

OHCHR - SR on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

1. To what extent, in your view, should United Nations Member States encourage individuals to participate in sport and adopt healthy lifestyles, to fulfil State obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to health? What is the minimum that must be done for this obligation to be met?

Sport and physical activity is an important health, social and development tool and should be used effectively. All United Nations member states have a responsibility to encourage individuals to be more physically active and adopt a healthy lifestyle. UN members must ensure that individuals are provided with the necessary resources and opportunities that will encourage and facilitate their engagement in physical activity and adopting a healthy lifestyle, irrespective of their physical condition, age, financial or logistical means. Governments in member states should support people to be physically active and remove possible barriers. The best approach is through a whole of government and whole of society approach.

2. Has your State introduced legislation or policy in relation to sport and/or healthy lifestyles? If so, please provide a brief description of the laws or policies adopted.

The following is a list of policies which have been outlined in Malta:

Health Vision 2000

This was the first national health strategy for Malta published in 1995. This document gave a good description of the nation's health status at the time, described a reform for the health services and set targets for intervention within particular key areas. It highlighted the importance of preventing major non-communicable diseases such as coronary heart disease, certain cancers and type 2 diabetes by tackling the lifestyle risk factors of smoking, unhealthy diets, obesity and physical inactivity and called for a shift in emphasis towards prevention and health promotion.

The Sports Act (Act XXVI of 2002)

The Sports Act (Act XXVI of 2002) defines the roles of the Malta Sports Council (KMS); a governmental organisation, and the Malta Olympic Committee (MOC), a non-governmental organisation.

The aims of the Act established that KMS is to encourage and promote sport through the various organizations by being both regulator and provider of services in the Sport and Active Leisure sector, committed to supporting local sports from grassroots to the elite level of sport.

Re-shaping sport; towards personal development, health and success 2007

The main aims relating to health of this strategy are to broaden accessibility of sporting activities at recreational, leisure and competitive levels, by further development and promotion of programmes addressing the needs and constraints. It also aims to educate people on the health and social benefits resulting from regular participation in Sport. Another important aspect of this strategy is to assist sport organisations in keeping their competitive athletes free of illegal performance enhancing substances through the setting up of a National Anti Doping Agency. This strategy is currently being revised.

A strategy for the prevention and control of non-communicable disease in Malta (2010)

Inspired by the guiding principles of the Health Vision 2000 (Malta) report, this strategy aimed to reduce the burden of the major non-communicable diseases by tackling lifestyle-related risk factors with the main ones being; diet, physical inactivity, tobacco and alcohol.

The strategy set out the following targets for 2020:

“To increase the proportion of the Maltese population who carry out a moderate or high level of physical activity daily or on most days, from the current 43.5% to 70%.

To reduce the proportion of children and adolescents who never perform any exercise by 5%.”

The strategy aimed to shift all those within the ‘Low level of physical activity’, and ‘Moderate level of physical activity’ categories to the ‘High level of physical activity’ category.

Performance Audit: Physical Education and Sport in State Primary and Secondary Schools, 2010

This audit was carried out by the National Audit Office (NAO) and published in 2010. It aimed to determine the issues and factors impacting on the delivery, quality and frequency of physical education and sport initiatives in state primary and secondary schools and also propose recommendations on how these could be mitigated

The National Cancer Plan 2011-2015

This was launched in February 2011 with the overarching purpose of reducing the incidence, prolonging survival and ensuring the best quality of life possible for cancer patients. The important role of lifestyle factors in the causation of cancer was highlighted and also stressed the importance of focusing on behavioural changes related to tobacco smoking, alcohol drinking, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity for cancer prevention. Supporting individuals to sustain lifestyle changes was considered essential.

A new cancer plan is currently being outlined.

Healthy weight for life: A national strategy for Malta 2012-2020

The overall aim of the Healthy Weight for Life Strategy is to curb and reverse the growing proportion of overweight and obese children and adults in the population in order to reduce the health, social and economic consequences of excess body weight.

National Health Systems Strategy for Malta 2014-2020

This new strategy for health was launched in 2014 in the context of the more recent challenges faced by health care systems which include; changing age structures together with changes in disease epidemiology and health needs, political transformations, technical revolutions and patients that are more knowledgeable, discerning and demanding. The strategy supports previously published documents in that it recognises the need to strengthen the prevention and promotion of health by focusing on lifestyle-related risk factors including physical inactivity and the need to create environments that facilitate the healthier choice to become the easier choice.

A food and Nutrition Action Plan for Malta 2015 – 2020

The main aim of this policy and action plan is to address the health challenges being faced in the area of nutrition and food security that are associated with diet related non-communicable diseases and conditions, as well as promoting healthy lifestyles.

A whole school approach to a healthy lifestyle: healthy eating and physical activity policy 2015-2020

The main aim of the policy is to promote healthy eating and physical activity through holistic education, whilst strengthening the necessary framework to enable the school environment to help the whole school community to adopt healthier patterns of living by encouraging physical activity and promoting healthy foods.

It also seeks to empower children to achieve the required physical and health literacy, to adopt a healthy lifestyle from an early age and to make informed choices about their lifestyles throughout the life course.

Health enhancing Physical activity strategy

The Health authorities are currently developing a strategy to focus on HEPA.

3. What are the major challenges and opportunities that arise in adopting a right-to-health approach to participation in sport and adoption of healthy lifestyles?

The physical inactivity problem is not the sole responsibility of the health sector. On the contrary, it is an issue that spans many sectors each of which needs to contribute actions in a coordinated manner. The set targets to increase physical activity can only be reached through inter-ministerial, inter-agency and inter-professional collaboration which needs to happen at all levels of government and also in collaboration with the private and voluntary sectors.

The major challenge is the obesogenic environment which does not support physical activity.

Trained personnel in physical activity and sport are essential. These are required to conduct an intensive information and promotion campaign on benefits and methods on how to be active.

The opportunities would be the possibility of bringing together a number of stakeholders who currently tackle the issue of a healthy lifestyle in a coordinated way as well as produce a virtuous cycle of health awareness and skills which would impact the general population on a lasting scale. Opportunity exists whereby one can use human resources expertise available and use innovative ideas to promote healthy lifestyles.

4. What are the best ways that Member States can promote individuals' participation in sport and adoption of healthy lifestyles? Please provide and briefly describe any examples of "good practices" adopted by Member States in this respect.

In Malta, Health Promotion and disease prevention directorate offers physical activity such as aerobics and walking classes for overweight individuals free of charge. From time to time it also issues self help information booklets for physical activity that can be done anywhere. It also promotes physical activity to different members of society.

Various other measures are being implemented through the various strategies outlined above.

The education sector promotes physical activity through school-based physical education, organised physical activity in local communities (sports clubs, nurseries), national sports programmes and facilities and also through the provision of education and training for physical educators and coaches. SportMalta organises both Winter and Summer sport programmes which include a wide variety of sport and physical activities at a very low price targeted across all age groups and are spread across the island.

Various NGOs and sports clubs organise activities for all ages.

Malta participates in the OPEN EU funded project whereby a project will be initiated this year in secondary schools providing mass movement sessions in schools during the break. This will be complemented by community measures.

5. Are there any targeted interventions that can be implemented to promote participation in sport and adoption of healthy lifestyles amongst populations who could face vulnerable situations, including women, children, and people with disabilities?

Schools, old People's homes, nursing homes, orphanages, homes for people with special needs and other similar institutions serve as perfect settings to reach a large number of people with a custom message as well as with concrete examples on how to be active and healthy. Devising innovative tailor made programmes for different groups would be the best approach.

6. *Other than Member States, which other actors should be taking steps to encourage individuals to participate in sport and adopt healthy lifestyles? What can Member States do to ensure this occurs?*

The role of Government and different sectors of society as contributors to population health should be the way forward with the health sector as the leading role to maximise the health and well being dimensions of their activities and minimise their negative effects.

The sectors to be involved include:

Health
Education
Sport
Transport
Planning
Fitness industry
NGOs
Civil society