



Success story

Making the Whole School Day More Physically Active



Initiative type: Policy | Legislation

Sector: Education | Children & Youth

Target group: School-aged children

Implementation stage: Adopted; entering into force in autumn 2026

Transferability: Yes

About the initiative

As part of Finland's Get Finland Moving Programme, an amendment to the Basic Education Act makes promoting a physically active lifestyle an explicit objective of teaching.

The legislation requires schools to integrate physical activity throughout the school day.

This means promoting movement is no longer dependent on individual principals or teachers choosing to prioritise it. Every school will be required to support a physically active lifestyle during the school day.

What does it look like in practice?

Following the legislative change, the Finnish National Agency for Education revised the national core curriculum. Local education providers, mostly municipalities and schools then updated their local curricula and annual plans.

The national Schools on the Move programme, funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, has supported education providers in putting these changes into practice.

Examples include:

- Active teaching methods
- Regular breaks from sitting
- Longer outdoor recess periods
- Physically active journeys to and from school

The approach therefore aims to make movement part of the whole school culture, rather than treating physical activity as something that happens only during PE.

What is making it successful?

The initiative is supported by a clear policy-to-practice pathway:

Legislation → National curriculum → Local curricula and plans → School-level action

The existing Schools on the Move programme provides additional support to municipalities and schools as they implement the changes.

This combination of political commitment, legislative change, curriculum reform and practical implementation support is a key strength of the Finnish approach.

What could other countries learn?

The main condition identified is political prioritisation. Countries considering a similar approach would need sufficient political commitment to establish physical activity as a clear responsibility within the education system.

The Finnish experience also illustrates the importance of connecting national legislation with curriculum frameworks and practical support for schools, rather than relying on legislation alone.





Key challenges to promote HEPA

Finland's wider challenge for physical activity promotion

Changes in lifestyles and physical activity behaviour, including those linked to digitalisation and wider global trends, continue to affect population activity levels.

At the same time, resource pressures in social and healthcare services can lead to greater emphasis on treating disease rather than preventing it.

Physical activity is also not yet sufficiently integrated into working life as a way of supporting work ability, health and wellbeing.

Country-level barriers to advancing HEPA

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



BARRIER

IMPACT

Political prioritisation

EXTREME

Weak intersectoral coordination

MAJOR

Regional/local implementation gaps

MAJOR

Lack of workforce capacity

MODERATE

Insufficient monitoring/data

MODERATE

Limited research translation into policy

MODERATE

Inequities in participation/access

MODERATE

Limited funding/resources

NO IMPACT

Public engagement challenges

NO IMPACT

Other

NO IMPACT

What is needed?

Finland identified the need for sustained cross-sectoral action, supported by strong political commitment and adequate resources.

Attention is needed to ensure that physical activity is recognised not only as an education and sport issue, but also as part of prevention, healthy ageing, workplace wellbeing and health-system priorities.



How can the HEPA Europe Network help?

The Network could strengthen the evidence base for HEPA by supporting the generation and sharing of research evidence and policy recommendations.

A further proposal is to establish a HEPA study-visit model, where one country hosts a small group of other countries for several days to explore a specific theme in depth and exchange practical experience.

Such peer-learning visits could help countries move from sharing information to seeing policies and practices in action.