

BULGARIA

PREVALENCE (%) OF ADULTS CARRYING OUT
VIGOROUS- OR MODERATE-INTENSITY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
THROUGHOUT THE WEEK, 2007

%	ADULTS (25-64 YEARS)	
	MODERATE-INTENSITY	VIGOROUS-INTENSITY
MALES	57.3	50.0
FEMALES	47.7	34.7
BOTH SEXES	52.4	42.3

Total population: 7 202 198
Median age: 43.2 years
Life expectancy at birth males: 71.3 years
Life expectancy at birth females: 78.6 years
GDP per capita: €5 500
GDP spent on health: 7.72% (1)



Monitoring and surveillance

Physical activity in adults

Bulgaria foresees the imminent establishment of a surveillance and health monitoring system that includes population-based measures of physical activity. The National Programme for the Prevention of Chronic Noncommunicable Diseases (NPPNCD) (2014–2020) is a framework with the National Center of Public Health and Analyses as the leading institution, which conducted a study in 2014 entitled National Research for Risk Factors¹. Aspects measured included frequency, duration and intensity of physical activity, across different domains (leisure, transport, work, household), cycling and/or walking and sedentary lifestyle among different age groups, including older adults (aged 65+ years).

National recommendations are to be developed as part of the NPPNCD framework activities, in compliance with WHO's *Global recommendations on physical activity for health* (2010) (2) and using the international cut-off point suggested for adults reaching the recommended physical activity levels for health.

National research from 2007 (3) showed that less than half (42.3%) of the adult population (aged 25–64 years) carried out vigorous-intensity physical activity throughout a standard week. The proportion was lower among females (34.7%) than among males (50.0%), as shown in Table 1.

Moreover, 1 in 7 participants (regardless of gender) reported engaging in vigorous-intensity physical activity 2–3 times per week and 21.6% reported being vigorously active on 4–5 (or more) occasions per week, whereby the proportion of males active in this capacity was twice (29.4%) than that of females (14.0%).

The proportion of adults engaging in moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week was 52.4%, with females being significantly less active (47.7%) than males (57.3%) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Prevalence (%) of adults carrying out vigorous- or moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week, 2007

%	ADULTS (25–64 YEARS)	
	MODERATE- INTENSITY	VIGOROUS- INTENSITY
MALES	57.3	50.0
FEMALES	47.7	34.7
BOTH SEXES	52.4	42.3

Source: National Center of Public Health Protection, 2009 (3).

Among the individuals that reported carrying out vigorous-intensity physical activity, only 3.1% of males and 3.8% of females did so for 31–60 minutes, while 32.1% were active for over 60 minutes, again with males being more active

¹ Data are currently being analysed and studies will soon follow.

(40.1%) than females (24.3%). When comparing moderate-intensity physical activity levels, 3.5% of males and 3.7% of females were moderately active for 31–60 minutes, while 42.4% indicated that they carried out moderate-intensity physical activity for a period longer than 60 minutes.

The WHO Global Health Observatory (GHO) data from 2010 for the Bulgarian adult population (aged 18+ years) (4) show that 77.0% of Bulgarians meet the WHO recommended physical activity levels for health, with males being more likely (81.0%) to meet the recommended levels than females (73.3%).

Physical activity in children and adolescents

Bulgaria uses the international cut-off point for children and adolescents reaching the recommended physical activity levels for health, as set out in WHO's *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health* (2010) (2).

Data from national research (carried out in 2011, as yet unpublished) regarding the nutritional intake and eating habits of pupils in Bulgaria shows that 19.5% of Bulgarian children (aged 7–9 years) were reaching the recommended levels of physical activity for health. Boys were found to be much more physically active (22.3%) than girls (16.5%) (see Table 2).

Among adolescents (aged 10–18 years), physical activity levels tend to drop with age, with the proportions of youth meeting the recommended physical activity levels for health being 25.7% for adolescents aged 10–13 years and 19.0% for those aged 14–18 years. Across all age groups, boys are much more active than girls, but among the older adolescents, the gap between genders is twice as large.

Table 2. Prevalence (%) of children and adolescents reaching the WHO recommended physical activity levels, 2011

%	CHILDREN 7–9 YEARS	ADOLESCENTS 10–13 YEARS	ADOLESCENTS 14–18 YEARS
MALES	22.3	30.9	26.8
FEMALES	16.5	20.2	11.9
BOTH SEXES	19.5	25.7	19.0

Source: Unpublished data from national research carried out in 2011.

The WHO GHO 2010 estimates for Bulgarian adolescents (defined as aged 11–17 years in relation to WHO data) show that 25.9% are reaching the WHO recommended physical activity levels for health (4). Boys engage in more physical activity than girls, with a higher proportion of them meeting the recommended physical activity levels (31.7% boys versus 20.1% girls).

Policy response

Major policy documents adopted by government bodies

The National Strategy for Physical Education and Sports Development 2012–2022 was adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria in 2011. The Strategy aims to highlight the social function of physical education (PE) and sports in Bulgaria, and the need for political, economic and social changes to improve the uptake of physical activity. It addresses the principal stakeholders, including public authorities, local government and public sports organizations (5). The National Programme for the Development of Physical Education and Sports 2013–2016, passed by the Council of Ministers in 2013, includes further considerations, such as sports infrastructure and the role of various bodies in the national sports system. The vision of the programme is to build a functioning system for the promotion of PE and sports in the Republic of Bulgaria, to encourage physical activity and participation in sports and social tourism (6).

The conception for promoting the development of Sports for All, issued by the Ministry of Sports in 2014, involves objectives such as: optimizing structures for the management of sports for all; increasing and/or reallocation of available financial resources; extending and improving the quality of sports infrastructure; ensuring all citizens have access to opportunities to engage in physical activity; developing and implementing targeted programmes and documents for physical activity promotion; and developing Sports for All, with a focus on key target groups (7). The government programme for the sustainable development of the Republic of Bulgaria also includes provision for physical activity (8), and the NPPNCD encourages uptake of physical activity, in order to reduce the prevalence of noncommunicable diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes (9).

Box 1 describes national awareness-raising campaigns relating to physical activity in Bulgaria.

Box 1. National PE campaigns (10)

“Movement is Health” and “World Day of Physical Activity” are public-awareness campaigns that were established in 2002 by the Ministry of Health to enhance population-level knowledge about the benefits of regular physical activity and to help people to develop skills and attitudes in favour of healthy lifestyles. These coordinated activities were carried out both at local and national levels, to encourage behaviour change and promote the cultural acceptability of being physically active.

Guidelines and goals

Bulgaria currently follows WHO's *Global recommendations on physical activity for health* (2010) (2). National recommendations are to be developed in tandem with the activities of the NPPNCD 2014–2020, and will be continue to be in compliance with WHO recommendations.

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

Table 3. Summary of key physical activity initiatives in Bulgaria

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*

* It is envisaged that this will be created within the NPPNCD in the near future.

Additional information on action in key areas

Physical activity in the workplace

It is envisaged that a national scheme to promote active travel to work will be created within the NPPNCD in the near future.

Physical activity in schools

It is mandatory for Bulgarian primary schools to provide 3 hours of compulsory PE in grades 1, 2, and 7-12. In grades 3-6 it is mandatory for primary schools to provide 3.5 hours of PE. A scheme is currently in place for after-school health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) promotion programmes, entitled "The school – territory of the students" (11). In addition, national and international competitions are held to encourage pupils to engage in physical activity. These initiatives are overseen by the Ministry of Education and Science and their aim is to promote physical activity and the uptake of regular sports among pupils as part of a healthy and active lifestyle. It is envisaged that several national schemes will be created within the NPPNCD in the near future, including a national scheme for active school breaks during and between lessons, a national scheme to promote active travel to school, as well as a national scheme for after-school HEPA promotion. Sports Clubs for Health guidelines have been implemented in 950 different sports clubs across the country (12), with support for these clubs provided by the Bulgarian Sports for All Association (13).

Transport and the built environment

It is envisaged that the European Guidelines for Improving Infrastructures for Leisure-Time Physical Activity will be implemented in the near future (14). The guidelines will be implemented for the construction, modernization and equipment of multifunctional Sports for All sites and facilities and for the construction of playgrounds for children, accessible foot paths and cycling lanes, and recreational sports areas and campsites, among other plans.

Plans are also being made to improve access to and conditions for practising sports for people with disabilities. Bulgaria is part of WHO Regional Office for Europe's European network for the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA Europe) (15).

Successful approaches

I Love Sports campaign

I Love Sports is a nationwide campaign that was carried out in the month of May from 2010 to 2012, promoted by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the digit lottery leader Bulgarian Sports Totalizator. The campaign was supported by a range of public and private bodies: the Regional Health Inspectorates to the Ministry of Health, the Regional Education Inspectorates to the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Agency for Child Protection, various municipalities, preschools and school sports organizations, along with private businesses. The main objectives of the campaign were: to demonstrate that sport can be an alternative to (addictive) pastimes, such as clubbing, fighting, computer gaming or even chatting with friends; to encourage children and their families to practise sports; to use sports to integrate marginalized population groups into society, such as orphaned children and people with disabilities; and to motivate larger number of adolescents – including from remote areas – to take part in various sports initiatives at local level, thus increasing their physical activity levels and promoting grassroots sports. Famous Bulgarian athletes were invited to participate in the campaign, with the goal of using their popularity and authority to attract children to sports.

The main initiatives of the campaign included organizing sports holidays, competitions and demonstrations of (among others) volleyball, basketball, football, track and field disciplines, gymnastics, tennis, table tennis, badminton, archery, handball, combat sports, motor sports, pétanque and chess. Famous athletes were also brought in to PE lessons in schools, as well as featuring in awards ceremonies and celebrating the anniversaries of their sporting achievements, to promote their particular fields of sport. Competitions and tournaments were organized for students from sports schools, orphaned children, adolescents from minority groups (including Bulgarian children living abroad), disabled people, and so on. Across the three years that the campaign ran, about 1500 initiatives were organized in over 180 municipalities, with about 100 000 participants including preschool and school-aged children, orphans, minorities groups and children with disabilities.

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