

# MOVING policy index

# Physical activity policy in 30 European countries



In collaboration with

# MOVING policy index:

## Physical activity policy status in 30 European countries

### Executive summary

Government action to create environments where people find it easy to eat a healthy diet and be physically active is essential for the prevention of overweight and obesity among adolescents. This brief presents an overview of physical activity policy status at European level, based on benchmarking national government policies against the **MOVING benchmarking tool**.

The brief shows indexed results of 30 European countries, produced by rating countries based on the quality of their policy design across each policy area of the **MOVING framework**. It is accompanied by a complementary policy brief, focusing on nutrition policy (see **NOURISHING brief**).

### Main findings

Just under two thirds of the countries analysed took a comprehensive approach to physical activity policy by implementing policies in all six areas of the MOVING framework (see more details on page 5).

#### Countries are showing most action in:

promoting physical activity in schools and the wider community (M), offering physical activity opportunities in the workplace (and training in physical activity promotion across multiple professions) (O), and public communication policies which build behaviour change skills (N).

#### Countries are taking insufficient action in:

the two MOVING policy areas that target the active environment, specifically structures and surroundings which promote physical activity (V), and transport infrastructure and opportunities that support active societies (I).

#### Countries are implementing poorly designed policies in:

physical activity training, assessment and counselling in healthcare settings (G), with little to no focus on training for healthcare professionals in this area.



The brief can be used by a range of stakeholders to advance national physical activity policies.

**Policymakers** can utilise the policy design criteria in the benchmarking tool to improve current policies (in particular structural policies), to identify gaps at national level, and to identify opportunities for action at local and regional level.

**Civil society**, including **youth groups**, can identify weaknesses in the policy status. These weaknesses can inform advocacy efforts to improve policy action by national governments and to lower the current and future rates of overweight and obesity.

**Researchers** can compare higher-scoring and lower-scoring countries to identify how existing policies can be improved to meet aspirational design standards (see details on page 12). They can also identify where results could be supplemented by additional analyses at local level and in specific settings.

## Background

In Europe, overweight and obesity affects one in five adolescents. Fewer than one in five meet the WHO daily physical activity recommendations, and almost half (48%) eat no fruits or vegetables daily [1]. Nutrition [2] and physical activity [3] habits developed in adolescence continue into adulthood, making it vital that non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention starts with tackling unhealthy diets and promoting physical activity – two key factors for health – during early years, childhood, adolescence, and later in life.

Prevention is key: otherwise overweight and obesity is set to become the leading risk factor for cancer (surpassing smoking), while also being linked as a risk for other NCDs [4].

Government action to create enabling environments where people find it easy to eat a healthy diet and be physically active is essential for obesity prevention. To achieve this, more action and advocacy are needed to drive policy development and implementation.



Research conducted as part of the **CO-CREATE project** found that most obesity prevention strategies targeting adolescents focused on individual behaviour change and targeted

school settings [5]. This means we know little about structural policy measures that could change environments, and their impact on adolescent diet and physical activity [6]. Even when policies do not target adolescents directly, they are likely to have an impact on their health by shaping the environments where they live.

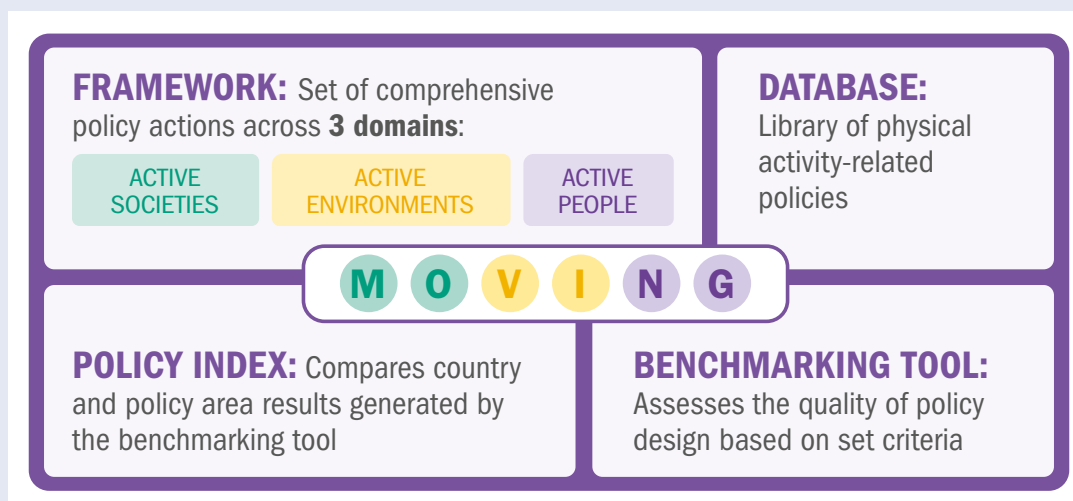
This policy brief focuses on physical activity policy and presents an overview of the status of national government policy actions in 30 European countries. It is produced by benchmarking policy actions from the **MOVING database** and is accompanied by a complementary **NOURISHING policy brief** focusing on nutrition in the same countries.

## Methods

The MOVING policy index is structured around the MOVING framework [7] and developed by applying the MOVING benchmarking tool [8]. The policy index is one of a set of policy tools developed as part of the CO-CREATE project to monitor, benchmark and compare national government physical activity policies (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**

Policy tools for monitoring, benchmarking and comparing national government physical activity policies



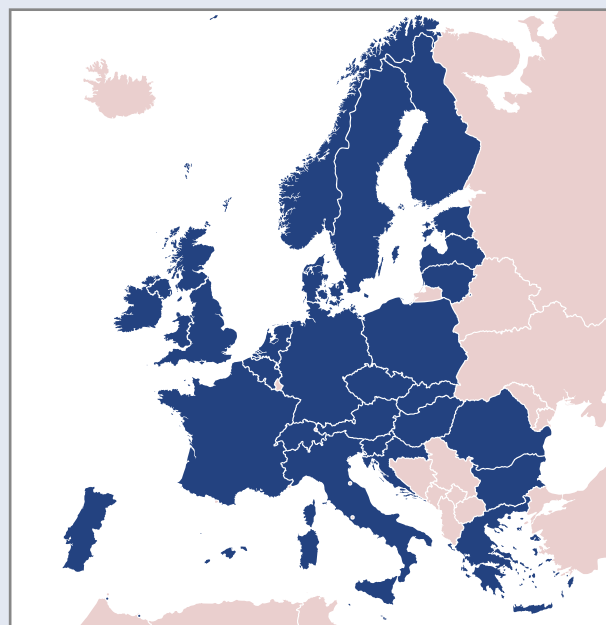
The MOVING benchmarking tool [8] was developed as part of the CO-CREATE project to assess national government policy actions with reference to aspirational standards. As current government action is insufficient, the benchmarking tool holds governments accountable to a higher, aspirational, standard rather than comparisons to current best practice. The tool includes 23 benchmarks (and associated indicators) across the six policy areas of the MOVING framework.

The indicators are measured by two types of attributes: a) **one attribute for the existence of a policy action**, and b) **an associated set of policy attributes to assess the quality of design of the policy actions**.

The benchmarking tools were applied to national government policy actions collected via a comprehensive scan conducted for 30 European countries (see Figure 2). The inclusion criteria for countries chosen and the methods for the comprehensive scan are publicly available [9, 10] and briefly explained below. Policies from the 30 countries included were sourced through this comprehensive scan, and are publicly available in the **MOVING database**. These policies were used to generate the index results.

The comprehensive scan was carried out between 2019–2022 by World Cancer Research Fund International researchers. If the policy actions identified met the inclusion criteria (see Box 1), its description was sent to country experts for verification. These experts were civil servants or researchers at national research institutes or universities, identified with support from the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The results of the comprehensive scan are included in the MOVING database and can be downloaded and analysed freely.

**Figure 2.** Overview of the 30 European countries included in the MOVING policy index



**Box 1.** Inclusion criteria of policy actions included in the MOVING database



→ **1. National level policy actions**

- For policy actions to be included they had to be implemented at a national level.



→ **2. Government policy actions**

- Implemented in partnership, supported, sponsored, or endorsed by the government.
- Programmes run by non-governmental actors were also included if endorsed by national governments. Voluntary schemes run by industry or non-governmental actors without government endorsement were not eligible.



→ **3. Implemented policy actions**

- In effect or enforced at the time of the scan (2019–2022).



→ **4. Sufficient information available**

- Information required: name of the policy action, implementation and/or publication date, and enough information to draft a policy description.

## Benchmarking policies and producing index scores

The index results are produced in two stages:

- **Benchmark scores (0–100)** = Policy action presence (“no” = 0, “yes” = 50) + Average of design attributes scores (0–50)
- **Policy area scores (0–100)** = Calculated average (mean) of benchmark scores for each policy area

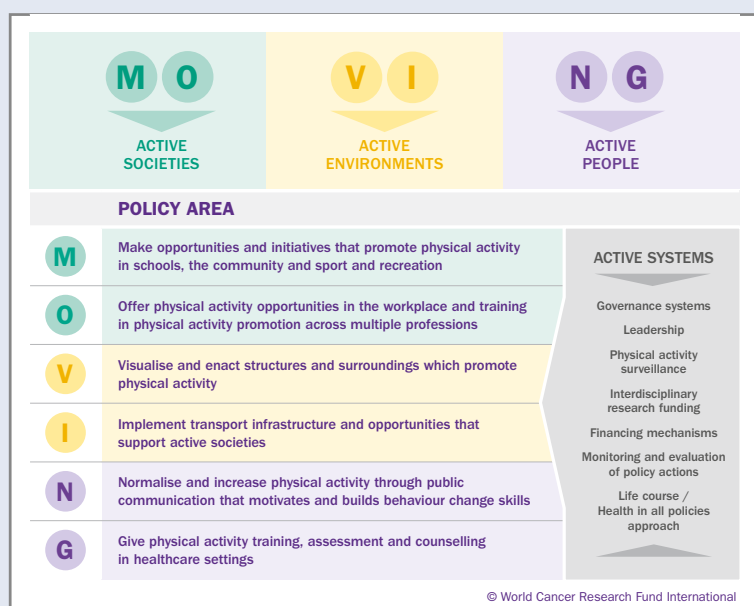
Detailed explanations on the development and application of the benchmarking tools are available [8]. An overall index score was not calculated because the number of benchmarks is not distributed equally across the policy areas.

Further, each benchmark is associated with a variable number of quality attributes. However, the distribution of benchmarks and design attributes is in line with existing evidence and was developed via extensive expert consultation [8].

The final policy area scores were grouped into five categories (see Box 2). A score of 0 indicates no policy actions are in place within the respective policy area, and a score of 100 indicates all aspirational attributes have been met.

**Box 2.** Categorisation of policy area scores for the MOVING policy index

No policy	NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED
1–24	POOR
25–49	FAIR
50–74	MODERATE
75–99	GOOD
100	EXCELLENT



**The MOVING framework** consists of six key policy areas within three domains: **active societies, active environments, and active people** – which make up a comprehensive approach to physical activity policy.

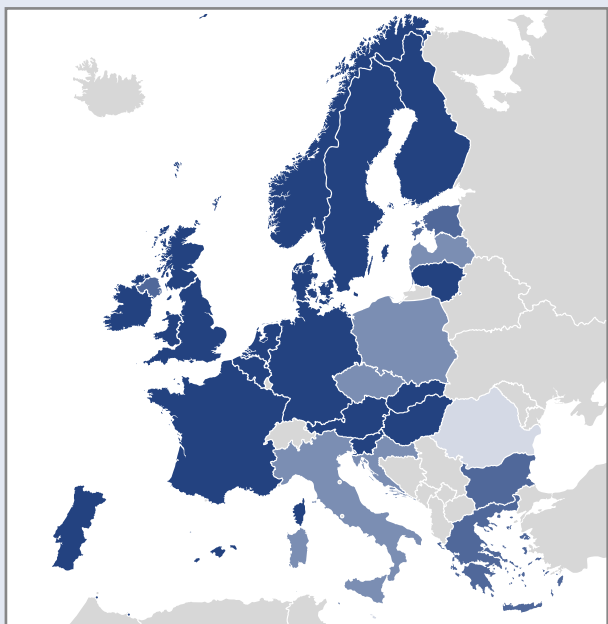
## The MOVING policy index

The policy index results for the 30 countries are presented comparatively in Figure 3 and discussed below. In addition, 30 country snapshots were produced that supplement the policy index results with an in-depth look at the quality of policy design in each country. To consult the country snapshots, please visit our [website](#).

Figure 3. National government policy design in 30 European countries

COUNTRY	M	O	V	I	N	G
Austria	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Red
Belgium	Light Green	Yellow	Red	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Bulgaria	Orange	Grey	Red	Red	Orange	Red
Croatia	Yellow	Orange	Grey	Grey	Orange	Red
Czech Republic	Orange	Orange	Grey	Orange	Orange	Grey
Denmark	Light Green	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Light Green	Orange
England	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Estonia	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Grey
Finland	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Light Green	Orange
France	Yellow	Dark Green	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Red
Germany	Light Green	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
Greece	Yellow	Light Green	Red	Grey	Light Green	Red
Hungary	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Orange	Orange	Red
Ireland	Light Green	Light Green	Orange	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Italy	Yellow	Orange	Grey	Grey	Light Green	Red
Latvia	Orange	Orange	Red	Grey	Orange	Grey
Lithuania	Yellow	Light Green	Red	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Malta	Light Green	Grey	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey
Netherlands	Yellow	Light Green	Orange	Red	Orange	Red
Northern Ireland	Yellow	Grey	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange
Norway	Yellow	Light Green	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange
Poland	Light Green	Yellow	Red	Grey	Orange	Grey
Portugal	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Orange	Yellow	Light Green
Romania	Orange	Grey	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey
Scotland	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange
Slovakia	Orange	Yellow	Red	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Slovenia	Orange	Orange	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
Spain	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Sweden	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Red
Wales	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange

**Figure 4:** Overview of policy areas covered by national government policy action in the 30 European countries



Of the 30 countries analysed, 19 countries took a comprehensive approach to physical activity policy meaning they implemented physical activity policy actions in all policy areas of the MOVING framework.

However, the primary consideration in the index is the quality of the policies implemented. Most assessments across the MOVING index are poor, fair or moderate. These are based on the quality of the design of policies implemented.

Most good assessments (n=10) were achieved by the policy area that targets **public communication policies which build behaviour change skills** **N**. This was followed by the policy area on **physical activity in the workplace and training for non-healthcare professionals** **O**, where Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Norway received a good assessment.



One country – France – achieved an excellent assessment, due to policies on physical activity in the workplace and training for non-health professionals supported by legislation and regulations. On average, policy assessments across the remaining countries received a moderate assessment.

The Czech Republic, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Poland and Romania took the least comprehensive approach by implementing policy actions in four or less policy areas across the MOVING framework. All seven countries had policies implemented in **promoting physical activity in schools and wider community** **M** and **public communication policies which build behaviour change skills** **N**. No policy actions were identified in the **built environment** **V** and **transport infrastructure** **I** for Croatia, Italy, Malta and Romania.



## Where was national government action concentrated?

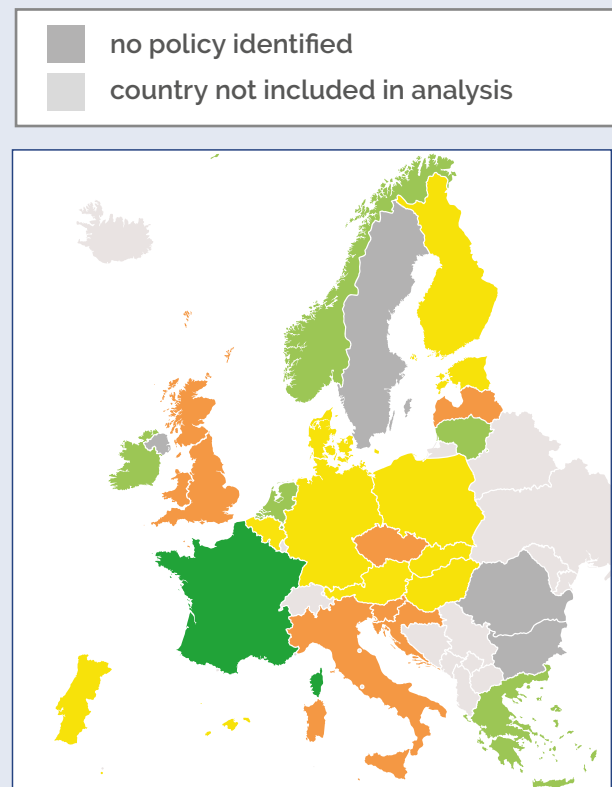
Three policy areas were covered by a majority of countries and received at least a fair assessment across countries: **promoting physical activity in schools and the wider community** **M**, **public communication policies which build behaviour change skills** **N**, and **offering physical activity opportunities in the workplace and training in physical activity promotion across multiple professions** **O**.

First, all countries have taken action in **promoting physical activity in schools and the wider community** **M**. However, a majority of the countries (n= 16) received a moderate assessment. Only six countries, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Malta and Poland, received a good assessment in this area. This is due to national government taking action across all benchmarks, which include physical activity in and outside of classrooms and school hours, community and participation initiatives that target people of all ages and abilities, as well as financial incentives to promote physical activity.

Second, under half the countries received a good assessment in **public communication policies which build behaviour change skills** **N**. Those were the countries that adopted physical activity guidelines that were also accompanied by well-designed public awareness campaigns, specifically those that use social marketing, focus on inactive population segments and that point to services or environmental changes to support behaviour change. The remaining countries received either a fair (n=13) or moderate (n=7) assessment. Thus, although implementation was strong across the 30 countries analysed, improvements are needed in policy design for more than half the countries.

Third, 25 countries implemented policies focusing on offering **physical activity opportunities in the workplace and training in physical activity promotion across multiple professions** **O**. Out of these, only France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Norway received a good assessment, meaning they implemented policies focused on the workplace, as well as training for relevant professions outside of healthcare.

**Figure 5.** Overview of the status of physical activity opportunities in the workplace and training in physical activity promotion across multiple professions **O**



### Recommendations



Action to date shows that countries have focused on public awareness and on behaviour change skills. Well-designed policies in this area should include both physical activity guidelines and well-designed public awareness campaigns.

Action across all areas of physical activity promotion in schools and the community is needed, including physical activity outside of school hours, and physical activity for people of all ages and abilities.

Lastly, national governments should ensure that they put in place national policy action supporting physical activity in the workplace and training in physical activity promotion for professions outside of healthcare.



## Where was there least action from national governments or poor policy design?

National governments have implemented policies that received mostly poor or fair assessments in the two MOVING policy areas that target the active environment, specifically **structures and surroundings which promote physical activity** **V** and **transport infrastructure and opportunities that support active societies** **I**. Gaps in action for these policy areas were also identified: out of the 30 countries analysed, five did not implement any policy actions on structures and surroundings which promote physical activity and seven had no action for transport infrastructure.

Of the 24 countries which implemented a policy action within **structures and surroundings which promote physical activity** **V**, most (n=13) received a poor assessment. Norway was the only country to be assessed as moderate. Norway received this assessment because it had implemented policies on all but one relevant policy action, specifically design guidelines and regulations for buildings. The implemented policy actions referred to active design guidelines outside buildings, for open/green spaces, walking and cycling infrastructure, integrated urban design and land-use policies, and policies to ensure access to quality public open space and green spaces.



For this policy area, structures and surroundings which promote physical activity, national government action was concentrated on walking and cycling infrastructure,

implemented by 19 countries. In contrast, the least action from national governments was on integrated urban design and land use policies, where only Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Wales have taken action.

Most of the countries that implemented policies on **transport infrastructure and active travel** **I** received a fair assessment (n=15). Four countries, Finland, Germany, Norway, and Slovenia received a moderate assessment, as these four countries

implemented policies to support public transport, road safety actions, policies to promote active transport and mass communication campaigns on active transport.

Importantly, nine countries did not have policy actions implemented in either structures and surroundings which promote physical activity or transport infrastructure, with four of those countries (Croatia, Italy, Malta and Romania) having no policy actions implemented across either policy area.

A third policy area, **physical activity training, assessment and counselling in healthcare settings** **G**, received only poor or fair assessments for the 24 countries that took action at national government level. Most countries that did take action implemented actions on physical activity assessment, counselling or prescriptions in primary care. Only four countries (Belgium, France, Ireland and Portugal) offered physical activity counselling in outpatient settings and ten included physical activity training for healthcare professionals in their national policies. Portugal was the only country that achieved a good assessment in this area, by implementing well-designed policies across all three of these policy actions (primary care, outpatient settings and training for healthcare professionals in physical activity promotion).

### Recommendations



National governments should prioritise policy actions which target the built environment and transport infrastructure including public and active transport. Taken together, these policy areas are key in creating active environments where physical activity is the easiest option.

National governments should improve the quality of training in physical activity for healthcare professionals to support existing policies on offering physical activity assessment, counselling or prescription.

## How can countries improve current policies?

Policy area	Countries with NO POLICY IDENTIFIED or scoring POOR or FAIR	Policy design improvements* * For full recommendations, consult aspirational standards table <a href="http://wcrf.org/benchmarking-physical-activity-policy">wcrf.org/benchmarking-physical-activity-policy</a>
<b>M</b> Physical activity in schools, the community and sport, and recreation	8/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure mandatory inclusion of physical activity in and outside of the classroom and beyond school hours in both primary and secondary school children.</li> <li>2. Develop legislation on financial incentives which promotes physical activity in adolescents, people of all abilities and least active groups.</li> <li>3. Support community level and mass participation initiatives which target adolescents, people of all abilities and least active groups to promote physical activity.</li> </ol>
<b>O</b> Physical activity in the workplace and training for multiple professions	13/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop regulations on the inclusion and promotion of physical activity in the workplace.</li> <li>2. Ensure mandatory training in physical activity for more than one non-healthcare professional which are based on competency-based standards.</li> </ol>
<b>V</b> Structures and surroundings which promote physical activity	29/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure regulation surrounding building design guidelines which encourages physical activity.</li> <li>2. Develop legislation and regulations on active design guidelines for in and outside buildings, open and green spaces, walking and cycling infrastructure, and urban design and land-use that encourage physical activity.</li> <li>3. These regulations should target groups such as adolescents, people of all abilities and least active groups.</li> </ol>
<b>I</b> Transport infrastructure and active societies	26/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop regulations to increase the provision of public transport and to promote active transport that also target adolescents, people of all abilities and least active groups.</li> <li>2. Strengthen public information campaigns which increase awareness about road safety, promote the use of public transport and active transport focusing on key target groups such as inactive populations, and those classified as vulnerable or marginalised.</li> <li>3. Develop regulations that promote active transport, including to and from primary and secondary schools and work.</li> </ol>
<b>N</b> Public communication	13/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen mass communication campaigns to promote physical activity by including social marketing and signposting to more services or information such as policy actions, programs, or environmental changes to support the behaviours targeted.</li> <li>2. The target group of the mass communication campaigns should be the inactive populations, and those classified as vulnerable or marginalised.</li> <li>3. Physical activity guidelines should target children and adolescents and be disseminated through mass communication campaigns targeting these populations.</li> </ol>
<b>G</b> Physical activity training, assessment and counselling in healthcare settings	29/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure mandatory physical activity training for more than one type of healthcare professionals which are based on competency-based standards.</li> <li>2. Develop regulations on physical activity counselling, assessment, and physical activity prescription, and ensure that these take a specific focus on children and adolescents with obesity related issues.</li> </ol>

## Contextualising the policy index findings

This brief presents the status of national government policy action in physical activity across 30 European countries. It shows which countries have implemented well-designed policy actions for each of the six policy areas of the MOVING framework, while also highlighting where there are gaps in action, and how to improve poorly designed policies according to the aspirational standards used in our assessment.

These results present a quality assessment of current action at national government level. As such, they cannot draw a causal link between the quality of policy design and any changes in the prevalence of overweight and obesity, in the absence of repeat benchmarking. Further, they do not consider extent of implementation, or any action taken by regional, provincial or local governments.

When used in context, these findings need to be judged carefully against a situational assessment in each country. Some suggested questions to contextualise findings:

- **Are countries that have taken action across all areas of the MOVING framework doing so in response to a lack of enabling conditions for physical activity?**
- **Conversely, will countries with an existing enabling environment for physical activity be likely to take less action?**
- **Do findings focused on national level actions miss current action at provincial, regional or local levels?**
  - Findings for countries with a federal governance arrangement (eg, Germany, Austria, Belgium) or with decentralised governance (eg, Spain, Italy) should be contextualised by considering provincial or regional action.
- **What national policy actions can be complemented by action at local government level?**
  - Action in physical activity promotion is often the remit of regional or local governments. Thus, the results of this index, which focus on national government policy action, should be considered in the context of analyses at regional or local levels.
- **Among policies that are missing, which policies are likely to have most impact on preventing overweight and obesity?**
  - We know that structural, regulatory policies should be prioritised, as they are the most likely to impact environments, and reach people that need them most. These are also least actioned by governments.
  - However, no single policy action is sufficient to effectively curb the rise in adolescent obesity, and action is necessary across multiple policy areas [4, 5].

Other questions to contextualise the findings are [available here](#).

## References

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### About Co-Create

Funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, CO-CREATE brought together 14 international research and advocacy organisations to work with young people to create, inform and promote policies for obesity prevention.  
[co-create.eu](http://co-create.eu)

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