



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

## 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. 47% of all deaths in Turkey, 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 – approx. 58% of Turkish children of age 6 to 11 do not even exercise 30 minutes a day - half the WHO recommended level of physical activity<sup>1</sup>. The project has been designed to better understand the reasons for physical inactivity in children, and show that cost-effective, simple solutions can make a difference.

**Who?** Children in the City is implemented in partnership with WHF national members and partners - in Turkey, the Turkish Heart Foundation.

**When and Where?** Children in the City has been run in the district of Sisli, Istanbul, Spring 2016 to early 2017.

**How?** The first phase of the project consisted of a review of data available and informal meetings with key stakeholders to identify the barriers to physical activity in targeted children. Based on this study, key actions were identified and implemented.

## APPROACH, BARRIERS AND DRIVERS

The Turkish Heart Foundation conducted a review of the available evidence and data on physical activity, its barriers and its drivers in Turkey. Based on this study and their experience on-the-ground, four main barriers to physical activity have been identified:

- **Access and costs:** sport facilities often have a dissuasive cost for families and free facilities or public places to exercise are scarce, especially in winter.
- **Safety:** public areas and streets where children can safely play are rare, and walking or cycling to schools or places to exercise is generally considered unsafe.
- **Perception and habits:** streets used to be the primary place for Sisli's children to play. The increasing urbanization restricted this possibility, and it has not been replaced by new habits yet.
- **Time:** difficulty for parents to dedicate time to play with their children or take them to safe places where they can exercise.

**22** of the **38** primary schools don't have indoor facilities: when the weather is bad, physical activity classes are spent in the classrooms or playing computer games

The following opportunities and drivers have been identified:

- **Create new places to exercise** by lobbying for the inclusion of more green space and sport facilities, and shorter term, leveraging existing opportunities such as school playgrounds.
- **Family:** inform and educate parents about the importance of physical activity for health, which is not widely understood yet.
- **Fun:** promoting the fun aspect of physical activity to engage all children, and make sport and play attractive, especially against TV, video games and other screen activities.
- **Inclusion and socialisation:** use sport as a way to help children in difficult situations to develop soft skills and self-esteem, as a positive alternative to the streets.

**2/3** of **7-12** age group children living in Şişli cannot access sports facilities: playing games in the street is their primary opportunity to be active

<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.



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## KEY ACTIONS & ACHIEVEMENTS

An action plan based on these findings was implemented in two terms, October-November and December-January, in collaboration with the Turkish Football Federation, the Municipality of Sisli and the District Directorate of National Education in Sisli:

- **Special physical activity sessions** during school hours for over 200 children, first with a sport approach, then evolving during the second term to show children some simple and fun group games that can be played everywhere.
- **Know your body sessions:** classes for children to better understand their body and its different functions; those were not pursued for the second term to offer more activity sessions instead.
- **Awareness sessions for the parents** introducing the project, explaining the benefits of encouraging children to exercise, and providing opportunities to ask all the questions they may have.

- **Spotlight: creating new spaces for children to play** by convincing the schools to open their playground after school, offering a chance for children to play in a safe environment, under the supervision of trained staff. The authorities confirmed that Sisli's schools playgrounds will now stay accessible for children after class.

- **Communications and two press conferences** with the participation of celebrity sportspeople, schools and local authorities to raise awareness about the project and the importance of spaces for children to exercise.
- **Recommendations to authorities** were prepared and published together with the speeches from the closing press conference.
- **Surveys were run among parents** after the sessions with very positive feedback: 89% of the parents from the

**Legacy:** The Turkish Heart Foundation is capitalizing on this interest generated to encourage local and national authorities to replicate the project (or some aspect of it), and will keep using and distributing material about the project and its findings. First results are already available, with the authorities of the city of Mersin being in contact with the Foundation to implement the project, and the Director of Sisli Directorate of National Education confirming that the playgrounds of all schools in Sisli will now stay opened outside of school hours. Moreover, the Turkish Heart Foundation is preparing a grant application to the European Union to extend the Children in the City project to other neighbourhoods and cities.

“My boy is hyperactive and we [...] failed to come up with a real solution.... Recently, with this programme, my son is feeling much happier and his teacher confirms the positive development

*says the mother of one of the children*



A website has been created for the project, available in Turkish and English: [www.sehirdekicocuklar.com](http://www.sehirdekicocuklar.com)

first term and 94% of the second term agreed the project should be continued in their school, 85%/97% that it should be implemented in other schools and 87%/91% said they are more aware of the importance of the physical activity after the session. More importantly, 89%/95% of the parents say that after the session, they better understand how they can help their children be more active, and 94%/98% say they will make efforts to encourage their children to be more active.

## CONTACTS & LINKS

Access the full reports, surveys, pictures & material on the project website: [www.sehirdekicocuklar.com](http://www.sehirdekicocuklar.com)

World Heart Federation: [communications@worldheart.org](mailto:communications@worldheart.org)

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