

Sports Club for Health (SCforH) resolution 2022



This resolution was issued as part of the “Creating Mechanisms for Continuous Implementation of the Sports Club for Health Guidelines in the European Union” (SCforH2020-22) project, funded by the Erasmus+ Collaborative Partnerships grant (ref: 613434-EPP-1-2019-1-HR-SPO-SCP) and Young Researchers’ Career Development Project, funded by Croatian Science Foundation (ref: DOK-2020-01-8078).

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Publisher

University of Zagreb
Faculty of Kinesiology
Horvaćanski zavoj 15
10000 Zagreb, Croatia
E-mail: dekanat@kif.unizg.hr

Suggested citation

Pedišić Ž, Matolić T, Benedičić Tomat S, Háp P, Hartmann H, Kokko S, Koski P, Lane A, Oja P, Ti-tze S, Veress R, Jurakić D. Sports Club for Health (SCforH) resolution, 2022. Zagreb, Croatia: Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Zagreb; 2022.

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The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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1. Background

The Sports Club for Health (SCforH) movement has a long and rich history in Europe (1). Through its numerous activities that have been recognised and supported by the European Commission and the Council of the European Union, the SCforH movement has become an integral part of the sports and health promotion system in the Europe (1, 2).

In the past 15 years, the European Commission provided funding for three international SCforH projects (1, 3). The first project was titled “Sports Club for Health” (hereafter abbreviated as “SCforH 2009-11 project”) and realised from 2009 to 2011. The main outcomes of the project were:

- the second version of SCforH guidelines (4) with recommendations for the implementation of health-enhancing sports activities in sports clubs;
- health profiles of specific sports disciplines based on scientific evidence aimed to serve as a basis for the promotion of health-enhancing sports activities in sports clubs;
- a questionnaire for sports clubs that can be used for self-evaluation of their efforts to promote health-enhancing sports activities;
- an established consortium of stakeholders in the European sports system interested in the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity through sports clubs.

The second project was titled “Promoting National Implementation for Sports Club for Health (SCforH) Programmes in EU Member States” (hereafter abbreviated as “SCforH 2015-17 project”) and realised from 2015 to 2017. The main outcomes of the project were:

- the third version of SCforH guidelines (5) with the definitions of key SCforH concepts, seven guiding principles of the SCforH approach, recent scientific evidence on health benefits of sport and physical activity, recommended ways to implement SCforH programmes in sports clubs, and considerations for promoting health-enhancing sports activities among all age groups;
- a survey-based report on the awareness and use of SCforH guidelines in 36 European countries (unpublished);
- an Electronic Toolkit with practical recommendations for implementing SCforH initiatives in sports clubs and associations (6);
- a scientific article titled “Does sports club participation contribute to physical activity among children and adolescents? A comparison across six European countries” (7) and several conference abstracts presenting research evidence relevant to the SCforH movement;
- an expanded consortium of stakeholders in the European sports system interested in the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity through sports clubs.

Based on the findings of the second SCforH project, the SCforH consortium issued a resolution on the suggested activities to continue promoting the awareness and use of SCforH guidelines in Europe after the end of the project. In the resolution, it was envisaged that the activities of the SCforH consortium will continue through: regular updates of the official SCforH website; posts on SCforH Twitter profile; meetings of the HEPA Europe SCforH working group; and local- and national-level promotion of SCforH guidelines by the members of SCforH consortium. In the resolution, it was also stated that the status of SCforH movement in Europe should be re-assessed after some time.

The third project was titled “Creating Mechanisms for Continuous Implementation of the Sports Club for Health Guidelines in the European Union” (hereafter abbreviated as “SCforH 2020-22 project”) and realised from 2020 to 2022. The main outcomes of the project were:

- an edited book titled “Sports Club for Health (SCforH) Movement in the European Union” that includes the following book chapters: [i] “Introduction: Sports Club for Health movement” (3), [ii] “Sports Club for Health movement: terminology and definitions” (8), [iii] “Physical activity guidelines for health: evolution, current status, policy context, and future outlook” (9), [iv] “Physical activity and sport participation in the European Union” (10), [v] “The structure of the European sports system as a framework for the implementation of health-enhancing sports activities” (2), [vi] “The history of HEPA Europe: Growing from an EU-funded project towards a WHO-Europe network” (11), [vii] “The history of the Sports Club for Health movement in Europe” (1), [viii] “Sports Club for Health movement in published media: a systematic scoping review” (12), [ix] “Promotion of health-enhancing sports activities through European and international umbrella sports organisations: four examples of good practice” (13), [x] “Dissemination of Sports Clubs for Health guidelines in Europe: a survey-based evaluation” (14), [xi] “Sports Club for Health and similar initiatives in Europe: examples of good practice” (15), and [xii] “Conclusions and future directions” (16);
- a book titled “Sports Club for Health (SCforH) textbook” (17) including an overview of SCforH guidelines written in lay language;
- the SCforH online course (18), including 7 units with videos, infographics, and quizzes presenting the SCforH guidelines in an interactive way;
- a book titled “SCforH Country Cards” (19) including information on the awareness and use of SCforH guidelines in 36 countries in Europe;
- a report on the awareness and use of the SCforH guidelines among HEPA policymakers, promoters, and researchers in Europe (20);
- a report on the use of the SCforH guidelines in the context of higher education courses for health promoters, physical educators, and sport and exercise practitioners in Europe (21);
- four scientific articles: [i] “Health benefits of different sports for adults: systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal and intervention studies” (22), [ii] “Promotion of health-enhancing physical activity in the sport sector: a study among representatives of 536 sports organisations from 36 European countries” (23), [iii] “Raising awareness about the Sports Club for Health (SCforH) guidelines in the sports, higher education, and health promotion sectors using an online learning tool: outcomes of a large initiative in 36 European countries” (24), and [iv] “Is sport and exercise participation related to the environmental and political factors for physical activity in Croatia? A cross-sectional population-based study” (25)
- a book chapter titled “Health promotion in sports settings” (26);
- six conference abstracts (27-32);
- a further expanded consortium of stakeholders in the European sports system interested in the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity through sports clubs.

Given that the previous SCforH resolution had been issued more than 5 years ago and that the SCforH movement has in the meantime significantly advanced, there was a need for a new SCforH resolution. Therefore, based on the findings of the SCforH 2020-22 project, we have written this resolution. The strategies presented in this resolution may help guide future SCforH projects.

2. Evidence informing the resolution

Key findings and lessons learned from the SCforH 2020-22 project are summarised in Table 1. In the scientific article “Health benefits of different sports for adults: systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal and intervention studies” (22), we found evidence on health benefits for various sports. In the “Sports Club for Health (SCforH) textbook” (17), we summarised benefits of sports and physical activity for physical, mental, and social health and well-being. As indicated in our book chapter “Physical activity guidelines for health: evolution, current status, policy context, and future outlook” (9), to achieve these benefits, the World Health Organization (WHO) and national governments in many countries recommend to regularly engage in health-enhancing physical activities of moderate-to-vigorous intensity, such as sports. However, despite the public health recommendations, in our book chapter “Physical activity and sport participation in the European Union” (10), we found that population levels of health-enhancing sport and physical activity should be significantly increased.

In our article “Is sport and exercise participation related to the environmental and political factors for physical activity in Croatia? A cross-sectional population-based study” (25), we found that individuals who feel that their local government supports physical activity promotion and those who think that their local sports clubs offer more opportunities for health-enhancing physical activity are more likely to engage in sports. However, as suggested in our book chapter “The structure of the European sports system as a framework for the implementation of health-enhancing physical sport activities” (2), the current sport systems in the European Union and at the national levels are still far from being optimal for effective promotion of health-enhancing physical activity. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in our book chapters “The history of HEPA Europe: Growing from an EU-funded project towards a WHO-Europe network” (11) and “The history of the Sports Club for Health movement in Europe” (1), HEPA Europe network and SCforH consortium have been very successful in collaboratively facilitating the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity and sports in Europe, despite many challenges.

The book chapter “The history of the Sports Club for Health movement in Europe” (1) also shows that numerous activities have been carried out as part of the SCforH movement, particularly during the three international SCforH projects funded by the European Union. In the book chapter “Sports Club for Health movement in published media: a systematic scoping review” (12), we found a large number of published items that have helped disseminate the SCforH guidelines among the stakeholders in the European sports sector. Importantly, most of them were published during the three funded SCforH projects (12).

It is clear from the interviews published in the book chapter “Promotion of health-enhancing sports activities through European umbrella sports organisations: four examples of good practice” (13) that some of the key umbrella sports organisations in Europe actively promote health-enhancing physical activity and use SCforH guidelines. Results of the SCforH survey conducted in 2016/17 and presented in our article “Promotion of health-enhancing physical activity in the sport sector: a study among representatives of 536 sports organisations from 36 European countries” (23) and in our conference abstract “Sports Club for Health (SCforH): 12 years of a successful European initiative” (32), show a relatively low awareness and use of SCforH guidelines among sports clubs and somewhat better situation among national sports associations. Results of the SCforH survey conducted in 2021/22 and presented in our book chapter “Dissemination of Sports Clubs for Health guidelines in Europe: a survey-based evaluation” (14) show a substantial increase in the awareness and use of SCforH guidelines among sports clubs and associations in the past 5 years. To further demonstrate the success of the SCforH movement, we provided descriptions of a large number of SCforH and related

initiatives in our book chapter “Sports Club for Health and similar initiatives in Europe: examples of good practice” (15). However, from the data presented in our book “SCforH Country Cards” (19), it seems that in some European countries no SCforH initiatives have been implemented, which shows a need for further dissemination of SCforH guidelines among sports clubs and associations in Europe. The need for further dissemination of SCforH guidelines is also obvious from the evidence presented in the “Report on the awareness and use of the SCforH guidelines among HEPA policymakers, promoters, and researchers in Europe” (20) and the “Report on the use of the SCforH guidelines in the context of higher education courses for health promoters, physical educators, and sport and exercise practitioners in Europe (21)”.

The endeavour to increase the awareness and use of SCforH guidelines may be facilitated by the SCforH online course (18), available in 25 languages. As part of the SCforH 2020-22 project, we have already distributed invitations to the online course to 3,809 stakeholders in the European sports sector, including policymakers, representatives of sports associations, public health promoters and researchers, and tertiary education teachers in the fields of health promotion, physical education, and sports and exercise science. As shown in our article “Raising awareness about the Sports Club for Health (SCforH) guidelines in the sports, higher education, and health promotion sectors using an online learning tool: outcomes of a large initiative in 36 European countries” (24), the participants’ reactions to the SCforH online course were mostly very positive.

TABLE 1. KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SPORTS CLUB FOR HEALTH (SCFORH) 2020-22 PROJECT

Sports participation has a range of physical, mental, and social benefits.

The number of sports club members in the European Union could be significantly increased.

The vast potential of the European Union sports system to promote health is still underutilised.

Increasing the awareness of SCforH guidelines may improve the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity in sports clubs and associations.

SCforH is a long-standing, Europe-wide movement recognised and supported by policymakers at the European Union level.

SCforH movement has been supported by key European organisations and networks for the promotion of sport and physical activity.

SCforH guidelines are used and promoted by a range of stakeholders in the sports sector.

Most SCforH-related activities are undertaken during the funded SCforH projects.

The SCforH online course is a modern alternative to traditional modes of learning about the SCforH approach.

Participant satisfaction with the SCforH online course is generally very high.

Translations of the online course into 25 European languages enabled tertiary education teachers to easily implement the course into their curricula.

Technical issues with the SCforH online course can be expected over time; hence, continuous and ongoing support from an IT professional is needed.

Dissemination through a range of channels is needed to reach stakeholders in the sports sectors.

Personalised, direct emails seem to be the most effective way of dissemination among most target groups.

In the dissemination of SCforH guidelines, it may be hard to reach policymakers and sports club representatives.

Local events held in national languages seem to be the most effective way of dissemination of the SCforH guidelines among sports club representatives.

Around 50% of the representatives of sports associations in Europe are still not aware of the SCforH guidelines.

The awareness and use of SCforH guidelines among sports clubs are higher than 10% in only 12 and 8 European countries, respectively.

The awareness of SCforH guidelines in Europe is increasing.

The awareness and use of the SCforH guidelines vary significantly between European countries.

Further dissemination of SCforH guidelines is needed, particularly among sports clubs.

There are numerous ongoing SCforH initiatives, but they do not seem to be implemented in all European countries.

Collaborations of sports clubs with European Union funding agencies, health insurance companies, and national Olympic committees may facilitate implementation of SCforH initiatives.

Quality certification might motivate representatives of sports clubs and associations to adhere to SCforH principles.

3. SWOT analysis

3.1. Strengths

Key strengths of the SCforH movement include:

- Large network of collaborators with diverse expertise, covering most of the European Union member states and several other European countries;
- Long and successful history with numerous activities that have been carried out;
- Various publications and tools that were produced;
- Recognition by the European Commission and the Council of the European Union;
- Relatively high awareness of the SCforH guidelines among the representatives of European and national sports organisations, policymakers, HEPA researchers and promoters, and higher education teachers;
- Successful collaboration of the SCforH consortium with key European umbrella sports organisations, HEPA Europe network, and the European Union Physical Activity Focal Points Network;
- The HEPA Europe SCforH working group that facilitates continuity of SCforH-related activities in the periods with no international, funded SCforH projects.

3.2. Weaknesses

Key weaknesses of the SCforH movement include:

- Limited involvement of policymakers and representatives of sports clubs in the SCforH consortium;
- Decrease in the number of activities between funded projects;
- Relatively low awareness of the SCforH guidelines among the representatives of sports clubs.

3.3. Opportunities

Key opportunities for the SCforH movement include:

- Possibility to expand the SCforH consortium to the European countries that have not been represented by partner institutions in previous international SCforH projects funded by the European Union;
- Good potential to secure future funding from the European Union;
- High probability of further increases in the awareness of SCforH guidelines over time;
- Promising prospect for the SCforH online course to get implemented in the curricula of tertiary education courses across Europe;
- Potential for collaboration with kindergartens, schools, and senior citizens' clubs in the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity;
- Possibility to contribute to broader health promotion in the sports club setting.

3.4. Threats

Key threats to the SCforH movement include:

- Possible gaps in expertise and experience following the retirement of senior members of the SCforH consortium;
- Possible misinterpretation of the SCforH approach and misuse of the SCforH brand by organisations that are not part of the SCforH consortium;
- Possible discontinuation of activities due to a lack of funding in the periods between international, funded SCforH projects.

4. Vision

The vision of the SCforH movement is Europe in which all people, regardless of their gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, place of residence, physical and mental (dis)abilities, health status, and experience in sport have a plethora of opportunities to engage in their preferred health-enhancing sports activities implemented according to the SCforH guidelines in the sports clubs in their locality.

5. Mission

The mission of the SCforH consortium is to help raise population levels of health-enhancing physical activity by increasing the awareness and use of SCforH guidelines among sports clubs and associations in Europe. We are primarily committed to improving the availability and quality of health-enhancing sports activities.

6. Specific objectives

The key objectives of the SCforH consortium for the period between 2023 and 2028 are to:

1. Increase the awareness of SCforH guidelines among the representatives of sports associations by 10 percentage points;
2. Increase the awareness of SCforH guidelines among sports clubs to more than 10% in at least six additional European countries;
3. Increase the use of SCforH guidelines among sports clubs to more than 10% in at least four additional European countries.

7. Recommended actions

The recommended actions to achieve the specific objectives of the SCforH consortium for the period between 2023 and 2028 are to:

- Maintain the wide recognition of the SCforH as a European Union brand by continuing to conduct large, international projects;
- Expand the SCforH consortium by inviting new partner institutions to participate in SCforH projects;
- Strengthen the relationship with the European Union- and national-level policymakers through their direct involvement in the future SCforH projects;
- Increase the involvement of sports club representatives in the future SCforH projects;
- Maintain strong partnerships with European umbrella sports organisations, the HEPA Europe network, and the European Union Physical Activity Focal Points Network;
- Apply for new funding from the European Union;
- Facilitate the transition of knowledge from senior to junior members of the SCforH consortium;
- Continue the dissemination of SCforH guidelines through a range of channels;
- In the 17 European countries that were included in the SCforH funded projects, continue disseminating the guidelines through their SCforH representatives;
- Invite the institutions from the remaining European countries to participate as partners in the future international SCforH projects funded by the European Union;
- Support future national- and local-level SCforH projects;
- Organise local events in national languages to reach sports club representatives;
- Maintain the official SCforH website and social media profiles;
- Translate SCforH materials to all national languages of the European Union;
- Regularly update the content and design of the SCforH online course and other materials;
- Share the examples of good SCforH practice with sports clubs and associations;
- Develop a how-to guide for sports clubs and associations that may help them obtain funding for SCforH initiatives from the European Union, health insurance companies, and national Olympic committees;
- Consider options for creating a SCforH certification system;
- Consider options for protecting the SCforH brand from potential misuse;
- Maintain the operations of the HEPA Europe SCforH working group to ensure the continuation of SCforH-related activities in the periods between funded SCforH projects.

8. Evaluation

Subject to funding from the European Union, SCforH surveys will be conducted in 2024/25 and 2027/28. The following questions from the SCforH survey will be used to evaluate the progress against the specific objectives:

Specific objective 1 - “Prior to this survey, were you aware of the Sports Club for Health (SCforH) guidelines?”, with “yes”, “no”, and “don’t know” as response options (the question is intended for the representatives of sports associations);

Specific objective 2 - “Please estimate the percentage of sports clubs in your country that are aware of the Sports Club for Health (SCforH) guidelines”, with “none”, <10%, 11%-20%, 21%-30%, 31%-40%, 41%-50%, 51%-60%, 61%-70%, 71%-80%, 81%-90%, >90%, and “unable to respond” as response options;

Specific objective 3 - “Please estimate the percentage of sports clubs in your country that implemented ‘Sports Club for Health’ programmes according to the Sports Club for Health (SCforH) guidelines”, with “none”, <10%, 11%-20%, 21%-30%, 31%-40%, 41%-50%, 51%-60%, 61%-70%, 71%-80%, 81%-90%, >90%, and “unable to respond” as response options.

To evaluate progress, the findings of the SCforH 2024/25 and 2027/28 surveys will be compared with the findings of the SCforH 2021/22 survey.

9. Final remarks

The SCforH approach is a long-standing, Europe-wide initiative with clearly defined principles and a range of important benefits for sports clubs and their members. Increasing the awareness of SCforH guidelines may help reach the vast potential of sports clubs to promote health that is currently underutilised in Europe. The awareness of SCforH guidelines is increasing but it still significantly varies across European countries. Also, SCforH initiatives have been successfully implemented across Europe, but their number is still relatively low. Given that it is hard to reach some groups of stakeholders in the sports sector, such as policymakers and sports club representatives, creative and modern ways of dissemination are needed. Importantly, the dissemination should be ongoing and systematic. To maximise the progress of SCforH movement in the next five years, this resolution should serve as a guide for its future activities.

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