SPORT FOR ALL – SPORT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH?
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Compelling recent evidence shows remarkable health potential for physical activity. How is the sport for all movement reacting to this new challenge? The global sport for all movement has issued formal declarations in the six world congresses since 1994. The importance of sport for all in promoting public health has been consistently highlighted in all of them. As these declarations should reflect the ingenuous ambition of the sport for all movement, it is of interest to explore how the health issues are being realised in the practice of sport for all.

The Sport for All Committee of the International Olympic Committee commissioned a survey among the European National Olympic Committees (NOC). All 48 European NOCs were asked about the role and status of sport for all in their programmes and in particular how the health issues indicated in the declarations were dealt with in the NOCs. Data from 37 NOCs (77% response rate) showed the following: Two thirds of the NOCs had an article on sport for all in their statutes, 54% had a sport for all commission or committee, and nearly 60% allocated funds for sport for all. Majority of the committees reported formal and regular contacts with their respective national health authorities. Half of the committees reported that there are national sport for all policies or programs with the principal aim of promoting public health in their country. In most cases the NOC participated as a consultant in developing the policies and programs. Most of the reported policies and programs concerned either sport legislation or sport policies. Comprehensive health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) policies were reported in only three countries. The rest were narrow-focused HEPA policies, general health promotion programs, limited HEPA promotion programs or topical publications.

These results suggest that while the global sport for all movement considers the promotion of health as an important new social challenge, the sport for all movement as part of the European Olympic community has been only marginally active in promoting sport for all for health. This is in sharp contrast to the situation among the European public health community where physical activity has been placed firmly on the health agenda in many countries. Thus, the realisation of the potential of sport for all for public health remains to be only partially supported by the Olympic sport for all movement in Europe.

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