



Children in the City case study: **Slovenia**

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. 40% of all deaths in Slovenia, 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 33% of Slovenian children reach WHO recommended levels of physical activity¹. 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 Slovenia, the Slovenian Heart Foundation, an NGO active in heart health promotion and research.

When and Where? Children in the City has been run in Slovenia from end of 2015 to early 2017, and targeted children in different low-income neighbourhoods of Ljubljana.

How? The first phase of the project consisted of a survey to identify the barriers to physical activity in targeted children (almost 2000) and their parents (about 750). Based on the results, key actions were identified and implemented in the same population, followed by a second survey.

KEY BARRIERS & DRIVERS

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

- **Time & priorities:** parents and children should see sport/physical activity as priorities and dedicate the appropriate amount of time and resources to them.
- **Access:** children should have the possibility to easily access facilities – by improving transportation, availability at/close to school, and better information.
- **Knowledge:** the recommended activity levels are not widely understood, leading to children (and parents) thinking that they exercise enough while they do not.
- **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.

80% of parents think their child exercises at least one hour a day - only **33%** of those children do

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

- **Facilitated access:** making it easier for children to be active by ensuring activity is accessible and part of their everyday life.
- **Role models:** famous athletes are popular, and can improve the perception of sport.
- **Sport for everyone:** coaches and physical education teachers are key to show students that sport is fun and important, regardless of the level of performance.
- **Family:** encouraging parents to consider physical activity a priority for their children can make a critical difference, especially when engaging in physical activity with their children.

40% of children say they sit during school breaks

¹WHO 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 winter 2016-17, and focused on inspiring children to get more activity as part of their everyday life, and making sport inclusive and fun:

- **Active school breaks:** encouraging children to engage in “old” simple games that can be played anywhere. The “Heart BimBam mascot” visited schools to promote this action and played games with children, supported by posters and material for the classes.
- **Children and parents workshops** on the importance of physical activity, discussing (and experimenting!) fun and engaging ways to be more active. Challenges, ideas and practical suggestions were presented, and parents were made aware of the sport opportunities in their neighbourhood.
- **Teachers and school directors workshops** about heart health and the benefits of physical activity (versus the fear of children being injured, material damaged etc), providing practical knowledge and ideas to make sport fun and part of the everyday life of all children (example: taking active mini-breaks with children during classes).
- **Testing active way to go to school** with the “walk bus” - adults supervising a group of children to walk to school from a “bus stop”.
- **Disseminating a health message at sport events** in collaboration with the Slovenian Football Federation, with a focus on the promotion of girls’ football.

“I will not be sitting at my computer so often anymore. I want to stay healthy and I decided I will go out with my friends more often to play football or something else”
commented one of the participating children



- 17’000 posters and leaflets distributed
- Over 50 workshops organized
- Movie showed on national TV and high-profile football games
- PR reach of 4,551,155

● **Spotlight: Advocating for physical activity at the government level:**

Based on the data collected through the survey, evidence from WHO and advice from an experts’ meeting (97 attendees from the field of health and sport, schools, parents organisations, ministries and municipalities), a set of recommendations to improve physical activity in children at the policy level was developed. Endorsed by a network of NGOs in health, it was sent to all Slovenian municipalities, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, the Faculty of Sport and the Faculty of Education.

- **The on-the ground activities** have been supported by a communication campaign including a movie featuring football players and a press conference.
- **The follow up survey** showed that children feel distance and lack of equipment are less of a barrier to exercise at

the end of the programme. The percentage of children meeting the recommended level of physical activity haven’t changed significantly (33% before, 32% after), but the target group had less hours of sports classes at school at the time of the second survey.

Legacy: Based on the findings of the surveys and this experience, the Slovenian Heart Foundation decided to continue tackling physical activity and is preparing a large physical activity campaign against sitting planned for 2018 and 2019.

CONTACTS & LINKS

Access the full reports, surveys, pictures & material on: <https://goo.gl/fs8SMP>

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