

MALTA

COUNTRY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FACTSHEET 2024

World Bank classification: High income
Total population: 520 971
Median age (years): 40.4
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (€): 24 560
GDP for health (%): 5.5
GDP for education (%): 5
GDP for sports (%): 1.4
Population, male (%): 51.8
Population, female (%): 48.2
Life expectancy, males (years): 80.4
Life expectancy, females (years): 84.6

Source: Eurostat
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00205/default/table?lang=en&category=t_demo.t_demo_mor



Photo: © Ann Marie Bezzina

► National recommendations on physical activity for health

Target groups included

YES	Children (< 5 years)	NO	During pregnancy
YES	Children and adolescents (5–17 years)	NO	During breastfeeding
YES	Adults (18–64 years)	NO	People with disability
YES	Older adults (≥ 65 years)	NO	People with chronic diseases
NO	Frail and very elderly adults (≥ 85 years)		

Link to national recommendations: https://hdp.gov.mt/hpu/physical_activity

SUCCESS STORY

According to the Special Eurobarometer on Physical Activity in 2014, 75% of Maltese citizens never engaged in physical activity or sport; in 2018, this percentage had decreased to 56% and, in 2022, to 31%. According to the European Health Interview Survey 2020, 26% of respondents reported that they performed moderate physical activity for at least 10 min continuously on at least 1 day/week, 16% of respondents reported that they performed vigorous physical activity for at least 10 min continuously at least 1 day/week, and 46% reported that they went for a walk for at least 10 min continuously at least 1 day/week. Only 16% of respondents stated they performed muscle strength training at least once a week.

<https://sport.ec.europa.eu/news/new-eurobarometer-on-sport-and-physical-activity>; https://dhir.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/EHIS_health_determinants_report.pdf; www.healthsurveys.gov.mt



► Monitoring and surveillance of physical activity

Sectors with surveillance systems



Health

YES



Education

NO



Sports

NO



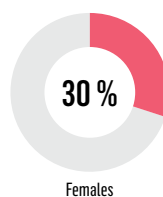
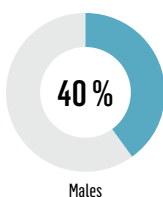
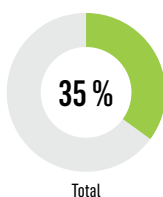
Transport

NO

► Prevalence of physical activity

Physical activity indicators

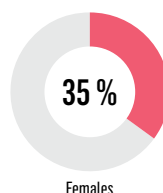
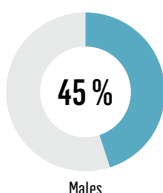
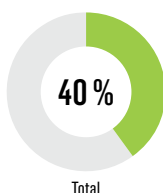
18–24 years



At least once a week

Special Eurobarometer 525, 2022; <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ebsm/api/public/deliverable/download?doc=true&deliverableId=83633>

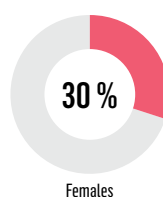
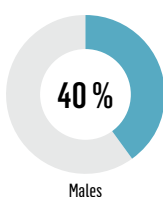
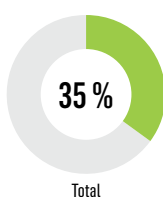
25–34 years



At least once a week

Special Eurobarometer 525, 2022; <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ebsm/api/public/deliverable/download?doc=true&deliverableId=83633>

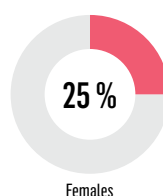
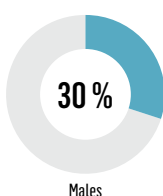
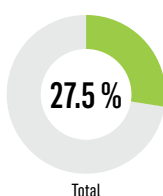
35–44 years



At least once a week

Special Eurobarometer 525, 2022; <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ebsm/api/public/deliverable/download?doc=true&deliverableId=83633>

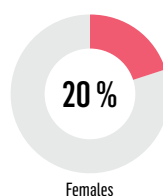
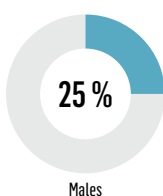
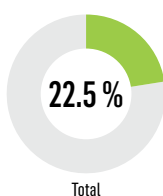
45–54 years



At least once a week

Special Eurobarometer 525, 2022; <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ebsm/api/public/deliverable/download?doc=true&deliverableId=83633>

55–64 years



At least once a week

Special Eurobarometer 525, 2022; <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ebsm/api/public/deliverable/download?doc=true&deliverableId=83633>







► National government coordination mechanism and leadership on the promotion of physical activity

Malta's strategy on obesity, the Healthy Weight for Life Strategy, is designed to curb and reverse the growing proportion of overweight and obese children and adults. It creates an environment that encourages healthy choices, leading to healthy weight. Noncommunicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and stroke, are responsible for 82% of deaths in Malta. An NCD prevention framework and a HEPA strategy were launched for consultation in 2024. These involve collaboration among various stakeholders, including health, education, commerce, and media, to promote well-being, combat NCDs, and encourage HEPA.

https://healthservices.gov.mt/en/strategy-development-and-implementation-unit/Documents/Strategies_and_Policies/A_Healthy_Weight_for_Life_a_National_Strategy_for_Malta.pdf; <https://healthservices.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/Pages/Services/Healthy-Weight-for-Life.aspx>; <https://health.gov.mt/publications/a-healthy-weight-for-life-a-national-strategy-for-malta-2012-2020/>; <https://hpd.gov.mt/form/healthy-weight-for-life>

► Funding for the promotion of physical activity for health

Funding allocated specifically to physical activity promotion by sector

					
Health	Education	Sports	Environment	Urban planning	Transport
YES	—	YES	—	—	—

► National policies or action plans for the promotion of physical activity for health

National policy highlights

National Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity

The Strategy integrates sports into the educational system by encouraging schools to include regular physical activity and sports in their curricula, thereby promoting healthy habits from an early age. The policy also recommends increasing sports participation by all demographics by creating inclusive programmes that address barriers due to gender, race and ability. It also develops the sports sector economically by investing in infrastructure and community programmes to make sports more accessible and promoting them as a means of leisure and community engagement. The Superintendence of Public Health has launched a Health-Enhancing Physical Activity Strategy for consultation, which focuses on a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

<https://tfal.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/National-Sports-Strategy.pdf>

Healthy Weight for Life: A National Strategy for Malta

The Strategy addresses obesity by promoting healthy diets and physical activity. Its aim is to improve access to nutritious food through policies that increase their availability, clear labelling systems and improve school meals. To increase physical activity, the strategy requires schoolchildren to engage in 3 h/week of exercise and reduce screen time; community infrastructure will be developed for active living. Recognizing the significant economic burden of obesity on health-care costs, the strategy advocates for a coordinated approach involving sectors such as health, education, commerce and the media.

<https://health.gov.mt/publications/a-healthy-weight-for-life-a-national-strategy-for-malta-2012-2020/>

School strategy – nutrition and physical activity

The strategy integrates the principles of “education for life” by recognizing the role of nutrition and physical activity in enhancing student learning and development. Its aim is to address the decrease in healthy eating and the increase in sedentary behaviour by embedding healthy food and physical activity into the school environment. It stresses the importance of schools in fostering lifelong healthy habits. Educators, parents and policy-makers collaborate to create a supportive environment. The strategy includes a structured framework for effective implementation, ensuring that schools and communities work together to foster healthy eating and physical activity.

<https://migrantlearnersunit.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Healthy-Eating-and-Physical-Activity-Policy.pdf>

MALTA

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Other initiatives:

The **Weight Management Programme** targets adults with a BMI over 25 kg/m², promoting sustainable weight loss through physical activity and nutritional education, addressing obesity-related health costs. **Care4Diabetes**, an EU joint action, supports Type 2 Diabetes prevention and management by integrating education, physical activity, and nutrition, aligning with EU NCD reduction goals. **Health4EUkids** promotes physical activity and healthy habits among children and adolescents through school and community-based interventions to prevent childhood obesity. The **Community Outreach Programs**, organized by the Health Promotion Directorate, offer free physical activity talks to ensure widespread access to preventive health services. Furthermore, Educational Materials, tailored to different demographics, provide guidance on incorporating physical activity into daily life, supporting national efforts to combat sedentary behavior and NCDs. For example, the Directorate's Handbook for Ageing Well offers practical tips on physical activity, nutrition, sleep, and stress management to support healthy ageing.

https://hpd.gov.mt/sites/default/files/2024-05/your_handbook_for_Ageing_Well.pdf

National policies or action plans for the promotion of physical activity for health



- 1 National Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity
<https://tfa.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/National-Sports-Strategy.pdf>
- 2 Healthy Weight for Life: A National Strategy for Malta
<https://health.gov.mt/publications/a-healthy-weight-for-life-a-national-strategy-for-malta-2012-2020/>
- 3 School strategy – nutrition and physical activity
<https://migrantlearnersunit.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Healthy-Eating-and-Physical-Activity-Policy.pdf>

Sectors involved in the design of the policy or action plan



Health	1	2	3	Environment	1	2	3
Education	1	2	3	Urban planning	1	2	3
Sports	1	2	3	Transport	1	2	3

Plan for evaluation of a specific policy



Policy	1	2	3
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Target groups included



General population	1	2	3	Frail/elderly (≥ 85 years)	1	2	3	Low socio-economic groups	1	2	3
Children < 5 years	1	2	3	People with disability	1	2	3	Ethnic minorities	1	2	3
Children and adolescents (5–17 years)	1	2	3	People with chronic diseases	1	2	3	Deprived of liberty	1	2	3
Adults	1	2	3	Pregnant women	1	2	3	Migrants	1	2	3
Older adults (≥ 65 years)	1	2	3	Breastfeeding women	1	2	3	Unemployed people	1	2	3

► Sports clubs for health

Malta has not implemented the WHO Guidelines for Sports Club for Health Programmes because sports clubs continue to focus primarily on competitive sports rather than integrating health-oriented programmes as outlined in the guidelines.

► Increasing access to exercise facilities for socially disadvantaged groups

SportMalta is enhancing access to exercise facilities for socially disadvantaged groups by offering a variety of inclusive sports and physical activity programmes. The programmes are available to all segments of society, including children and seniors, ensuring that individuals from diverse backgrounds can participate.

<https://sportmalta.mt/programmes/onthemove-programme/>



SUCCESS STORY

Let's Move Malta is a national initiative aimed at promoting physical activity and healthier lifestyles, particularly among underrepresented groups, including senior citizens, former substance abusers in shelters, and people with disabilities. The programme encourages these groups to adopt regular exercise routines, supporting them in leading healthier lives. It emphasizes the importance of movement by offering guidance on a variety of physical activities. This initiative is part of a broader effort to reduce sedentary behaviour and improve public health across Malta.

Physical education in schools

Primary
schools

Average
per week



3

Mandatory

Secondary
schools

Average
per week



3

Mandatory

HEPA in training of physical education teachers

YES

Part of undergraduate studies Mandatory

YES

Part of postgraduate studies Mandatory

Promotion of physical activity in schools

YES

During school breaks

YES

After school

YES

During lessons

NO

Active travel to and from school

National travel survey

The National Household Travel Survey was conducted in Malta during the last quarter of 2021 to record the travel patterns of household members over the age of 14 years. The survey involved collaboration between the National Statistics Office and Transport Malta and collected comprehensive data on travel behaviour.

Promotion of physical activity in the workplace



National guidance or programme
to promote active travel to work
(e.g. walking, cycling)

YES

The Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate within the Superintendence of Public Health has produced a guideline for employers on improving employee health in the workplace. It includes a section specifically dedicated to physical activity, offering evidence-based guidance and best practices to help employers implement measures that encourage healthier choices and lifestyles. The Directorate also regularly organizes competitions for workplaces to further promote physical activity. As part of Let's Move Malta, SportMalta offers assistance to all workplaces that wish to promote physical activity.

http://hpd.gov.mt/sites/default/files/2023-08/improving_employee_health_in_the_workplace_en.pdf
<https://sportmalta.mt/lets-move-malta/>



SUCCESS STORY

Through #BeActive at the workplace, SportMalta ensures that employees are active during working hours. It also offers assistance and its venues to other workplaces that show interest in the initiative.

<https://sportmalta.mt/beactive-at-the-workplace/>

Community interventions for older adults



National guidance or programme for community interventions to promote physical activity in older adults

YES

One of the activities of Let's Move Malta is visiting older adults in their homes and providing support in engaging in physical activity. This has been successful, and there are plans to increase capacity to reach more participants.

<https://sportmalta.mt/lets-move-malta/>

National awareness-raising campaign on physical activity

The Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate (HPDP) regularly organizes campaigns to promote physical activity. It has also compiled a list of walking routes around the island, accessible through the HPDP website. SportMalta, the national coordinating body for the European Week of Sport, uses the #BeActive campaign to raise awareness about the importance of being physically active.

<https://sportmalta.mt/events/ewos-home/>

Media used in national campaigns



Television

YES



Radio

YES



Newspapers

YES



Social media

YES



Public events

YES



Public figures

YES



SUCCESS STORY

The aim of the European Week of Sport, launched in 2014, is to combat the inactivity crisis by encouraging a healthy, active lifestyle for everyone, regardless of age, background or fitness level. The initiative addresses the stagnation and decline in physical activity across Europe, promoting awareness of the benefits of even slight increases in regular exercise. Now in its tenth year, the week serves as a global springboard for embracing an active lifestyle.

<https://sportmalta.mt/events/ewos-home/>

Acknowledgments

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