The European Week of Sport celebrates its sixth anniversary

This year, the sixth round of the European Week of Sport (23-30 September) will kick off in unusual circumstances. The lockdown measures put in place to curb the coronavirus pandemic have made the initiative more necessary than ever.

The #BeActive campaign that has accompanied the event since its launch by the European Commission in 2015 is driving its message home with new urgency. Since mid-March, as teleworking and self-isolation have become a daily reality for many Europeans, going to the gym – or even simply walking to the office – has turned into a distant memory. It has therefore become essential for many people to find new ways to remain physically active.

This year’s #BeActiveAtHome campaign encourages the use of social media as a way to exchange novel ideas about exercising while staying at home. By posting with the hashtag #BeActiveAtHome and mentioning @EUSport on Twitter and @european_youth_eu on Instagram, sport enthusiasts have the opportunity to show what they are doing to stay fit. The best and funniest content has been shared on the social media accounts of the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture.

Some key highlights

To support projects and individuals dedicated to the promotion of sport and physical activity across Europe, in 2019 the European Commission created the #BeActive Awards as a centrepiece of the European Week of Sport. The #BeActive Education Award shows how education can stimulate children to be active outside the regular sport/physical activity taking place on a normal school day; the #BeActive Workplace Award honours activities and practices encouraging employees to stay fit at the workplace; and the #BeActive Local Hero Award celebrates individuals who have been actively promoting the participation in sport and/or physical activity in their local community.
The winners of this year's awards will be announced in November 2020.

The #BeActive Night is yet another highlight of this year's European Week of Sport, when a series of mass sport events will take place in cities across Europe.

In 2019, the #5minChallenge was launched to remind Europeans that five minutes of physical activity is easily accomplished and often leads to a more regular practice. Participants in the challenge were asked to take a photo or video of themselves while working out for five minutes and to post it to Twitter or Instagram using specific hashtags and tagging the European Commission’s accounts. Europeans could thus be seen dancing, lifting weights, gardening, cycling or walking pets, to name just a few of the various activities they did to stay fit.

On the #BeActive Night on 28 September 2019, the #5minChallenge became a massive coordinated event across Europe. At 19.00 CET, all Europeans were invited to do five minutes of physical activity simultaneously. Live streams from multiple events across the continent were posted on social media as Europeans joined up for fun workouts. This year’s edition of the #BeActive Night is scheduled for 26 September.

A spin-off of the week – the European School Sport Day® – has so far engaged over 3 million students from 9 000 schools. To take part in the event, participants need to work out for at least 120 minutes. Any kind of physical activity counts – running, hopping, skipping, dancing - provided the distance corresponds to the year in question (2020 meters in 2020). This year’s event will take place on 25 September.

FROM A MODEST BEGINNING TO AN EVER-GROWING SUCCESS

The idea behind the European Week of Sport originated in a 2012 European Parliament resolution on the European dimension in sport, which called on the European Commission to set up a ‘European Day of Sports’ to raise awareness of the role and benefits of sport and physical activity. In the past six years, the European Week of Sport has greatly contributed to fighting physical inactivity by encouraging Europeans to embrace healthy and active lifestyles. The event is now an EU-wide initiative led by the European Commission and implemented at EU, national, regional and local level, with the help of national coordinators and in partnership with sports organisations and stakeholders. Starting off with 5 million participants and 7 000 events in 2015, the 2019 edition drew over 15 million participants to some 28 000 events in 41 countries across Europe and the region of Kosovo*.

PHYSICAL (IN)ACTIVITY IN THE EU

The European Week of Sport was initiated to tackle the stagnating and even declining levels of physical activity in the EU. Worryingly, the results of the 2018 Eurobarometer survey on sport and physical activity showed that nearly half of respondents (46 %) never exercise or play sport – up 5 percentage points from 2014 (see map opposite). Moreover, the WHO estimates that 25 % of European adults and 80 % of European adolescents are not sufficiently active and that each year physical inactivity claims over 500 000 lives across Europe and generates over €80 billion in costs for the EU-28 economies. This amount represents 6.2 % of all European healthcare spending, €5 billion more than the annual global spend on cancer drugs, and half of Ireland or Portugal’s annual GDP. Conservative estimates put the annual cost of physical inactivity in 2030 at over €125 billion (in 2012 prices).

All this could be avoided by encouraging Europeans to be physically active not just during the European Week of Sport but all year round.

Data source: Sport and physical activity, Special Eurobarometer 472, TNS opinion & social, European Commission, 2018.

(*) This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.