

# Good practices in Promoting Physical Activity in workplace; Guimarães, Portugal

## Workplace

### Guimarães, Portugal

Socio-demographic indicators:

Municipality/City Population: 158 124

Gender ratio: Female 51%; Male 49%

Age distribution: The average age of the resident population is 40.6 years.

0-14 (14%), 15-64 (68%), +66 (18%)

Socio-economic indicators:

GDP per capita: 19,604 euro

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### Health and Physical Activity Issues

Fighting physical inactivity among the population in general;

Involving more women in outdoor sports and physical activities;

Raising-awareness among the population to adopt daily practices that promote physical activity (walking, using the bicycle);

Contributing to physical and sport activity for the over 45-year-old age group of the population;

Contributing to decrease the prevalence of diseases associated with physical inactivity (obesity, overweight, diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and cancer).



### **Why did you start a strategy / an activity / a project?**

Physical inactivity is a widespread and worrying phenomenon in all dimensions of social life. Although the municipality of Guimarães has physical activity promotion policies (dating back from 30 years ago, starting with the construction of infrastructures and the consequent provision of physical activity services and sports for all programs), the truth is that physical inactivity rates are high and in line with national performance.

Considering that Guimarães is an industrial city (48% of the economic activity is based in industries; industrial activity in the textile sector is predominant (41%), followed by footwear and cutlery, representing half of all economic activity in the municipal territory), the strictest working hours regime, labour based on repetitive activities, fixed positions (sitting and / or standing for hours), are some of the findings that preceded the concern to implement a program that involves companies in a plan of good practice of physical activity in the workplace environment.

Following recent surveys in Guimarães a significant part of the respondents expressed their opinion about the need to implement physical exercise programs in companies.

Civic, cultural and legislative obstacles persist, as well as economic imperatives against which it is difficult to combat or propose change, however, it is believed that with science based data, it is possible to introduce a pilot program that allows to demonstrate the correlation between physical activity, workers well-being and work performance.

Driven by examples from other countries and municipalities, as well as awareness by programs such as PACTE, Tempo Livre decided to prepare a program that aims to implement a physical activity service appropriate to the reality of each sector and in line with a more global strategy for the promotion of physical activity.

### **What do you do?**

Presently, there is no public program specifically focused on this subject, however, there are some companies that individually implement facilitating measures (active breaks, physical activity classes in the company, sponsorship of gyms). Therefore, Tempo Livre is preparing a proposal to implement a pilot program to promote active work environments. Based on the existing indicators - physical inactivity, low sports practice rates, prevalence of diseases associated with sedentarism, work absenteeism, public opinion in favour of implementing a physical activity program in the work environment - it was proposed to conduct a Tempo Livre pilot program to test the feasibility of the project and to foresee its broader implementation.

The target group is the working age population (men and women) aged 25 to 65, integrated into the working world. It is intended to orient the program to specific professional groups:

- workers with repetitive manual tasks;
- administrative workers (more sedentary and subject to posture errors);
- workers who stand long hours.

### **How do you do it?**

Before starting with the pilot program, an internal survey was conducted among Tempo Livre workers. We applied an internal questionnaire to our 112 employees (including logistics and maintenance, technical staff, administrative and physical education teachers). From these we

obtained 81 valid questionnaires. The working group is very heterogeneous in terms of tasks performed, ranging from typically sedentary (administrative) to physically demanding functions (physical education teachers and logistics and maintenance staff). The results revealed a team that is very aware of the benefits of regular sport and concerned with taking active breaks (sedentary group) and relaxation (for those who perform physical tasks).

Most Tempo Livre employees practice physical activity outside working hours (83%) against 17% who are inactive. The majority (82%) pay attention to practicing relaxation exercises during or after work (e.g. stretching / joint mobilization, lunch break / drinking water / drinking coffee, leaving the workspace for fresh air, etc.), and around 90% adopt measures to combat physical inactivity (e.g. climbing stairs instead of taking the elevator, taking exercise breaks, leaving the workspace for fresh air, etc.).

The respondents indicated as main reasons for practicing physical activity in their regular life and work life: “improve health and well-being” (88%), “to stay active” (52%), and “to relax” (41%).

We asked workers their opinion about the importance of regular physical activity and how does it affects their professional performance and the answers were: “Improves the ability to concentration and focus” (14%), “Improves professional performance” (17%), “Contributes to well-being and positive mood” (69%).

#### **What are the Challenges and Successes?**

The main challenges have been to adapt the format of a physical activity service to the work context with the inflexibilities of management and the operations of certain companies and services, as well as the Portuguese labour legislation which is very restrictive regarding breaks.

We hope to adapt the program to the conditions of each situation and try to provide the best possible answer.

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