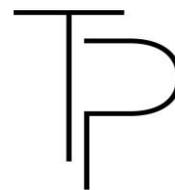




# Comparative Report



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## Introduction

**Balanced Living through Healthy Nutrition Habits** (BLHNH) addresses the **challenge** of promoting a mutually **reinforcing combination** between **Sport activity** and **healthy practices of living** (including proper nutrition and non-sedentary lifestyles) as a means of enhancing a **greater physical and mental wellbeing** at the level of the **youth**.

The audience of project beneficiaries at the ultimate level is composed of **young people** aged 16-24 in partner countries and Europe. The main youth sub-category addressed is composed of **youngsters with fewer opportunities** (NEETs, early school leavers) with a view to addressing the direct relationship between low rates of physical activity and belonging to disadvantaged groups. The **direct audience** of targets includes **Sport operators** (Coaches and Trainers active in grassroots Sport organizations), **youth operators** (NGO trainers) working with the youth in a complementary fashion **to formal education** and **health practitioners** (nutritionists and fitness experts specialized in youth health).

BLHNH addresses the issue of **low physical activity** at the level of the European population, complementing it with an attention to the dimension of **health-enhancing** living practices in a holistic approach to **individual and social health and wellbeing**.

## The Report

The **collection** and **analysis** of **National Research Reports** was performed by the WP leader with the intent of drawing a comparative outline of findings across the national and sectorial (Sport, NGO, fitness/nutrition) findings of research and is contained in the present Report.

The **Research Report** is crucial both for identifying existing good practices and for an assessment of the general state-of-the-art across partner countries and the different targeted sectors, which will provide the base for the **Handbook**.



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The Report provides a cross country analysis, which considers the national context of each country in order to provide the reader a preventive framework regarding government policies and population habitudes in relation to physical activity and health culture. Subsequently, the report presents a comparative outline of the involved partner countries by focusing on the three sectors, namely NGO, Sport and Fitness and Nutrition and by highlighting the affinities and the differences regarding the target groups considered, the approaches and the finalities pursued by the entities involved in the projects. Finally, the conclusions will summarize the findings and provide a general spectrum of the activities implemented in the analysed projects.

## Cross-Country Analysis

### Romania

In Romania, the trend of an increasing overweight or obese population caused by a sedentary lifestyle is congruent with the data published by the World Health Organization on a global scale. Reveal Marketing Research, under the care of Adriana Toma (Senior Quantitative Analyst), undertook a study to highlight Romanians' perception of the importance of sport in the lives of young people and to identify measures to increase participation in sports activities among children and adolescents. The results show that respondents are aware of the positive impact of sports activities to health, relationship and harmonious development, acting on both the physical and mental level.

Although the interest is obvious, the benefits are major and the public opinion is positive, there are still no concrete actions nor policies at governmental level to make sport a national priority. One of the solutions agreed by the respondents (72%) was the involvement of local institutions and town halls in the organization of public spaces dedicated to the practice of attractive sports. Parents could support this initiative, because 51% of them would be willing to contribute financially for a space where their children can participate in interesting and non-traditional sports (obstacles, parkour, ninja warrior).

### Italy

From a study conducted by the DOXA Institute for Federalimentare in 2004 it emerged that most young people aged 6-17 are familiar with the behaviours connected to a correct lifestyle in relation to physical activity and nutrition. However, the complexity and rhythms of the everyday life pose obstacles to the adoption of good practices, especially regarding physical activity. The minimum levels of physical activity recommended are far from being practiced and from becoming a characterizing element of personal lifestyle, while, for prevention purposes, the aspect more appreciable regarding motor exercise should be continuity. Nevertheless, the survey revealed a figure of a lazy and dissatisfied teenager, unwilling to perform motor activity, dissatisfied with his physical form.



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On average, the starting age regarding sport activities has decreased making sport a less structured activity, while more frequently young people aged 10-24 quit sporting activity due to a lack of time related to study reasons. This phenomenon is relevant since, taking in consideration the number of registered athletes in the National Sports Federation and the Discipline Sportive Associate, it has been calculated that there are more than 2 million potential sportsmen and women, equally divided between boys and girls, who would play sports if they had more free time.

In recent years, there has been a stabilisation of the sedentary rate around 39%, which shows that the number of sedentary people is stable despite an ageing population. The Ministry of Health has entrusted a group of experts to orient the population towards healthier eating habits by developing a reference diet model that is consistent with the current lifestyle and food tradition of Italy. The result was the creation of a weekly pyramid of the Italian lifestyle, based on the definition of "Quantità Benessere" (literally: quantity of wellness) for both food and physical activity. The Italian food pyramid developed by the Institute of Food Science of the University of Rome "La Sapienza" indicates the recommended daily food consumption.

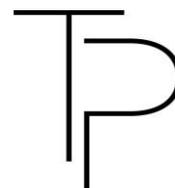
## Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, National Development Program: Bulgaria 2030 has been accepted in 2020, outlining the strategic development of the country with a framework 2020 – 2030. One of the priorities in the mentioned political document is to improve the health characteristics of the population and therefore increase the quality of human capital in the country. The focus of the policy is to ensure equal access for all to quality health services. Achieving the set goals will play a key role in the implementation of Goal 3 "Ensuring a healthy life and promoting the well-being of all at all ages" of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Efforts in the field of sports are focused mainly on increasing population's participation in sports and physical activities. The support of grassroots sport is carried out through the construction of small-scale sports infrastructure, which provide an environment for daily exercise, amateur sports and entertainment, while the focus on students is evident in the renovation of gyms and other school sports infrastructure, which should provide optimal conditions for conducting classes in physical education and sports.

The government is active in the provision of youth services for building personal and professional skills, while there is a positive climate for enacting cooperation between institutions at state, regional and local level looking also for synergies with social partners and non-governmental organizations aiming at the development and social engagement of young people. An important element in youth policies is the inclusion of young people living in small towns and rural areas, which comprises a wider effort in expanding access to quality services and information, developing youth work and intercultural dialogue.

The overall educational system in Bulgaria is still predominately formal and the non-formal educational methods and practices are still on their beginner's stage.



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This reflects also in sport education, where the Ministry of education and science have not included non-formal methods in the curriculum. Young people aged 16-24 can get involved in training programmes of sport education whether in school and/or university sport classes or by getting a profession in sport through VET schools and universities.

There is a wide spectrum of policies and government initiatives in promoting sport and education for young people in Bulgaria, which are aimed at improving the demographic situation of the country and the quality of life achieving the goals set by the European Union. Unfortunately, in Bulgaria there is a decrease in young population, while the higher consumption in alcohol, cigarettes and psychoactive substances among youth is stressing the importance of posing physical activity and proper nutrition as high values. There is a growing trend that after leaving school, a large number of young people stop playing sports, and their daily lives are characterized by low physical activity and insufficient care to maintain good shape. Up to the age of 18, young people at risk are covered by the Child Protection Act. The access of young people at risk (from 18 to 29 years old) to targeted and quality social services in the community, especially in small settlements, is still limited.

## Slovenia

The National Sport Program in the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2014–2023 aligns with the Council of Europe in conceiving sport as a representation of all forms of physical activity, which are aimed at expressing or improving physical fitness, mental well-being and the formation of social relations or achieving results at various levels of competitions through unorganized or organized activities. In Slovenia, sport is part of public interest due to its role in encouraging voluntary work and active participation in society, in promoting solidarity, tolerance and responsibility, in contributing to sustainable development and in other positive social values and national identification.

The National Sport Program is primarily for public, state and local institutions and is of a principled and political nature. In particular, it focuses on the regulation of professional, organizational and managerial tasks that are closely related to sport. These tasks are defined in the annual sports program, which is co-financed each year from the state and local budgets for sports and the funds of the Sports Foundation. In the part where sport is intertwined with other social areas, it defines the starting points for the appropriate placement of sport in the strategies and policies of these areas, and thus tries to encourage their interaction for the common public good.

Numerous indicators show that sport in the Republic of Slovenia has experienced comprehensive growth and quality development in the last 15 years. Other supporting factors were the role of sport in various social fields (especially the educational system), the self-initiative of the social organization of sport, the expansion of privacy in sport, sports financing.



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## Greece

Greece developed a national health policy aligned with Health 2020, which aims to support action across government and society to significantly improve the health and well-being of populations, reduce health inequalities, strengthen public health and ensure the existence of people-centred health systems that are universal, equitable, sustainable and of high quality. Despite there are improving trends in Greece, there are some deteriorating ones expressed by overweight indicator, which shows an increase in overweight or obese population.

This trend is particularly relevant in a context characterized by below-replacement birth rate and a rapidly ageing population, while low growth and high levels of emigration have contributed to a decrease in the total population. The health status of the Greek population has been among the best in the Region but improvements in health were falling behind in comparison with other European Member States long before the economic crisis. Among individual risk factors, a long-standing issue concerns smoking, for which the rates remain among the highest in the Region and the highest in the EU15.

The prevalence of childhood obesity is, paradoxically, one of the highest in Europe even though the pattern of eating has traditionally conformed to the Mediterranean diet. It could be argued that this diet is vanishing, especially among children and adolescents who have adopted a more westernized diet. The protective benefits of the traditional diet in Greece, which have been described many times in the past, do not appear evident today either in the causes of death or in terms of how overweight people are. On the contrary, it is estimated that in 2014, 66% of men and 55% of women in Greece were overweight, above the European Member States' average for both sexes and particularly so for men. Estimates by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation suggest that tobacco smoking, high blood pressure and dietary risks are responsible for the heaviest burden of disease in Greece.

Greece has issued a set of policies aimed at monitoring the salt intake of the population and at promoting physical activity. In the latter case, there is a national "sport for all" policy aimed at promoting physical activity in the elderly in communities, while it highlights the importance of having physical education as mandatory subject in primary and secondary schools. At the present time, the inclusion of physical education in general teaching training is an evidence-based practice.



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## Sectorial and National Comparative Outline

### NGOs

Romanian NGOs tackle the problem of overweight and sedentary life by promoting a specific, sector related project. In fact, the issue related to physical inactivity related to office work is addressed through the promotion of a series of exercises and sport events on the workplace with the active involvement of companies that provide spaces and resources for such activities.

Italian NGOs promote their activities to a wider age group; mainly people aged 14-40. The usual approach is the one of involving participants with particular backgrounds or characteristics that differentiate them from the more general target group. In this sense, Italian NGOs aim at solving problems that are endemic to the particular group. Sport is promoted as a means of social inclusion or prevention against the phenomenon of youth deviance in the context of kids who has been reported to the juvenile legal authority. Thus, sport acquires the function of re-educating and re-integrating young people, thus fostering positive autonomy and collaboration between local agencies and associations. Another example is represented by the education and promotion of proper nutrition and body weight control in the Roma community through the involvement of Roma women as target group. In this case, Roma women have been individuated as vehicles for educating their households and their community, since they are mostly engaged in providing food and nutrition for their families. Peer education in sports is promoted as well and, like for the Bulgarian case, it is focused on the renovation and revitalisation of urban spaces. However, differently from Bulgarian NGOs, the Italian ones promote street sports as an expression of present trends and fashions as opposed to traditional sports. Regarding peer education, it implies the sector of non-formal education, where young people can train and transmit their knowledge about a particular sport to their peers.

In Bulgaria, NGOs are committed in providing non-formal education paths for social inclusion through sport and healthy lifestyle. In this context, given that Bulgaria has not been receptive in the field of non-formal education as other countries, projects are mostly based on the transfer of knowledge with the aim of learning how to use non-formal education methods on local and international activities, while reflecting on the dimensions and values of non-formal education, youth work, and social inclusion. Moreover, a peculiarity about Bulgarian NGOs approach to the design and implementation of European projects implies the valorisation of traditional and local customs and traditions by educating young people to traditional and healthy cuisine and to folk dances as a reflection of cultural and historical heritage of partner countries. The promotion of sport projects within a local framework is a recurrent feature of Bulgarian projects, which aim to integrate the young people into local communities and to make them the subject of urban renovation by also promoting cooperation with experts, local community representatives and stakeholders for the achievement of a healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, Bulgarian NGOs approach is the one of making young people not only learners, but also educators for the wider community.



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In this sense, they promote campaigns and initiatives to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills for healthy lifestyles, as well as training for young people on health, sport and physical activity, while at the same time young people provide informational material to sensitize their communities. Overall, the target group in Bulgarian NGO projects are young people aged 18+.

Slovenian NGOs target mostly young students in their projects. The focus is mostly in promoting sport activities rather than involving target groups in nutrition education. There is a common feature with Bulgaria in highlighting the value of partner countries tradition. In this case, the NGO promoted the involvement of children with special needs in primary school by including them in the practice of traditional European sports and games that seemed to be more appropriate to their disabilities. As a result, tradition was instrumental for easing the access to sport activities and therefore social inclusion, rather than educate children to the cultural and historical heritage of partner countries as in the Bulgarian case. In Slovenia NGOs act in synergy with national policies, therefore there are projects that aim at offering employment to young athletes (up to 29) in sports teaching in the framework of the Youth to Youth program. The program is designed to encourage secondary and vocational school students to spend their free time more actively and provide them with additional free professionally guided classes with sports content aimed at improving motor skills. In addition, the strengthening of competences of coaches and managers is fundamental for valorising their work, since they pass values to children. Overall, NGOs are well committed in strengthening children's social and educational skills, in promoting mentoring and peer education, while raising awareness on sports benefits among parents.

In Greece, NGOs are committed to bring more youngsters with fewer opportunities in the Erasmus+ field, thus empowering newcomer organizations actively involved with inclusion efforts or those who have been granted already but have not included young people with fewer opportunities in their activities so far. Sport promotion is directly linked to the themes of inclusion, empathy formal, non-formal and informal learning with a particular focus on the sensitization of people to the theme of children affected by blindness. Greek NGO was the only one to promote the inclusion of migrant and refugee children for providing them important knowledge and skills in their daily attitude for an inclusive society.

## Sport

In Romania Sport associations are involved in the social integration of children aged 11-18 by promoting inclusion, equality, tolerance and fair play. The aims are to strengthen the cooperation between sport institutions and organisations, promoting the exchange of good practices, tolerance and combating discrimination through healthy lifestyle and improving educational practices and policies.

The purpose of promoting sport in schools is a common feature to Italian associations as well. However, the intent in the Italian case pertains the prevention field, with a particular focus on school dropouts. Through sport, the associations are willing to enact an educational action to strengthen autonomy, individual and collective responsibility, awareness and inclusion among scholars.



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Moreover, the integration of sport practice within the urban environment is a recurrent theme also in the associations sector, which are aiming at involving a wider public into running activities by promoting non-competitive running events to sensitize people to healthy lifestyle. At the same time, associations are engaged in the training of professionals for fostering the promotion of physical activities among youngsters. In this sense, the collaboration with sport associations and sport federations that could provide quick training session to participants is crucial for providing the youth with mentors that can enhance their physical development and social inclusion. Italy is the only case in which sport associations are committed in informing and raising awareness on the importance of a healthy diet connected to physical activity. An association supported participants by applying the weekly pyramid method (Quantità Benessere) for providing information about proper nutrition and healthy cooking combined to physical activity.

In Bulgaria, sport associations target young people, children and students from high schools in their sport projects. The activities vary from infrastructural interventions such as the building of a fitness playground to activities that are more specific and that aim at enhancing the physical and mental condition of the target group. In this sense, associations relied on complex methods to foster social integration and health in children with disabilities using hydrotherapy for musculoskeletal and intellectual development. Sport, conceived as an inclusive means and as a source of ethical values, is promoted among students for motivating them in getting involved in physical activities. Therefore, sport is mainstreamed in schools by also involving teachers and by supporting their collaboration with parents to involve students in such initiatives.

The similarity of Slovenian sport projects to the previous ones is that they target students in primary and secondary education. Sport associations focus more on the sensitization of young participants to the theme of disability so that there are institutions of Paralympic sports day in which children learn a Paralympic sport, where they are encouraged to respect and better understand “disabled people”. Besides, several activities concern the inclusion of young people with special needs by rising the quality of life through their involvement in sports that can guarantee networking, relaxation, movement and self-esteem. Different projects were also framed in UNESCO programmes for the promotion of healthy lifestyle and regular physical activity and healthy diet, while choosing running as principal activity for connecting people and raising openness and tolerance, which makes it an element similar to the activity enacted in Italy. The attention paid to intergenerational cooperation is a characteristic element of the Slovenian case, which aims at involving not only students, but also the larger community into sport culture, thus highlighting the importance of solidarity, cooperation, ethical and moral values, creativity, promotion and respect of diversity.

Intergenerational cooperation is sought also in projects run by Greek sport associations in which there is a focus on the preservation and further promotion of traditional sports and games, while the higher scope is to build a sense of community within neighbourhoods by posing children at their centre. On the other hand, Greek sport projects are targeted to specific problems and to professionals, while addressing children with particular backgrounds. In this sense, there is a more deep intent to involve public institutions in the promotion of healthy lifestyle through different actions, but primarily by developing educational tools.



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In this context, the issue of doping was tackled by the development of a tool to be used as an educational resource for anti-doping interventions and educational campaigns by educators, policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders in the fight against doping in fitness/amateur sports, thus triggering a European-wide strategic partnership between academic institutions and sports organization. At the same time, the fight to discrimination and racism through sport education is carried out through educational technologies and open access in order to offer modernized distance learning pathways and resources to educators. Furthermore, the problem is managed also at the institutional level through the issuance of a policy paper to authorities, which recommends on how to prevent and confront discrimination while defining regional and national policies and stimulating the development of new local initiatives. Another peculiarity shown by Greek sport associations is the intent of involving children from disadvantaged target groups (Roma immigrants, children from low socioeconomic background). Projects are addressed to educators in order to increase their skills and knowledge through the sharing of good practices on coach leadership style and through the provision of training material and seminars derived from a prior research phase aimed at identifying training needs of the target groups.

## Fitness and Nutrition

In Romania, the major commitment towards nutrition is related to the reduction in food waste through the involvement of teachers, children and parents in awareness campaigns.

In Italy, the main target are children, while healthcare entities usually apply the pyramid method in designing and implementing their projects. The latter are mostly characterized by an education and training effort, which is integrated by a medical follow up, which provides examination, nutritional education path and data collection. In this way, participants have a feedback about their physical parameters and the way they should improve their nutritional and physical activity habits in an expert opinion. Usually, the objective is also to involve teachers and parents that represent means through which children could improve the consumption of healthy food, in particular fruits and vegetables. Nutritional information is promoted as well in specific sport environments, such as football, where the aim is to educate players and families about the right feeding methods that could positively integrate players' performances.

In Bulgaria, fitness and nutrition projects are run by universities and they target students. In particular, projects in this sector aim at educating about fitness training and health culture. Therefore, there is the implementation of a fitness technology to personalize the fitness training of students as the basis for individual adaptation to specific conditions and the acquisition of skills and habits for a healthy lifestyle. The aim of the training is to take into account the individual characteristics of the person in the process of physical training, to overcome stressful situations and to stimulate the intellectual abilities of students. In addition, there are projects for providing a health culture for maintaining and restoring individual and public health.



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As in the previous two cases, Slovenia also targets children in schools in the promotion of healthy nutrition. Interventions in school involve the promotion and encouragement in the creation of ecological gardens and their inclusion in the educational program, while enhancing the learning about organic food and its production. Other projects, specifically linked to school education involve the combining of food education with Slovenian language and the analysis of the value of energy density of each meal for health reasons. The valorisation of tradition and culture is stressed in the education about traditional breakfast and the comparison between traditional breakfasts of different partner countries, so that the highlight of a healthy breakfast is individualized in its traditional form.

## Conclusions

The report, through the cross country and the sectorial and national comparative outline, highlights the differences and the similarities among the different partner countries. It firstly took in consideration the national context of each country in order to provide the reader a preventive framework regarding government policies and population habitudes in relation to physical activity and health culture. Subsequently, the report presented a comparative outline of the involved partner countries by focusing on the three sectors, namely NGO, Sport and Fitness and Nutrition and by highlighting the affinities and the differences regarding the target groups considered, the approaches and the finalities pursued by the entities involved in the projects.

From the cross-country analysis, it emerged that the national policies in Bulgaria aim at improving the health characteristics of the population for increasing the quality of its human capital through infrastructural interventions and the cooperation between the state and local organisations. The country is still lagging in the offer of non-formal education, while demographic data show an ageing population complemented by a decreasing general interest in sport and healthy lifestyle among youth. One finds a similar scenario in Italy, where teenagers revealed themselves as lazy and dissatisfied, unwilling to perform motor activity and dissatisfied with their physical form. The dropout phenomenon in sport occurs at an early age and the main reason is represented by study necessities. In front of an ageing population and a moderately high sedentary rate, experts developed a weekly pyramid of the Italian lifestyle for both food and physical activity. Romania represents a case in which there are no active policies in the field of sport and nutrition enacted by the government, while the level of consciousness about the benefits of physical activity and healthy food is high in its population. In fact, there is also a positive attitude by parents and adults in involving children in programs that promote sport. In opposition, Slovenia has an advanced sport program implemented by national policies, since sport is part of public interest. In this sense, the state channels a great amount of finances in the National Sport Program for the regulation of professional, organizational and managerial tasks that are closely related to sport. It also defines the relations and the strategies in the social areas connected to sport activities, trying to encourage their interaction for the common public good. The Greek national context is more similar to the previously analysed ones, where there is an ageing population with an increase in overweight and obesity among the youth, who does not rely anymore on the traditional Mediterranean diet. The government developed a national health policy aligned with Health 2020 for improving the health and well-being of populations, reduce health inequalities, strengthen public health and ensure the existence of people-centred health systems that are universal, equitable, sustainable and of high quality.



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From the comparative analysis, it emerged that in the NGO sector the similarities pertain the use of tradition and national culture as agents for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle (Bulgaria and Slovenia). Moreover, the conception of the target group not only as recipient object, but also as an educator subject for the wider community in the framework of sport and healthy lifestyle is well accepted in Bulgaria and Italy, which have implemented projects for urban renovation and revitalization. On the other hand, differences in target groups addressed by the NGOs imply a difference in the approach and in the activities proposed, while sport assumes a different social function on a case by case basis. In fact, Italy directs its projects to young people with particular backgrounds, thus giving to sport a re-educating and re-integrating social function, Romania aims at improving the physical abilities of its sedentary office workers, while Slovenian NGOs act in synergy with national policies for the employment of young athletes in sports teaching. In addition, Slovenian NGOs are more focused on sport activities rather than on nutrition education. In Greece, NGOs are committed to bring more youngsters with fewer opportunities in the Erasmus+ field, thus empowering newcomer organizations actively involved with inclusion efforts or those who have been granted already but have not included young people with fewer opportunities in their activities so far.

In Sport sector there are is a common feature among the associations regarding the choice of the target group, which is represented by students in primary and secondary education, while Bulgaria and Slovenia are more prone in the inclusion of young people with disabilities and special needs. Running is a common activity to Italy and Slovenia and so it is the intent of proposing it as an activity that fits to the urban environment and that involves the connection of a wider group of people for raising openness and tolerance. Besides, Slovenia and Greece incentivize intergenerational cooperation for revitalizing communities and for the transfer of traditional knowledge about sports and games. There are several particularities within the projects carried out by national associations, such as infrastructural interventions in Bulgaria, which follow the trend outlined by the government, while in Romania the organizations are majorly committed in the strengthening of cooperation between themselves and the institutions. Italy is entailed in the training of professionals for preventing school dropouts, while in Greece combines the cooperation between public institutions and associations through the development of educational tools. In Greece, there is a special implementation of educational paths for trainers aimed at the inclusion of children from disadvantaged target groups through sport.

In Fitness and Nutrition sector, there is a general involvement of children and their families with the support of teachers in food education. In Italy, nutritional education is also supported by experts, who apply the weekly pyramid method embraced by national institutions. There is a sound difference in the activities enacted in the projects concerning this field. Bulgaria is the only one that involved universities for the implementation of a fitness technology to personalize fitness training for students. At the same time, in Slovenia schools and associations are deeply committed in revamping teaching curricula by promoting eco gardens, the education to food combined to the learning of Slovenian language and the analytical teaching of the energy density of meals. In Slovenia, there is a great interest in traditional forms of breakfast as a healthy nutritional solution for children, while in Romania the attention is directed towards the reduction of food waste.



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