

## **Young People's Lifestyles and Sedentariness**

The study focuses on a holistic consideration of those lifestyle factors that lead to growing overweight in children and young people in all regions in Europe. There is no single explanation for this development. In addition to genetic predisposition, a whole group of factors, such as poor eating habits, increased media consumption and lack of physical activity has to be implicated. Among these variables, inactivity and sedentariness play a key role.

### **A. Results**

#### **1. Europe's Children are becoming fatter**

Overweight is rampant all over Europe with an increasing tendency. At present, the rate of prevalence is highest in south European countries (BMI < 25), lowest in east European countries and in the Baltic states (BMI > 15). In the "old" EU countries, the number of children who are overweight has increased by 8-10% over ten years. By contrast, their physical capacity has deteriorated over the last 25 years by 10-15% (EU average).

#### **2. Fat children are more susceptible to illness**

Over the last few years cardiovascular diseases and type 2 diabetes — formerly more likely to affect older people — have become increasingly common among younger people. An overweight child is highly likely to be overweight and susceptible to illness as an adult. Strains for individual development as well as financial consequences for health systems of our societies are unclear.

#### **3. Development of Overweight – an interaction of gene pool and lifestyle**

An interaction of genetic predisposition and environmental influences which is not yet decoded is seen as cause of the development of overweight, whereas special attention is laid on modern lifestyles, and especially on the variables energy consumption and energy transfer.

#### **4. Inadequate diet**

Snacks, fast food and sweet drinks are popular among young people, while healthy foods such as fruit and vegetables are often ignored. The habit of consumption do not fit national nutrition recommendations. Despite unfavourable distribution of food, the total energetic intake constantly decreased over the last years, in the last decade about 6-8% with western European children.

#### **5. Increasing media consumption**

In Europe, time spent watching television varies considerably by children aged 3-13 (between 90 and 120 minutes per day) as well as by young people aged 14-19 (between 120 and 180 minutes per day). On week days about two third of the European adolescents spent between 4 and 5 hours in front of the television. While the television consumption largely stagnates in the "old" EU countries, the expansion rates in the acceding countries are enormous. In addition, the use of computers increases everywhere. At present in Europe, about 15% of adolescents spent more than 3 hours per day at the computer; at weekends the rate of computer freaks grows to a quarter. Tendency: strongly growing.

## **6. Lack of movement despite high engagement in sport**

European sport clubs enjoy remaining participation rates for years. So the degree of organisation in Western European and Scandinavian countries and also in some of the new acceding countries in Eastern Europe lies between 50-70% with children, with young people between 30-50 %. Anyhow, the high engagement in sport is not able to compress the increasing inactivity in everyday life. About half of Europe's young people do not get the recommended amount of physical activity needed for good health (controlled moderate physical activity per day).

## **7. Diet, media consumption and physical activity — a complicated relationship**

Higher contact with media does not occur on the expense of physical activity. In contrast, nutrition attitudes and media consumption correlates as well as nutrition attitudes and physical activity. Television consume is connected with unhealthy nutrition, sportive activity with healthy nutrition.

## **8. Polarisation and social divisions**

In many European countries there is increasing polarisation between children with active and inactive lifestyles. Poor diet, sedentariness and in succession overweight are often found in families at the lower end of the social and education scales.

## **9. Young people involved in sport are not only fit, but also mentally stronger and emotionally better balanced**

Children who participate in sport are fitter, do better at school and are socially more integrated, more resistant to stress and more balanced than inactive children of the same age. More extensive sports opportunities in everyday life — especially at school — are therefore needed, not only in the interests of the younger generation, but also for the healthy development of our society.

## **10. Important Arrangements**

A networked strategy which includes all spheres of children and young people is necessary. Next to cognitive education psycho-mental self-acceptance for an active lifestyle needs to be promoted. As accompanying arrangements multi-media information campaigns about the interrelation between nutrition, sedentariness, media consumption and passive leisure time activities for different target groups (e. g. parents, teachers, pupils) are recommended as well as a comprehensive learning at school with an accent on health promotion.

### Young People's Lifestyles and Sedentariness

The focal point of this study is to obtain an overall view of the factors leading to overweight, sedentariness and a modern passive lifestyle. There is no single explanation for the sharp rise over the last ten years in the number of overweight children and young people — and the resulting societal diseases — in various regions of Europe. In addition to genetic predisposition, a whole group of factors, such as poor eating habits, increased media consumption and lack of physical activity, against the backdrop of changing living conditions, are responsible for this trend. According to this a networked strategy is essential to encounter the complex causes and consequences of this development with a broad catalogue of preventive arrangements which should comprise short- and medium as well as long-term activities in the member countries of the EU.

## **B. Recommendations**

### **1. Establishment of an EU-platform for “Active Living”**

There must be an interdisciplinary platform “Active Living” on EU basis which develops a networked preventive strategy for action and comprises all spheres of children and adolescents which play an important role within the everyday life of young people: parents’ house, school, sport and youth clubs, living environment and the community. Next to the cognitive education about risks and consequences of sedentariness, especially the emotional area of adolescents has to be addressed to achieve a self-acceptance with a desire for a changed active lifestyle, i. e. with a healthy nutrition attitude, a creative use of media and intensive sportive activity. To this also environmental variables count, such as criteria for urban development and for movement spaces in the urban development.

### **2. Community based network-projects in four EU-regions**

On the basis of such an networked strategy for action the EU-platform should develop example arrangements with compulsory benchmarks for “best practice examples”, respectively evaluate available concepts and already implemented actions in EU countries. In doing so criteria should be developed as well as a concept for communal projects which should lead to an applied model project of the EU in at least two communities within four regions of the EU (north, south, west, east) as “best practice example”.

### **3. Compulsory module for “Active Living” as a part of PE curricula**

As element of this strategy for action and of the model project, school is space for living and learning for all children and young people. For this area the EU-platform “Active Living” should develop a sport-related but comprehensive module as a common part of the curriculum for physical education (compulsory part of the subject physical education) in the EU which should be recommended to the national education constitutions for the implementation in their syllabuses for school sport as module. In this context, European-wide arrangements need to be taken in the countries of the EU, which ensure a daily movement offer for children and young people in school and in networks with different partners.

### **4. Information campaigns on the role of sedentariness in the context of nutrition and obesity of young people**

There is an almost not understandable flood of information of producers about their products for parents, children and young people on the sectors of food and luxury foodstuffs. We need to encounter this flood of information with an adequate public education and in the different media. It is also the task of PR-agencies in the advertising economy to deliver an education appropriate for everyone’s age about risks and consequences of wrong nutrition (too fat and too sweet) and of a sedentary leisure time. Especially on TV and in the internet sedentariness as complex problem of modern societies in the EU is not sufficiently picked out as a central theme.

### **5. Special programmes for obese young people in sport and social clubs**

Sport organisations including their member associations and member sport clubs should make clear with a strong emphasis that physical activity appropriate for everyone’s age enhances the physical fitness and diminishes the risk of illnesses with children and young people. At the same time one should be aware of the fact that physical activity and sport practice should not only be seen under the aspect of metabolic energy consumption, but also as an instrument which demonstrably supports the interaction of biological and

psycho-social aspects in the development of children and adolescents. Special offers which already exist for overweight children and adolescents in some European countries should be supported lastingly and further expanded. For the future, an improved collaboration with scientific institutions is recommended in all European countries, with view to programme planning as well as to programme evaluation (scientific attendance).

#### **6. Building a network of EU-research units for interdisciplinary life style studies**

A network of national research institutes should be developed on the level of an EU-platform "Active Living". It is the task of these research institutes to develop and implement middle-term an empirical EU-study which investigates the interplay of manifold life-style factors in an integrated and interdisciplinary approach from the earliest stages in life up to high age in adulthood in countries of the EU. This is a first step to establish a long-term "monitoring" of the problem of sedentariness with its consequences in single EU-countries and to use these results for a broad national guidance in politics and intervention (sport, health, nutrition, education, social aspects).