

A photograph of three people jogging outdoors. On the left is an older woman with white hair wearing a white t-shirt. In the center is a man with a beard wearing a red t-shirt and a smartwatch. On the right is a woman with grey hair wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt. They are all smiling and appear to be in good health. The background is a blurred green forest.

FESI Position Paper

On the Revision of the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2013 on Promoting Health-Enhancing Physical Activity

October 2026

Introduction

The Federation of the European Sporting Goods Industry (FESI) welcomes the European Commission's initiative to review the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2013 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) across sectors¹.

FESI represents the sporting goods industry in Europe, bringing together leading companies and national sporting goods associations committed to enabling more people to participate in sport and active lifestyles. Through innovation, products, services and partnerships, the sporting goods sector contributes to making physical activity more accessible, inclusive and attractive for citizens of all ages and abilities.

Physical activity remains one of the most effective tools to improve population health and well-being. It contributes to preventing non-communicable diseases, supporting mental health, promoting healthy ageing, strengthening social inclusion and improving quality of life. For this reason, promoting HEPA requires sustained cooperation across health, sport, education, transport, urban planning, environment and other relevant sectors.

FESI recognises the important role played by the 2013 Council Recommendation in establishing a common European framework, encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation, national strategies and monitoring mechanisms. However, more than ten years after its adoption, physical inactivity remains a major public health challenge. Participation levels remain insufficient, inequalities persist, and a gap remains between policy commitments and effective implementation on the ground.

The revision of the Recommendation should therefore focus on moving from policy development towards measurable impact: ensuring that existing policy frameworks deliver tangible improvements and remove barriers to physical activity to enable more citizens to be physically active.

FESI calls for four key priorities:

1. Strengthening policy implementation and measuring real-world impact
2. Embedding physical activity in prevention, healthcare and mental health strategies
3. Creating inclusive, safe and sustainable environments for active lifestyles
4. Harnessing innovation and digitalisation to support participation

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2013:354:0001:0005:EN:PDF>

1. Strengthening policy implementation and measuring real-world impact

FESI Position

The 2013 Recommendation successfully established the foundations for a European HEPA framework, including national strategies, cross-sectoral cooperation and a monitoring framework. The priority of the revision should therefore not be to create additional structures, but to ensure that existing commitments translate into effective action.

A stronger focus is needed on implementation, evaluation and measurable outcomes. Monitoring should increasingly assess whether policies succeed in increasing physical activity levels, reducing inequalities and reaching population groups that remain insufficiently active.

Recommendations

FESI calls on the European Commission and Member States to:

- review and update the HEPA indicator framework to better capture implementation, participation outcomes, inequalities and emerging challenges;
- encourage more systematic evaluation of the implementation of national HEPA policies and action plans;
- identify and promote successful interventions that have demonstrated measurable increases in physical activity participation supported by robust evidence, including data from long-term pilot studies including exploring the potential of innovative data sources, such as connected devices and wearable technologies, to complement traditional monitoring approaches;
- ensure that monitoring frameworks better capture inequalities in access and participation.

Suggested indicators

Building on the existing monitoring framework:

- percentage of citizens meeting physical activity recommendations;
- changes in physical activity participation over time;
- implementation rate of national HEPA actions;
- participation gaps linked to gender, age, disability and socio-economic background;
- evaluation mechanisms integrated into national HEPA policies.

2. Embedding physical activity in prevention, healthcare and mental health strategies

FESI Position

The 2013 Recommendation already recognises the role of healthcare systems in promoting physical activity and includes an indicator on counselling by health professionals. However, implementation remains insufficient.

Physical activity counselling should become a more systematic component of prevention and healthcare pathways. Despite progress in some Member States, including legislative frameworks allowing physical activity prescription, uptake remains limited and prevention opportunities are still often overlooked. Building on the recognition in the 2013 Recommendation that sedentary behaviour represents an independent health risk and is also a major factor for exponentially increasing healthcare cost in nearly all EU Member States, the revision should place greater emphasis on reducing prolonged sedentary time and promoting movement throughout the day.

Since 2013, the evidence on the relationship between physical activity and mental health has also significantly strengthened. The revised Recommendation should therefore explicitly integrate mental health as an essential dimension of HEPA promotion.

Recommendations

FESI calls on the European Commission and Member States to:

- strengthen implementation of physical activity counselling by healthcare professionals;
- improve training of healthcare professionals on physical activity promotion and prescription;
- develop stronger referral pathways between healthcare providers and qualified physical activity providers;
- integrate physical activity promotion into mental health strategies and prevention policies;
- recognise physical activity as a substantial element and complementary intervention alongside other healthcare approaches.

Suggested indicators

Building on existing indicators:

- proportion of healthcare professionals trained in physical activity counselling;
- proportion of patients receiving physical activity advice during healthcare consultations;
- number of physical activity prescriptions or referrals;
- inclusion of physical activity within national mental health strategies;
- participation in physical activity programmes supporting mental well-being.

3. Creating inclusive, safe and sustainable environments for active lifestyles

FESI Position

The 2013 Recommendation rightly identified environment, urban planning and public safety as essential areas for HEPA promotion. The revision should build on this foundation by addressing emerging barriers and ensuring environments are adapted to the needs of all citizens.

The ability to participate in physical activity depends not only on the availability of infrastructure but also on the availability, accessibility, affordability and safety of suitable spaces and opportunities.. Particular attention should be given to removing barriers faced by children, women and girls, people with disabilities, older citizens and disadvantaged communities.

Improved urban planning and infrastructure are essential to create more active communities. This includes ensuring access to inclusive and affordable sport facilities, low-threshold opportunities to be active close to where people live, study and work, as well as safe walking and cycling infrastructure, including dedicated cycling lanes in urban areas and connected networks in rural settings.

For working-age adults, lack of time remains an important barrier to participation. HEPA strategies should therefore support opportunities to integrate physical activity into daily routines, including through active commuting by e.g. bicycling, workplace initiatives and environments that encourage movement during the working day. The EU can support Member States and employers by facilitating the exchange of best practices and guidance on creating more active environments.

Major sporting events and mass participation events can play an important role in encouraging physical activity, strengthening social inclusion and promoting sustainable lifestyles. Public authorities should encourage event organisers to integrate accessibility, affordability, inclusion and sustainability considerations into the planning and delivery of such events, including by considering these elements as part of procurement processes, event tenders and evaluation criteria.

Finally, outdoor recreation, nature-based activities and mass participation events can make an important contribution to HEPA objectives by encouraging participation, strengthening social inclusion and promoting sustainable lifestyles. Climate change should also be considered when planning and managing physical activity environments to ensure their long-term resilience.

Recommendations

FESI calls on the European Commission and Member States to:

- promote inclusive, accessible and affordable physical activity opportunities through better urban planning, including access to sport facilities and low-threshold activities close to communities;
- strengthen active mobility approaches, by expanding safe walking and cycling infrastructure in both urban and rural contexts;
- address barriers preventing or discouraging children adolescents and underrepresented groups from participating in sport and physical activity, including lack of access, safety concerns, affordability issues and insufficient accessibility and poor condition of premises and facilities;
- address barriers preventing children, adolescents and underrepresented groups from participating in physical activity, including accessibility, affordability and safety barriers;

- support active lifestyles within daily routines by promoting active workplaces, active commuting and the exchange of best practices on enabling environments for physical activity;
- encourage public authorities and event organisers to integrate accessibility, inclusion and sustainability criteria into the design and delivery of sporting events, including through procurement processes and calls for tenders.
- recognise the contribution of outdoor recreation, nature-based activities and active tourism to HEPA objectives, while integrating climate adaptation and sustainability considerations into physical activity planning.

Suggested indicators

- availability of safe, inclusive and affordable sport and recreation facilities;
- availability and development of cycling and walking infrastructure development, including safe cycling lanes in urban areas and cycling networks in rural areas;
- accessibility standards applied to sport facilities and public spaces;
- opportunities for children and adolescents to access sport and physical activity;
- availability of low-threshold physical activity opportunities within communities;
- integration of accessibility, inclusion and sustainability criteria in public procurement procedures and calls for tenders for major sporting events.
- availability of low-threshold physical activity opportunities within communities;
- existence of schemes supporting active workplaces and active commuting.

4. Harnessing innovation and digitalisation to support participation

FESI Position

Since the adoption of the 2013 Recommendation, digital transformation has created new opportunities to support physical activity participation.

Digital tools, platforms, connected devices and personalised solutions can contribute to motivation, awareness and behaviour change, while also offering opportunities to support more accurate data collection and monitoring of physical activity levels, including through the potential integration of digital tools and wearable technologies in future EU-wide surveys such as the Eurobarometer on Sport and Physical Activity. However, digital solutions should complement—not replace—the need for accessible environments, social interaction and opportunities for real-world physical activity.

Recommendations

FESI calls on the European Commission and Member States to:

- recognise digital solutions as complementary tools supporting HEPA objectives;
- encourage the responsible use of digital tools, connected devices and wearable technologies to strengthen evidence gathering and monitoring of physical activity levels, including through future EU-level data collection initiatives;
- encourage evidence-based innovation that increases participation;
- support cooperation between technology providers, health stakeholders and sport organisations;

- ensure digital approaches remain inclusive and accessible to avoid increasing inequalities.

Suggested indicators

- use of digital tools supporting physical activity;
- integration of digital solutions within HEPA strategies;
- accessibility of digital physical activity solutions;
- evidence of impact of digital interventions on participation.

Conclusion

The revision of the Council Recommendation provides an opportunity to build on the strong foundations established in 2013 and ensure that Europe's HEPA policies deliver greater impact.

FESI believes that the future framework should focus on implementation, measurable outcomes and addressing emerging challenges, while ensuring that all citizens have the opportunity to be physically active.

The sporting goods industry stands ready to contribute its expertise and innovation and partnerships to support the European Commission and Member States in building a more active, healthier and more inclusive Europe.

About FESI:

Founded in 1960 FESI, the Federation of the European Sporting Goods Industry, is the unique pre-competitive platform representing the interests of the sporting goods industry in Europe, advancing its members' priorities and promoting initiatives that benefit the sector, EU citizens and the society as a whole. FESI represents the interests of approximately 1.800 sporting goods manufacturers (85% of the European market) through its National Sporting Goods Industry Federations and its directly affiliated member companies. 70-75% of FESI's membership is made up of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises. In total, the European Sporting Goods Industry employs over 700.000 EU citizens and has an annual turnover of some 81 billion euro.

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