

# Children in the City case study: Spain

## 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. 30% of all deaths in Spain, 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 15% of children in Madrid 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 demonstrate that cost-effective, simple solutions can make a difference.

**Who?** Children in the City is implemented in partnership with WHF national members - in Spain, the Spanish Heart Foundation.

**When and Where?** Children in the City has been run in Spain in 2015 and 2016, and targeted children in different low-income neighbourhoods of Madrid.

**How?** The first phase of the project consisted of a survey to identify the barriers to physical activity in targeted children (522) and their parents (221). Based on the results, key actions were identified and implemented in this population and beyond.

## KEY BARRIERS & DRIVERS

The initial survey identified 3 main barriers to physical activity in the target group:

- **Time:** the lack of time to practice sports comes out as the main obstacle for children, saying that homework and chores take too much of their time.
- **Competitiveness:** many children feel they are not “good enough” or meeting expectations when it comes to sport.
- **Costs:** economic difficulties were mentioned as an obstacle by 42% of parents.

The lack of safety or access to spaces and infrastructure were not considered important obstacles for either the children or their parents.

**21%** of children surveyed are active two hours or less a week

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

- **Family:** capitalize on the importance of parents and siblings to motivate children and encourage them to exercise, together or alone.
- **Physical activity in daily life:** create opportunities for children and parents to be active and fit some physical activity in their busy schedule.
- **Fun:** emphasize the fun aspect of sport, focusing on game-playing to encourage all children to exercise and enjoy it.

**23%** of children say that having the support of their parents would help them be more active

**86%** of children said they would engage in more physical activity if they were better at it

<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 in 2015-2016, and focused on inspiring parents to be more active with their children:

- **Spotlight: communicating the impactful data from the survey**

A press and video release were issued to attract people's attention on the importance of the problem and the necessity to take action. Over 100 articles were published, including in preeminent publications such as La Vanguardia. View the video release here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qctt9aZciik>

The release also provided an opportunity to present the conclusions to members of the national administrations, who showed a clear interest in thinking about possible actions at their level.

 It's been an unforgettable day for our pupils.

You can count on [our school] for future collaborations

 commented the Principal of one of the participating schools



- **Sport as a family, promoting physical activity**

**in schools** through sessions during which 1125 children tested activities that they could do with their parents (stretching, Zumba etc). The sessions were followed by a conference from the Olympic former athlete Fermín Cacho to inspire children, and a brochure for parents was distributed "Give time to your son/daughter and do sport as family".

- **Video #deporteenfamilia**

with parents taking about the sedentary lifestyle of their children compared to their own childhood, and outlining the great influence and responsibility that parents can have on their children's level of physical activity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m1v00rOH3s>

- **Annual Heart Race promoting participation as a family**

to encourage parents and children to be active as a team, and communicate about the benefits of practicing sport together.

Video reach:

- Over 4600 views
- 102 pieces of coverage (including El Mundo, El País)
- Facebook reach of 135'000 people (2000 likes, 500 shares)

- **Various communications, advertisements and distribution of material**

in health and sport publications, as well as during events (including Heart Week and in the 4'000 bags of the Heart Race participants).

**Legacy:** The Spanish Heart Foundation is more than ever convinced that physical activity in children is essential to improve heart health, and this survey as well as a national report published in December 2016 outline the magnitude of the problem and the importance to take action. They shared the study with a number of important organizations and authorities, including the Health Ministry, the Sports Council, the Spanish Olympic Committee, and collaborate with the recently created group on cardiology and sport. The Heart Foundation keeps working on this topic, referring to the data and results of the project in other communications and is looking into possible actions to focus on vulnerable groups, making this initiative a long term project. They had interest from the Atlético Madrid Foundation, as well as Unidad Editorial (Spanish editorial group) for which the Foundation may participate in school workshops on physical activity.

## CONTACTS & LINKS

Access the full reports, surveys, pictures & material on: <https://goo.gl/ogbYX3>

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