



Success story

Portugal's National Sport Development Plan: A Cross-Sectoral Framework for Physical Activity Promotion



Initiative type: National policy / cross-sectoral framework

Sectors: Health | Education | Sport | Urban planning | Workplace/employment | Social affairs | Children & Youth | Ageing | Civil society/community organisations | Finance | Economy | Territorial cohesion | Defence | Internal Affairs

Target group: General population across all ages

Implementation stage: Early implementation

Transferability: Partly

► About the initiative

In 2026, Portugal adopted its first National Plan for Sport Development (PNDD) through a Council of Ministers Resolution.

The plan represents a shift from viewing sport as a standalone policy area towards treating physical activity as a shared government responsibility. Seven government departments are involved, including health, with 44 measures distributed across sectors according to their respective responsibilities.

The PNDD includes health-oriented objectives such as:

- Reducing childhood obesity
- Reducing sedentary behaviour
- Embedding physical activity assessment into primary healthcare consultations
- Establishing targets for 2028 and 2036

► What is making it successful?

The main strength is its formal interministerial architecture.

By committing multiple government sectors to shared objectives, the PNDD creates a structured framework for integrating physical activity into broader public health and social policy rather than relying on isolated sport-sector initiatives.

As the plan was only adopted in 2026, its outcomes have not yet been measured.

► What could other countries learn?

The specific institutional structure reflects Portugal's governance system, but the underlying principle is widely applicable: embed physical activity objectives across government sectors and establish shared responsibility beyond the sport sector.





Key challenges to promote HEPA

► Portugal's wider challenge for physical activity promotion

A key challenge is the limited and uneven integration of physical activity into routine clinical practice. Although physical activity is recognised as an important determinant of health, implementation can depend on:

- Professional awareness and confidence
- Available time
- Role clarity
- Local organisational capacity
- Opportunities for referral and follow-up
- Documentation and monitoring systems

Systematically incorporating assessment, brief counselling, referral and follow-up into healthcare remains particularly challenging when health services are under pressure.

► Country-level barriers to advancing HEPA

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



BARRIER	IMPACT
Limited funding/resources	EXTREME
Lack of workforce capacity	EXTREME
Insufficient monitoring/data	EXTREME
Limited research translation into policy	EXTREME
Regional/local implementation gaps	EXTREME
Inequities in participation/access	EXTREME
Public engagement challenges	EXTREME
Weak intersectoral coordination	EXTREME
Political prioritisation	MINOR
Other	NO IMPACT

► What is needed?

Portugal needs sustained cooperation between sport, health, education and local government, supported by clear governance and responsibilities.

Implementation of the PNDD will require:

- Training and capacity building for professionals
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Practical tools for physical activity assessment and counselling
- Digital and documentation systems
- Effective referral pathways
- Strong links between healthcare and local physical activity opportunities
- Adaptation to different territorial contexts



► How can the HEPA Europe Network help?

HEPA Europe could support Portugal through knowledge exchange and peer learning with countries that have more advanced experience integrating physical activity into primary healthcare. Useful areas of cooperation include:

- Training models
- Professional role clarity
- Physical activity referral systems
- Digital tools
- European technical guidance
- Peer-to-peer exchanges between HEPA Focal Points

The Network can also provide political legitimacy by connecting national implementation with the wider European HEPA policy context.