



# Children in the City case study: **Romania**

## BACKGROUND

**What?** Children in the City is a project created by the World Heart Federation (WHF) in partnership with UEFA to improve access and awareness of physical activity in children (7 to 12 years old) living in selected low-income urban neighbourhoods across Europe.

**Why?** Physical inactivity is one of the major modifiable risk factors for cardiovascular disease, responsible for approx. 58% of all deaths in Romania, and one third around the world. Setting healthy habits early in life is essential to stay healthy, and being active in big

cities can be challenging – the survey showed that only 23% of Romanian children reach WHO recommended levels of physical activity<sup>1</sup>. The project has been designed to better understand the reasons for physical inactivity in children, and prove that cost-effective, simple solutions can make a difference.

**Who?** Children in the City is implemented in partnership with WHF national members - in Romania, the Romanian Heart Foundation, a Foundation active in health promotion.

**When and Where?** Children in the City has been initially run in December 2014-January 2015 in Bucharest, Timisoara and Cluj, and replicated (with improvements) from October to December 2016 in Oradea and Iasi.

**How?** The first phase of the project consisted of a survey to identify the barriers to physical activity in children and their parents (2000). Based on the results, key actions were identified and implemented, followed by a second survey. A simplified version of the surveys and another round of activities took place the following year.

## KEY BARRIERS & DRIVERS

The initial survey and interviews identified five elements as key barriers to physical activity in the target group:

- **Knowledge:** children think they exercise enough while they do not meet the recommended level.
- **Priorities:** parents and children often don't see physical activity as a priority.
- **Access:** facilities are not always easily accessible or close.
- **Insecurity when it comes to performance:** children who are less good at sport/a specific activity often don't engage in physical activity, as performance is widely perceived as more important than the fun and health benefits of sport.
- **Lack of volunteer culture:** lack of willing parents/ community members to help coach or support children's activities.

**30%** of children affirmed they would like to engage in more physical activity, but cannot because of homework

Based on these results and analysis, the following drivers and opportunities were identified:

- **Teachers:** rely on coaches and physical education teachers to carry the message that sport is fun and important, regardless of the level of performance.
- **Role models:** build on the popularity of famous athletes to improve the perception of sport.
- **Family:** encourage parents to perceive physical activity as a priority, and to dedicate time and resources.
- **Facilitated access:** making it easier for children to be active by ensuring activity is accessible and part of their everyday life.

**30%** of children (**37%** of the least active) said they would do more if they were better at sports

<sup>1</sup>WHO recommends that children and youth aged 5–17 should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily.



## KEY ACTIONS & ACHIEVEMENTS

An action plan based on the findings of the survey was implemented, targeting both children directly, and their teachers/coaches:

- **A toolkit for teachers and coaches** providing general information on the benefits of physical activity, the important role of coaches and presenting ideas of fun, non-competitive games (distributed and available online).
- **Children** received a leaflet and a pocket guide with pictures and quotes of famous athletes to encourage a positive attitude toward physical activity, and participated in an educational session.

- **Spotlight: 2800 children tracked their level of physical activity** during sixteen weeks with pedometers, and were encouraged to improve their daily numbers, competing as a class. They were all rewarded during a closing ceremony with famous athletes and football players.

- **A press conference** with the Romanian Football Federation presented the project to the media.
- **A workshop with a “trainer” of each participating city** was organized to present the material and activities in person, and those trainers led workshops for teachers in their city.
- **Questionnaires** filled by participating children and teachers showed a very high level of appreciation of all activities – 89% of teachers said that they now understand better how to promote physical activity among children, 95% of children said they are more aware of the importance of physical activity and 98% that they are motivated to be more active.
- **The follow-up survey** assessing changes in children’s physical activity habits showed increased practice of some activities and decreased in others. The knowledge on the importance of physical activity clearly improved (85% to 97%), and some of the perceived barriers such as the competitiveness or the amount of work for school

**Legacy:** The Romanian Heart Foundation wrote to the Ministry of Education to share the findings and lessons from the survey and implementation, suggesting recommendations and a meeting to encourage them to take action at the policy level.

“The pedometer made me understand how important my health is”  
said one of the participating children



- 320 teachers toolkits
- 3000 children leaflets and pocket guides
- 2800 medals and diplomas
- Children collectively walked over 400 million steps

(49% to 40%) decreased. The project’s focus on football also changed the perception of the sport, which became the second preferred sport (previously fourth), and 39% (instead of 30%) of children voiced their preference for playing football in teams for fun.

## CONTACTS & LINKS

**Access the full reports, surveys, pictures & material on:** <https://goo.gl/XP4wPN>

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