



Success story

Building a Physical Activity-Friendly Environment in Flanders



Sector: Health | Sport | Transport | Urban planning | Environment |

Workplace | Children & Youth | Ageing | Community

Implementation stage: Early implementation

Transferability: Yes

About the initiative

In a densely populated region such as Flanders, public space is limited, making it important to ensure that decisions about the built environment support physical activity. It aims to help local governments create environments that make active lifestyles easier and more attractive for everyone.

Sport Vlaanderen has developed a dedicated online resource, bringing together knowledge and input from different government departments and organisations.

It focuses on five key areas:

- Active travel
- Space for play and sport
- Blue-green environments
- Accessible public space
- Healthy environments

The initiative also promotes collaboration across local government departments including sport, urban planning and mobility to identify opportunities where one intervention can deliver multiple benefits.

Alongside this work, a matchmaking platform is being developed to connect with the growing number of people who participate in unorganised or self-organised sport and physical activity outside traditional sports clubs.

Who is it for?

Public space is intended to serve everyone. Depending on the intervention, particular attention can be given to:

Families | Girls and women | Teenagers |
People with disabilities | Older people

The approach recognises that different interventions may have different levels of accessibility and may need to be designed around specific groups and needs.

What is making it successful?

Creating an active-friendly environment can be difficult for local governments, particularly when sport services are not traditionally involved in decisions about public-space development.

The initiative helps address this by:

- Informing and inspiring local governments about how public space can support physical activity, sport and play.
- Making the case for cross-sector collaboration between sport, mobility, urban planning and other policy areas.
- Providing arguments and evidence that can help raise the importance of active-friendly environments in local decision-making.
- Highlighting the wider social value of public space, beyond sport and physical activity alone.
- Supporting the case for investment and additional funding for improvements to public space.

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What could other countries learn?

Its approach can provide a framework for helping local governments connect physical activity with broader policies on transport, urban development, health, accessibility and the environment.



Key challenges to promote HEPA

► Belgium's wider challenge for physical activity promotion

A key challenge is that health prevention does not yet receive sufficient policy priority, particularly in a context of increasing pressure on government budgets.

Belgium's federal structure also means that important responsibilities and autonomy relating to physical activity sit with the different regions. As a result, physical activity policies can vary between regions, making coordination and shared approaches particularly important.

► Country-level barriers to advancing HEPA

The following barriers are most persistent to advancing HEPA policy in the country.

► What is needed?

A revised HEPA recommendation could provide renewed political impetus and act as a catalyst for stronger collaboration on health-enhancing physical activity across policy areas.



► How can the HEPA Europe Network help?

The network could strengthen collaboration by providing a clearer overview of the outcomes of the different HEPA working groups and identifying opportunities for greater synergy between them.



BARRIER

IMPACT

Limited funding/resources

EXTREME

Political prioritisation

EXTREME

Public engagement challenges

EXTREME

Weak intersectoral coordination

MAJOR

Lack of workforce capacity

MAJOR

Insufficient monitoring/data

MAJOR

Limited research translation into policy

MAJOR

Regional/local implementation gaps

MAJOR

Inequities in participation/access

MAJOR

Other

NO IMPACT



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