

Eurobarometer: Survey reveals large disparities in attitudes to sport and physical exercise

40% of EU citizens play sport at least once a week and 65% engage in some form of physical exercise. But 25% are almost completely inactive, according to a special Eurobarometer Survey on Sport and Physical Activity published by the European Commission today.



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Ireland and the Nordic countries take sport most seriously, with 23% of Irish citizens practising sport 5 times a week or more, while Sweden, Finland and Denmark score the highest ratings for exercising 'regularly' or 'with some regularity' (once a week or more). At the other end of the scale, only 3% of citizens in Bulgaria, Greece and Italy say they play sport regularly.

Men in the EU play more sport and also exercise more than women. The disparity is particularly marked in the 15-24 age group. The survey also finds a correlation between socio-economic status and physical activity. 64% of people who left school by the age of 15 say they never play sport, while this rate falls to 24% for those who left education after 20.

The findings will be presented at a press conference in Brussels today (12:30) by Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner responsible for sport, and Michel Platini, President of UEFA, the European football governing body.

"It is reassuring to see that many Europeans take sport and physical activity seriously, but we also need to do more to encourage citizens who are inactive," said Commissioner Vassiliou. "Sport is good for the body and soul: as the ancient Romans and Greeks used to say, 'a healthy mind in a healthy body'. Sport gives you more energy and helps people to live more active lives. In an ageing society, it is important to help citizens to remain healthy longer.

"I will therefore be proposing an initiative later this year aimed at encouraging more Europeans to make sport and physical activity part of their daily lives."

This initiative will be presented as a Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, flanked by a proposal to establish a new Sport Programme which will support projects and supplement policies in the Member States.

UEFA President Michel Platini said: *"The Eurobarometer survey underlines the central role of European sports federations to guarantee the practice of sports of all levels. UEFA is committed to the healthy development at grassroots level, which remains a core-objective."*

Other findings from the survey

The survey, based on interviews with nearly 27,000 citizens in the 27 Member States in late 2009, also found that:

- EU citizens have different preferences when it comes to *where* they exercise: 83% of Slovenians prefer outdoors, followed by 76% in Finland and 67% in Estonia. Outdoor exercise is favoured by only 27% of respondents in Greece, 28% in Malta and 29% in Romania.
- Fitness centres are the most popular venue for Swedes (31%) and Cypriots (22%), while only 2% of French and Hungarian respondents like them.
- 61% of respondents in Germany and 57% in Austria are members of sports' clubs or other clubs involving physical activities, while these percentages are much lower in Hungary (8%), Greece and Lithuania (12%).
- Overall, European citizens feel that their local authorities do enough to provide them with opportunities for physical exercise. Finland (76%) and Luxembourg (75%) show the highest level of satisfaction, while citizens in Poland and Italy (52%) feel that their local authorities do not do enough to encourage physical activity.
- Engagement in voluntary work that supports sport is highest in Sweden and Finland (18%), while only 2% of people in Poland, Greece and Portugal volunteer for sport.
- Across the EU, far more people get some form of physical exercise - such as walking, dancing, and gardening - than play organised sport. A worrying statistic from a public health perspective is that 14% of EU citizens say they 'never' do any physical activity, while another 20% are 'only seldom' active.

EU Treaty and sport

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union gives the EU limited powers to support and encourage the development of sport in EU countries, but this is not aimed at harmonisation of national policies. The EU also respects the autonomy of sport governing bodies.

The results of the Eurobarometer will be presented at the European Sport Forum (19 April) and at the Informal meeting of EU Sports Ministers (20-21 April) in Madrid.

Eurobarometer findings in full:

http://ec.europa.eu/sport/news/news910_en.htm

To find out more:

http://ec.europa.eu/sport/index_en.htm