major policy documents adopted by nongovernmental bodies

The Swedish Sports Confederation has issued a number of documents relevant to the promotion of physical activity across Sweden. These include the strategy "Sports for Life" (*Idrotta hela livet*) (15) and the policy programme "Sports wants" (*Idrottens vill*) (16), as well as a strategic plan for collaboration between the Sports Confederation and schools in order to promote sports in schools (17). The documents promote Sports for All. Some focus on children and adolescents (notably in school settings), while others focus on the whole population. The documents cover actions to enhance coordination and cooperation with relevant authorities in order to promote sports.

## Guidelines and goals

Sweden has adopted national recommendations on physical activity for all adults over the age of 18 years (3). The recommendations provide specific guidance to adults over the age of 65 (for example, to focus on balance in particular), people with chronic conditions, and pregnant women, all of whom should be as physically active as their various conditions allow, and may need to adapt their activities accordingly.

Table 3 presents a summary of the key measures in place to monitor and address physical activity in Sweden.

Table 3. Summary of key physical activity initiatives in Sweden

HEALTH	SPORTS	EDUCATION	TRANSPORT	MONITORING	GUIDELINES
Counselling on physical activity as part of primary health care services	Existence of a national Sports for All policy(ies)	Mandatory physical activity in primary and secondary schools	National or subnational schemes promoting active travel to school and/or workplace	Physical activity included in the national health monitoring system or separate routine survey	Existence of a national recommendation on physical activity
YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

## Additional information on action in key areas

### Health sector

Physical Activity on Prescription (FaR) is an initiative in the Swedish health care system whereby licensed medical personnel can write a prescription for physical activity for the patient (18), with the main focus on physical activity for health promotion, disease prevention and treatment. The patient carried out the physical activity on their own or as part of various group activities, for example Nordic walking or water aerobics. Regular motivational dialogue with a trained professional is included in the process, to increase compliance.

## Schools

PE is mandatory in Swedish schools. Primary schools must provide a minimum of 1.5 hours per week, while secondary schools must provide a minimum of 1.9 hours per week, although many schools actually provide more than this. An optional module on health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) is included in the curriculum for PE teachers.

## Workplace

Workplace incentives (tax relief or reimbursement) are permitted for employees in Sweden, funded by employers in order to encourage employees to engage in certain (predefined) physical activities (for example, gym memberships) (19).

## Transport and the built environment

Since 2004, Sweden has implemented a congestion charge, payable as a tax to the Government, in certain parts of the country (20). The cities of Stockholm and Gothenburg have charges that apply to cars registered within and outside of Sweden.

Some authorities in Sweden have also used the WHO Health Economic Assessment Tool to estimate the potential health and economic benefits of a cycling and/or walking infrastructure policy (21). For example, the Swedish Transport Authority conducted such an economic assessment and was involved in the planning of the cycling infrastructure between and Malmö and Lund (22).

Box 2 details some of the successful regional and local physical activity promotion activities under way in Sweden.

### Box 2. Physical activity promotion initiatives in Sweden

#### Outdoor recreation

Swedes spend a lot of time outdoors. "The Right of Common Access" is guaranteed in the Swedish Constitution since 1994 and allows everyone to move around freely in the countryside.

#### Funding to local sport clubs

The ethos behind Swedish sports initiatives is to improve physical, mental, social and cultural wellbeing of the population. The Sports Movement relies on the active participation of hundreds of thousands of voluntary leaders. Local authorities contribute significantly to the funds available from the public sector. Government funding is administered by the Swedish Sports Confederation.

#### FYSS (23)

A handbook on physical activity in the prevention and treatment of disease has been especially tailored as a tool for licensed health care staff to use when prescribing physical activity. It is currently used by all county councils across Sweden.

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