



## **Informal Meeting of EU Sport Ministers**

Nicosia, 20 - 21 September 2012

### **Discussion paper on Active Ageing - The Role of Sport and Physical Activity** **Background document**

#### **I. Introduction**

Under its Presidency term, Cyprus has chosen sport and health as one of the priority themes for the work in the formal and informal cooperation structures for sport at EU level. Accordingly the topic of health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) will be emphasised in the foreseen Council conclusions and will form part of the discussions at the informal meeting of EU Sport Ministers. The promotion of HEPA was also addressed by EU Sport Directors at their meeting under the Danish Presidency.

As part of HEPA, the importance of physical activity practiced by senior citizens has come to the foreground recently. There are many reasons for this. The present ageing characteristics of Europe's population are posing huge challenges for health and social service systems and society at large. In this regard, the preservation of functional independence and the maintenance of quality of life of elderly people have become essential issues. Physical activity through its benefits with regard to better health, prevention of diseases, social inclusion, improved quality of life and reduction of healthcare costs can be a significant tool to help meet these challenges. HEPA for senior citizens can act as a driver for growth and employment, prevent or limit social exclusion, and can also contribute to the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy<sup>1</sup>.

#### **II. Background on Active Ageing and Physical Activity**

##### International level

The concept of active ageing was adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the late 1990s, and there has been a significant increase in the use of the term, active ageing, over the past few years.

Today, active ageing provides a conceptual framework for governmental and non-governmental sectors to plan and implement multi-dimensional strategies to improve the quality of life for older adults.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index_en.htm)

The WHO identified the lack of physical activity as one of the major risk factors in the ageing population<sup>2</sup>. In order to promote the recognition of the positive role of sport and physical activity in the process of active ageing different types of initiatives within and beyond the field of sport have been launched from international to local levels. These initiatives consist of programmes, projects, studies, specific strategies and conferences, etc.

One of the major platforms that emphasised the role of physical activity in active ageing is the recently organised 8<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Active Ageing<sup>3</sup>, held in Glasgow, which highlighted the needs of a growing population of senior citizens. The findings of the World Congress confirm that active ageing should be the foundation for any new model that attempts to address the challenges and opportunities of the ageing population.

In order to widen the knowledge about effective practices in the field, the founder of the International Council on Active Aging (ICAA), Mr. Colin Milner, has been invited to the Informal Meeting of EU Sport Ministers in order to present the North-American approach towards active ageing and the role of physical activity. The ICAA model can be summed up in three words “engaged in life” regardless of socioeconomic status or health conditions. The end goals are to have older adults leading a more productive, quality filled, purposeful life.

#### EU level

Active Ageing has also become a priority topic at EU level, notably with regard to policy making in the fields of health and employment. The year 2012 was designated the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.

According to the 2012 Ageing Report, one fifth of the EU’s GDP is used for ageing-related public spending and in average 7,1 % of the GDP is spent for health care services linked to ageing in EU Member States. Expectedly the age-related public spending could increase from one fifth to one quarter of GDP by 2060 due to the significant rise of population above 65 years.

Healthy ageing is one of the ways, how public expenditure for expensive care services can be reduced. In case if the increased life expectancy will be spent in bad health conditions the public spending for health care can be up by 1.3 % of GDP in the coming years, while in the healthy ageing scenario spending can be up by 0.5 % of GDP. It means that around two thirds of the expected increase in spending can be avoided if we can prevent an increase in the number of years in bad health.<sup>4</sup>

In connection with the abovementioned scenarios, preceding and following the announcement of the European Year, the topic of sport and active ageing has been on the European agenda in the field of sport:

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global\\_burden\\_disease/GlobalHealthRisks\\_report\\_full.pdf](http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/GlobalHealthRisks_report_full.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wcaa2012.com/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://europa.eu/ey2012/ey2012main.jsp?catId=970&langId=en&eventId=594&moreDocuments=yes&tableName=events&furtherEvents=yes>

- The EU Physical Activity Guidelines<sup>5</sup>, published in 2008, include specific policy recommendations concerning services for senior citizens (guidelines 35-37).
- Based on the Commission's Communication on Developing the European Dimension in Sport<sup>6</sup>, the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council adopted in 2011 the first EU Work Plan for Sport<sup>7</sup>. According to the Work Plan the Expert Group on Sport, Health and Participation was established. As a contribution to ongoing work developed at policy level in the context of the European Year, the Expert Group adopted policy principles and practical recommendations which could be taken into account at EU and national level. (See Annex I)
- As a follow up to the European Year, the promotion of physical activity supporting active ageing was one of the priority themes in the 2012 Preparatory Actions European Partnership on Sports<sup>8</sup>.

### **III. Principles on the contribution of physical activity to active ageing, in the context of the European Year 2012**

The principles, as presented in ANNEX I, were developed by the Expert Group on Sport, Health and Participation with the participation of other external experts and observers from European sport organisations. Thanks to these contributions, policy principles have been identified and practical recommendations could be formulated. The principles were presented to the Council Working Party on Sport on 4 July 2012. They aim at assisting policy makers and practitioners to promote physically active ageing at policy and at practical level in the EU and its Member States.

### **IV. Discussion**

In order to encourage the promotion of practical actions in the field of sport and active ageing and to facilitate their implementation in line with the proposed principles, the Cyprus Presidency would like to invite EU Sport Ministers to share their views on the following questions:

1. How do you tackle physical inactivity among elderly people at national level? Do you think that the identified principles and practical recommendations can contribute to the promotion of physical activity among senior citizens in your country?
2. Concerning the implementation of the identified principles and practical recommendations, are there elements which you find especially challenging? If so, do you think some of these would require support from the EU level?

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<sup>5</sup> EU Physical Activity Guidelines Recommended Policy Actions in Support of Health-Enhancing Physical Activity. Brussels, 10 October 2008. URL: [http://ec.europa.eu/sport/documents/pa\\_guidelines\\_4th\\_consolidated\\_draft\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/sport/documents/pa_guidelines_4th_consolidated_draft_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> European Commission Communication "Developing the European Dimension in Sport", COM(2011) 12 final

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 162, 1.6.2011.

<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/sport/preparatory\\_actions/eac-s06-2012\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/sport/preparatory_actions/eac-s06-2012_en.htm)

## PRINCIPLES ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TO ACTIVE AGEING, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN YEAR 2012

In order to preserve the functional independence of older people and maintain their quality of life, to minimise the risk of falls and their consequences, the promotion of physical activity and exercise should be considered as a key element in achieving the goals of the European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity 2012. As also reflected in the national Work Programmes of the Year, physical activity through the benefits of better health, prevention of disease, social inclusion, improved quality of life and reduction of healthcare costs can be a significant factor in meeting the challenges set by the current European ageing characteristics.

As a contribution to ongoing work developed at policy level in the context of the Year, the Expert Group is invited to consider the following policy principles and practical recommendations which could be taken into account at EU and national level – on a volunteer basis- after 2012:

### Policy principles:

- 1) In line with the objectives of the European Year 2012, aiming to ensure healthy and independent living for longer, the role of physical activity should be recognised:
  - a) **Policy documents** addressing active ageing at EU and Member States level should include references on the benefits and promotion of physical activity among senior citizens. Development of such policy documents should be preceded by consultation with senior citizens.
  - b) Health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) among senior citizens should be promoted by personnel and **financial support** including research:
    - i) EU level: based on the outcomes and lessons learned from the senior citizens related HEPA projects under the Preparatory Actions in the Field of Sport 2009 and 2012, future EU funding in the fields of sport and health should be included in EU programmes, e.g. Erasmus for All, Health for Growth Programme, Horizon 2020, etc.
    - ii) Member States level:
      - where appropriate, it can be a condition of any contract that provides for financial support from the government to sport associations and to other non-profit organisations;
      - financial incentives that contribute to the goals of governmental HEPA strategies targeting seniors can also be provided for for-profit organisations.
  - c) National and transnational **programmes and projects** aiming to promote HEPA among older people, including related research projects, need to be encouraged and supported. Strategies/projects should focus on different target groups with different functional capacities such as:
    - i) senior citizens with good functional capacity
    - ii) senior citizens with decreased functional capacity
    - iii) senior citizens with deficiencies of mobility or mental health problems.

Special attention should be paid to the living circumstances; e.g. senior citizens living alone.

Evaluation of the cost-effectiveness and the results of the projects is also needed. Long-term projects should be monitored with the help of indicators in order to gain evidence-based information for illustrating the importance of physical activity and exercise.

- 2) There is a need for setting up **quality criteria** for older people's physical activity and exercise, involving sport organisations, scientific partners, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, physical education teachers, exercise physiologists, nutritionists and other service providers.

Practical recommendations focussing on participation:

- 3) Local indoor and outdoor **environments have to be planned or adapted** to the needs of older people, taking into account their safety and security. Possible actions include:
  - a) Consultation with older people about how they currently engage with their local environment and what would make it easier for them to be more active in their local environment.
  - b) Establish 'open door' indoor facilities for physical activity and exercise with targeted programmes for older people.
  - c) Build up outdoor recreational areas in public spaces that are accessible and attractive to older people.
  - d) Establish safe walking and cycling paths and inform senior citizens about possible routes at local level (by using e.g. leaflets or sign posts). Facilitate establishment of walking and cycling groups that can cater for different ability levels.
- 4) **Information and public awareness campaigns** need to be carried out about the necessity and positive effects of physical activity and exercise in the ageing population, addressing the following target groups:
  - a) Senior citizens (through personal contacts and media/TV programmes especially addressing senior citizens);
  - b) People and organisations who are in touch with senior citizens: family members, doctors, nurse personnel, exercise physiologists, sport organisations, , organisations of senior citizens and other service providers.
- 5) Specific **training programmes** for becoming instructors for senior citizens need to be promoted.
  - a) Physical Educational institutions as well as education structures of sports organisations should include senior sport activities in their training programmes.
  - b) Voluntary training programmes and PA counselling for senior citizens should be organised and supported at local level.
- 6) Local retirement clubs and other **organised groups of senior citizens** should also be resourced to focus on HEPA-related activities and should develop cross sector networking structures.

Ideas for sport organisations and sport service providers:

- 7) Seniors should be seen as a target group to be actively involved in club life and civil society , and also as a growing group of **citizens requiring complex adapted special services, for example**:
  - a) Services not only focusing on physical exercise but also including social events. By combining PA with social events a social network can be built among participants, which can attract seniors;
  - b) Courses should be adapted to the specific needs and functional capacities of the respective target groups;

- c) Equipment in clubs and their facilities should meet the needs of older people and other offers like transfer to the venue should be organised.
- 8) **Special membership conditions** can promote participation of senior citizens in sport:
- a) Sport service providers should offer short time and flexible membership
  - b) Governments and municipalities could provide special incentives for service providers in exchange of special discount for senior citizens;
  - c) The attention of service providers should be drawn to the good practice of providing discounts during the period of working hours, when senior citizens could fill up the facilities and hence generate income.
- 9) In order to accelerate the effective implementation, **best practices** to promote sport for senior citizens should be collected and distributed among interested actors both at national and European level.
- 10) The level of realisation of each of these principles should be assessed.