

CROATIA

PREVALENCE (%) OF ADULTS REACHING THE WHO RECOMMENDED
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS, 2010

%	ADULTS (18+ YEARS)
MALES	83.2
FEMALES	77.5
BOTH SEXES	80.2

Total population: 4 246 809

Median age: 42.6 years

Life expectancy at birth: males 74.5 years

Life expectancy at birth: females 81.0 years

GDP per capita: €10 100

GDP spent on health: 7.2% (1)



Monitoring and surveillance

Physical activity in adults

According to WHO Global Health Observatory (GHO) data (2), as Table 1 presents, 80.2% of the Croatian adult population (aged 18+ years) is physically active, with 83.2% of males and 77.5% of females reaching the recommended levels of activity for health.

Table 1. Prevalence (%) of adults reaching the WHO recommended physical activity levels, 2010

%	ADULTS (18+ YEARS)
MALES	83.2
FEMALES	77.5
BOTH SEXES	80.2

Source: WHO, 2014 (2).

Physical activity in children and adolescents

The latest Croatian Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study (3) reports data disaggregated by age (11, 13 and 15 years). Preliminary unpublished data from 2013/2014 for Croatia (see Table 2) show that 25.6% of adolescents (11–15 years) meet the WHO recommended physical activity levels, with boys being much more physically active than girls (32.1% and 19.1%, respectively).

Table 2. Prevalence (%) of adolescents reaching the WHO recommended physical activity levels, 2013/2014

%	ADOLESCENTS (11–15 YEARS)
MALES	32.1
FEMALES	19.1
BOTH SEXES	25.6

Source: unpublished data from the 2013/2014 round of the HBSC study.

WHO GHO 2010 estimates for Croatian adolescents (defined as aged 11–17 years in relation to WHO data) show that 20.7% meet the recommended WHO physical activity levels, with significantly more boys (27.4%) than girls (14.6%) being physically active (2).

Policy response

Major policy documents adopted by government bodies

The promotion of health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) is covered by the Strategy for Science, Education and Technology 2015–2017 (4). The strategy promotes the development of a sustainable, high-quality system to encourage sports and sporting activities, focusing primarily on promoting sports from an early age, creating conditions for equal participation, and outlining plans for the construction, renovation and maintenance of sports facilities. Its implementation is envisaged through coordinating institutions and aligning the activities of various agencies.

Guidelines and goals

Croatia has thus far not adopted any national guidelines or recommendations on physical activity. Materials have been developed and included in the draft version of the country's health promotion and noncommunicable disease (NCD) prevention action plan (2015–2020), which is currently in the process of official approval by the Croatian Government¹. The national recommendations on physical activity for health, which will target the whole population, are based on WHO's *Global recommendations on physical activity for health* (2010) (5). Croatia is expected to implement national guidelines by 2018.

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

Table 3. Summary of key physical activity initiatives in Croatia

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 ^a	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO ^b

^a Postgraduate course entitled "Prescribing exercise and physical activity in medical practice", in which medical doctors can enrol.

^b Such guidelines are expected to come into existence over the next 2 years. They are included in the health promotion and NCD prevention action plan for 2015–2020, which is awaiting approval by the Croatian Government.

Additional information on action in key areas

Health sector

A postgraduate course entitled "Prescribing exercise and physical activity in medical practice" is available to medical doctors in Croatia. Organized by the Andrija Stampar School of Public Health (part of the Medical School University of Zagreb) (6), the course covers: physical activity and health; the importance of the epidemiological transition; counselling in medical practice; medical examination and assessment prior to intervention; approaches to determining medical fitness; and an action guide for doctors and health professionals. The course also involves practical demonstrations.

¹ Based on information provided by the country focal point.

Sports in schools

Funding for school sporting activities is provided from the State budget and allocated to the Croatian School Sports Association and the Croatian Academic Sports Federation (7). These bodies are responsible for the delivery of sports activities that encourage health-oriented training of young children and students and for providing resources and facilities for sports competitions, which can encourage uptake of recreational and amateur sporting activities outside education settings (8).

Physical education (PE) in schools

Table 4 shows the frequency of mandatory physical activity in Croatian schools.

Table 4. Frequency of mandatory PE lessons in primary and secondary schools in Croatia

PE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS	
GRADES 1–3	GRADES 4–8
THREE TIMES PER WEEK	TWICE PER WEEK
PE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS	
1–2 TIMES PER WEEK, DEPENDING ON THE INSTITUTION	

Active breaks in schools are also promoted by the Croatian National Institute of Public Health, which has developed activities for use by schools to encourage active play during break times.

How is work on physical activity coordinated?

Currently, no formal coordination mechanism exists for physical activity in Croatia. However, the Croatian National Institute of Public Health has recently initiated a national programme entitled "Living Healthy", involving all stakeholders in the area of HEPA promotion (working groups have already been designated) (9). The scope of work of the Living Healthy programme includes physical activity in the workplace and public awareness campaigns to promote physical activity.

Croatia's participation in the WHO Europe Healthy Cities Network (10) is coordinated by the Andrija Stampar School of Public Health. This academic institution provides extensive support (administrative, technical, informational, organizational and professional) to the city- and county-based project teams across Croatia.

Successful approaches

10' Exercise – developing preparatory exercises for everyday classroom use to promote daily physical activity

Preparatory exercises are the basic content of this programme of daily 10-minute exercises, designed for primary school children from the 1st to the 4th grades (6–10 years old). Exercises are carried out in the classroom for a total duration of 10 minutes (including preparation, exercises and re-seating). It is recommended that these exercises are carried out at the beginning of the class, to awaken the children, or after the first half of the class. Before they start the exercise, students should be spread throughout the available space, so that they have enough room. The exercises can and should be performed with music. The main goal of daily exercise is to create healthy habits and encourage children to exercise on a regular basis.

POLYGON (Specialized equipment for physical activity in schools)

This comprises multifunctional kinesiology equipment for use in various schools that do not have sports equipment or a gym. The equipment – which helps schools to provide PE even when they do not have a gym or in the event that bad weather conditions dictate that PE cannot take place outside – is intended to help teachers to meet students' physical activity needs and to provide practical, easy-to-use options in PE teaching topics, within the physical constraints of preschool and primary schools. A manual has been developed for teachers to enable them to use this equipment, and the continuing education of teachers is foreseen on how to use it.

Walking towards health

This initiative involves the organization and implementation of physical activity – specifically, walking (along a specified route) – for the entire population. Walking is the least expensive and most widely accessible physical activity. It is rarely associated with injury and can be practised by people of all ages, including those who have never been particularly physically active. The plan is for regular walks to be organized under the expert guidance of a team of volunteers. The goals of this community activity are to raise awareness and inform the citizens of Croatia (of all ages) about the positive aspects of physical activity, and to offer and run an organized group walking (circular route) on a regular basis.

References

1. Eurostat. Your key to European statistics [online database]. Luxembourg: Statistical Office of the European Union; 2015 (June update) (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, accessed 6 July 2015).
2. Global status report on noncommunicable diseases 2014. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2014 (http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/148114/1/9789241564854_eng.pdf?ua=1, accessed 18 July 2015).
3. HBSC. Health behaviour in school-aged children. Publications: international reports [website]. St Andrews: University of St Andrews Child and Adolescent Health Research Unit (HBSC International Coordinating Centre); 2015 (<http://www.hbsc.org/publications/international/>, accessed 2 July 2015).
4. National Reform Programme 2015. Zagreb: Government of the Republic of Croatia; 2015 (http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/nrp2015_croatia_en.pdf, accessed 18 July 2015).
5. Global recommendations on physical activity for health. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2010 (http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241599979_eng.pdf, accessed 15 July 2015).
6. History [website]. Zagreb: Andrija Stampar School of Public Health; 2005 (http://www.snz.unizg.hr/test/test4/history_det.php?hist_kat=2&hist_tekstPage=2, accessed 3 July 2015).
7. Škorić S, Bartoluci M, Čustonja Z. Public financing in Croatian sport. Financial theory and practice 2012;36(2):179-197 (<http://www.fintp.hr/upload/files/ftp/2012/2/skoric-bartoluci-custonja.pdf>, accessed 16 July 2015).
8. Croatian Academic Sports Federation [website]. Rijeka: Rijeka University Sports Association; 2015 (http://opatija2015.uniri.hr/?page_id=266, accessed 3 July 2015).
9. The health systems and policy monitor. Croatia [website]. Brussels: European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies; 2014 (<http://www.hspm.org/countries/croatia30062014/countrypage.aspx>, accessed 3 July 2015).
10. WHO European Healthy Cities Network [website]. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2015 (<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/urban-health/activities/healthy-cities/who-european-healthy-cities-network>, accessed 16 July 2015).