

MALTA 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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World Health Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR Europe



MALTA

PREVALENCE (%) OF ADOLESCENTS REACHING THE RECOMMENDED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS, 2009/2010

%	ADOLESCENTS		
	11 YEARS	13 YEARS	15 YEARS
MALES	43	36	26
FEMALES	25	15	14

Total population: 425 384

Median age: 40.7 years

Life expectancy at birth males: 79.6 years

Life expectancy at birth females: 84.0 years

GDP per capita: €17 200

GDP spent on health: 8.6% (1)



Monitoring and surveillance

Physical activity in adults

Physical activity among adults in Malta is evaluated through the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS), under the leadership of the Department of Health Information and Research (2). Physical activity measurements taken include frequency and duration of physical activity across different age groups. The country has adopted national recommendations and cut-off points for adults reaching recommended levels of physical activity for health according to WHO's *Global recommendations on physical activity for health* (2010) (3) and these address young people, adults and older adults (4).

Table 1 presents the percentages of adults and older adults meeting the recommended physical activity levels for health according to the Maltese results from the 2008 EHIS (5). Disaggregated data for adults and older adults (aged 65+ years) are available and show that older adult males (34.7%) and females (25.8%) are less active than adult males (17.3%) and females (11.3%) (aged 18–64 years).

Table 1. Prevalence (%) of adults reaching the recommended physical activity levels, 2008

%	ADULTS (18–64 YEARS)	OLDER ADULTS (65+ YEARS)
MALES	34.7	17.3
FEMALES	25.8	11.3

Source: data from EHIS 2008 (5).

The WHO Global Health Observatory (GHO) estimates from 2010 for Maltese adults (aged 18+ years) (6) show that 58.8% meet the WHO recommended physical activity levels for health, with males being more active (59.7%) than females (51.1%).

Physical activity in children and adolescents

Malta uses the international cut-off point for children and adolescents reaching the recommended physical activity levels, as set out in WHO's *Global recommendations on physical activity for health* (2010) (3). Physical activity levels in Maltese adolescents are examined through the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study (7). According to the HBSC survey results for 2009/2010, across all youth, more boys aged 11, 13 and 15 years reach the recommended physical activity levels for health (43%, 36% and 26%, respectively) and are therefore more physically active than girls (for whom the results were 25%, 15% and 14% for 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Prevalence (%) of adolescents reaching the recommended physical activity levels, 2009/2010

%	ADOLESCENTS		
	11 YEARS	13 YEARS	15 YEARS
MALES	43	36	26
FEMALES	25	15	14

Source: Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate, 2013 (7).

The WHO GHO 2010 estimates for Maltese adolescents (defined as aged 11-17 years in relation to WHO data) reveal lower prevalence of physical activity than the figures presented in the 2009/2010 HBSC study: 18.6% of boys meet the recommended physical activity levels for health, compared with 15.5% of girls.

Policy response

Major policy documents adopted by government bodies

Reshaping sports - towards personal development, health and success is a policy adopted by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment in 2007, effective from 2007 to 2010. It aimed to broaden accessibility of sports activities by developing programmes suitable for everyone within the Maltese population, to promote sports among children and their parents, to educate people on the health and social benefits of exercising and to assist with sports organizations' governance structures (8). The Maltese Parliamentary Secretary for Sports has outlined a draft sports policy in 2015, which acts as a dedicated national Sports for All policy. It builds on the Sports Act passed by the Government of Malta in 2003 (9).

Health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) is a key area targeted as part of the national obesity strategy entitled *A healthy weight for life: a national strategy for Malta 2012-2020* (4), which was developed by the Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care. Currently, the Ministry is drafting a HEPA strategy with the following goals:

1. to promote HEPA within the population, across all age groups and within all settings, through collaborative multisectoral action;
2. to foster the support and creation of social, cultural and physical environments that are supportive of HEPA;
3. to ensure HEPA research, surveillance and monitoring of the population are carried out, with a special focus on children.

The National Environmental Health Action Plan (NEHAP) functions as a policy framework document to implement, among other objectives, more sustainable transport alternatives, including encouraging the use of more active forms of transport (10).

Guidelines and goals

Malta's national recommendations on physical activity aim "to encourage and promote sports, provide for the establishment of a national sports council" (9).

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

Table 3. Summary of key physical activity initiatives in Malta

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 national recommendation on physical activity
YES*	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

* The Health Department is planning to issue Physical Activity Guidelines to Health Professionals. The Malta Association for Physiotherapists is working on practical recommendations to promote physical activity among physiotherapists and other health professionals.

Additional information on action in key areas

Malta participates in awareness-raising campaigns and physical activity programmes, focusing in particular on overweight or obese people (see Box 1).

Box 1. Move for Health

The Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate focuses on HEPA through various initiatives through cross-sectoral collaboration between health ministries, local councils and other government entities, nongovernmental organizations and private sector representatives, including the education, sports, transport and planning sectors, as well as across population groups (including older adults). Awareness campaigns are in operation using various mediums and physical activity programmes are organized free of charge for people who are overweight or obese. Malta also participates in the EU-funded Obesity Prevention through European Network (OPEN) programme (11) and has been developing a programme to target adolescents through mass movement in schools.

Sports for senior citizens

Malta has created provisions for its senior citizens. The Parliamentary Secretariat for Rights of Persons with Disability and Active Ageing has created the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing. There are 3 main themes within this: active participation in the labour market, participation in society, and independent living (12). In the National Dementia Strategy for Malta (2015–2023), published by the same Secretariat, promotion of physical activity is highlighted. The document describes the beneficial effects of physical activity on cognitive function and the potential to reduce the incidence of dementia (13).

Physical activity and sports in the workplace

A national scheme is being developed to promote physical activity in the workplace. Malta Employees Sports Association is planning a move from being largely focused on specific sports to advocating and facilitating for a wider spectrum of activities, including fitness and recreational physical activity. The Office of the Prime Minister, which manages public sector employees, has set up a dedicated unit for this.

Physical activity and sports in schools

It is mandatory in Maltese schools to offer 90 minutes of physical education (PE) per week in both primary and secondary schools. The Ministry for Education and Employment adopted the *Whole school approach to a healthy lifestyle: healthy eating and physical activity policy* in February 2015 (14). This policy aspires to:

- make healthy eating and physical activity a priority, specifically through holistic education;
- strengthen the relevant frameworks and support the creation of enabling school environments to help whole school communities to adopt healthier patterns of living by encouraging physical activity, promoting healthy foods and limiting the availability of products high in salt, sugar and fats;
- empower children to achieve the required level of physical and health literacy, to adopt a healthy lifestyle and make informed lifestyle choices throughout the life-course;
- make provision for a flexible curriculum which highlights health, nutrition, food safety and hygiene including food preparation, and which promotes physical activity;
- ensure that clear and consistent messages about food, drink and physical activity are delivered throughout the school day in order to reinforce health messages consistent with those promoted by the health authorities.

The Ministry for Education and Employment has implemented 2 further schemes: the National Curriculum Framework in 2013 and the Healthy Eating Lifestyle Plan in 2007. The framework focuses on health education, PE and sports, aiming to “maintain, promote and enhance physical, emotional, psychological and social well-being throughout school life” (15). The Healthy Eating Lifestyle Plan discusses how the inclusion of PE, health-related fitness and competitive sports in school policies encourages children to live healthier, more active lives (16).

Sport Malta (*Kunsill Malti għall-Isport*) has been running an after school sports programme since 2007, comprising a wide variety of initiatives for all age ranges including a foundation programme and programmes relating to participation and performance. It aims to ensure that individuals enjoy being active and have access to a variety of sporting activities, and to encourage children to specialize when older, should they be able to take their sporting abilities to a higher level (17).

Transport and the built environment

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority created the National Environment Policy for Malta (18). Together with the National Environment Policy created by the Ministry for Tourism, Culture and the Environment (19), these policies emphasize the environment as a priority in all aspects of life including transport, town-centre management, and the provision of public spaces to increase physical activity.

The Maltese Government also provides a grant to residents to buy a bicycle (15.3% of the bicycle cost, up to €150) to encourage use of active modes of transport (20).

Successful approaches

Whole of government and society approach in physical activity promotion

The Maltese authorities develop strategies and policies through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Such an approach enhances the ownership of the policies and encourages more input in specific areas to achieve desired results. Relevant stakeholders are contacted prior to the development of policies as well as during the development and implementation phases of the process. This approach has proven successful in, for example, the "Healthy weight for life" strategy (4), the "Whole school approach to a healthy lifestyle" policy (14) and it is also being used for the HEPA and sports strategy that is currently being developed.

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