

Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Questionnaire Responses by: The General Presidency of Youth Welfare

- 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?**

Saudi Arabia recognises sport and physical activity as vital to the future of our Kingdom. Our research shows that improvements in health and physical activity will have many benefits for our nation, including social, health, moral/ethical and economic benefits. Socially we can use health and physical activity to improve cohesion and inclusion within our society. From a health perspective, our data shows that we can significantly improve not only the physical wellbeing of our citizens, but also their psychological wellness by increasing physical activity. Moral values such as sportsmanship, interpersonal skills and good social responsibility will improve, especially amongst our youth. From an economic perspective, we can reduce our health care costs and increase the number of jobs in sports.

The General Presidency of Youth Welfare is currently working with global experts to create the strategy and governance to make sports and physical activity a part of daily life for all Saudis. This is our goal, and we have not placed any limitations on this vision. We want our youth, women, disabled and older generation to adopt a sporting habit for life, and we are currently putting a plan in place to make this a reality.

As part of our emerging strategy to help protect and improve the right to sport and health in the Kingdom we have already started to identify key areas for improvement and will work with our partners in the Kingdom to achieve these. This will include:

- a) Increasing the provision and importance of physical activities in schools
- b) Increasing the number, availability and accessibility of clubs and places to play
- c) Working closely with partners at the ministries, municipalities, corporate sector and federations to deliver the improvements required
- d) Providing access to more mass participation events and competitions
- e) Increasing the number of coaches and volunteers

To enable these changes we will be creating a new organisation within the Kingdom exclusively focused and dedicated to mass participation, with the goal of making sports and physical activity more accessible and available to all.

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 and policies adopted.

Clause 31 of the Basic Law of Saudi Arabia provides a mandate for Saudi Arabia to take care of health issues, and provide health care for each citizen. We recognise that one of the best ways of achieving this is to invest in sports participation for our citizens. In addition, we have signed international conventions and charter guaranteeing access to sports for all ages, genders and abilities – e.g. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Arab Charter on Human Rights, and therefore have a duty to continuously improve the accessibility and availability of sports for all.

It is recognised that from a cultural and policy perspective more needs to be done to create the culture of sports in our society and make sports truly open for all. The new mass participation organisation we are in the process of developing will help to drive these policy changes and increase accessibility to sports for all demographics across the entire Kingdom.

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

We face governance challenges and cultural challenges. From a governance perspective, our society is increasingly recognising the importance of physical activity, but we need to create a focus and accountability on this, to ensure there is a coordinated approach. It is for this reason that we are looking to create a body exclusively focused on the participation agenda within our Kingdom.

From a cultural perspective, the current levels of physical activity in the Kingdom show that we need to change people's attitudes and habits towards the value of exercise. This will start with the schools, and a key focus area of the new mass participation organisation will be school sports.

These challenges also represent an opportunity. We have a very young population, with c.40% of our population under 20 years old. This young demographic presents a unique opportunity to affect a cultural mindsets and behaviour change of a generation of Saudis. Therefore, the time is now, and over the coming years we will be increasing our focus on both educating people on the benefits of physical activity as well as ensuring the opportunities are provided to them to participate.

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 Saudi Arabia, as part of our current work on developing a strategy for mass participation amongst all citizens, we have recognised the following ways to promote physical activity:

- Develop a vision for mass participation
- Identify key elements of our strategy – e.g. schools, clubs, partnerships, events, coaches and volunteers (see answer to question 1).
- Create the right governance and accountability through the development of a mass participation organisation with a defined set of strategic objectives and targets for increasing participation
- Provide communications and campaigns to change behaviours and mindsets towards physical activity amongst different segments of our population
- Ensure the right level of public funding and encourage private funding into sports and physical activity
- Utilise insights to ensure the right interventions and to monitor their success. We are currently in the process of undertaking the first comprehensive survey of mass participation in the Kingdom

The implementation of the above approach will begin once our strategy for mass participation is completed. Nonetheless, there are already examples of good practices in the Kingdom that provide us with encouragement:

- National School Sports Program (see question 5 for further details on its impact)
- National Aquatic Development Project supported by the Saudi Arabian Swimming Federation has taught 25,000 participants to swim and developed 700 swimming coaches
- Darrajati cycling groups are a good example of volunteer led community cycling events taking place across all major cities in the Kingdom. Created in 2012, the organisation now has 3,000 members and is helping to create the culture of cycling in Saudi Arabia
- Riyadh municipality initiative to create walking lanes in parks – currently 300 parks have been opened and equipped with walkways with another 300 remaining to be equipped with walkways
- Ministry of Health's "Your Health Advisor" campaign to increase awareness of the health benefits of physical activity

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?

We are currently working with partners to conduct the first ever comprehensive survey of sports participation and physical activity in the Kingdom. This survey is representative of the demographics of the population, and seeks to understand the barriers to participation for each segment within our society.

The new mass participation organisation will use the insights derived from this survey to provide targeted interventions. These targeted interventions could take many forms, including policy changes, ring-fenced funding, initiatives or campaigns.

With regards to current initiatives, the SAOC Olympic Day in June of this year was targeted at youth, and giving them an opportunity to participate in a range of different sports. Our PE and Sports for all federation also targets all of our society, and puts on festivals in each region of the country, seeking to educate participants in health and physical activity.

One of our biggest targeted interventions in recent years has been the National School Sports Program. This was a nationwide strategy developed in 2012 to develop an environment that provides positive educational experiences that enhance health, sports participation and excellence. It focuses on children aged 6-12 years old, with some programmes for those aged 12-15 years old. The 3 main initiatives launched as part of this programme have been the Neighbourhood School Clubs Program, School Sport Development Programmes and Health and Wellness awareness programmes. In 2014, 400 Neighbourhood School Clubs were in operation (237 male and 163 female), with 70% of time dedicated to recreational and sporting activities.

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?

We believe that partnerships are vital to increase participation. If only driven top-down by the government and other governing bodies, we will not be successful.

In particular, we believe there is a real opportunity to increase private sector involvement in promoting sports and physical activity in Saudi Arabia. Our new mass participation organisation will look to educate and encourage the private sector to get involved. For example, private companies that introduce health and wellness programmes for their employees will see many benefits including increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and a happier and more loyal workforce.

To ensure the private sector is involved, we will gather data and insights to show these benefits. Our new mass participation organisation will work with corporate partners to track the benefits of health and wellness campaigns in the workplace. We will introduce initiatives and programmes to make it easier for the private sector to get involved and provide expertise as required. We will commission campaigns to encourage good corporate citizenship.