



# Children in the City **Improving access and awareness of physical activity in children**

## THE PROJECT

Physical inactivity is one of the main modifiable risk factors for cardiovascular disease and setting healthy habits early in life is essential to stay healthy through all ages. Being active in a big city can be challenging, which is why the Children in the City programme has been developed to encourage children (7-12 years old) living in low-income urban neighbourhoods to be more

active and improve their attitude and knowledge on physical activity.

Together with our national members, the World Heart Federation (WHF) piloted the programme in cities across five European countries, following the same approach which starts from the needs of children and parents in a specific setting. The main barriers to

physical activity as well as potential triggers were identified through surveys, research and insight from local partners. Based on the data collected, a number of simple, cost-effective and easily replicable interventions were designed to address those barriers, and then piloted and evaluated in each country.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The project was implemented in five countries, together with WHF national members – the Romanian Heart Foundation, the Spanish Heart Foundation, the Slovenian Heart Foundation, the Turkish Heart Foundation and in the UK, the British Heart Foundation in partnership with the charity StreetGames.

The activities developed to address the barriers identified through the surveys and research covered a wide range of actions, with different focus. Some countries prioritized practical aspects, for example improving access to places to exercise with the opening of school playgrounds after class, while others focused on perceptions, trying to make physical activity accessible

and attractive to all children. Raising awareness about the importance of active children was also key in all countries, with communications activities including movies, press conferences, workshops, publications and advocacy work targeted at children, their parents, teachers, the media and the authorities.

## RESULTS AND LEGACY

The different surveys and questionnaires and direct feedback from all stakeholders demonstrate the positive impact of Children in the City on the knowledge, attitude and level of physical activity in children and people around them. For example, the percentage of children realizing the importance of physical activity rose from 85 to 97% in the participating children in Romania, while 98% of the Turkish parents participating in a workshop in Istanbul said they would make efforts to encourage their children to be more active.

In each of the countries, Children in the City also reinforced the motivation of our national partners to fight physical inactivity in children and consider it a priority to tackle cardiovascular disease. Many of them are planning to build on



the results of the programme and surveys to develop additional actions, or scale up the programme. The effect of the activities are expected to last, not only thanks to the positive change in the children who participated, but also due to practical improvements in the environment that will impact other children. Most of the organizations involved also used the data and success stories from the project as an opportunity to contact their authorities and advocate for policies in favour of physical activity.

**You can find more details** about the barriers identified and the programmes run in each of the five countries in our case studies. We hope that this portfolio of cost-effective interventions will inspire WHF members, physical activity advocates and other civil society members to replicate the programme or some of its activities, and start their own project to promote physical activity in children and help reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease.

## CONTACTS & LINKS