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## Sport and Physical Activity of Slovakia Inhabitants



**Abstract:** - The paper points out the importance of sport in a person's life in terms of positive effects on his physical and mental health, socialization aspects. The aim of the article is to analyze and identify the current level of involvement of Slovak inhabitants in physical and sports activities compared to the European average. Subsequently, to identify key problem areas that are the main obstacle to developing a healthy lifestyle together with the subsequent involvement of the population in sports and to propose measures that will support the creation of a positive relationship to the physical activities of inhabitants of all age categories.

**Keywords:** economy, health, lifestyle, physical activity, sport infrastructure

### I. INTRODUCTION

The lifestyle of today's society is characterized by a fast consumer way of life with a lot of pleasures and technical conveniences which reduce the physical load, and on the contrary, increase the psychological load in everyday life situations. Insufficient physical activity is recognized by the World Health Organization as a separate risk factor involved in the development of chronic non-infectious diseases. The absence of sports and physical activities is currently a serious societal problem, the implications of which can be seen primarily in terms of negative effects on a person's physical and mental health.

On the other hand, regular physical activity which includes various types of movement activities such as walking, housework, various sports, exercises, represents an irreplaceable part and fills free time. At the same time, however, it also brings with it significant health, economic and environmental benefits. It helps in the prevention of many diseases, contributes to a positive return on investments in physical activity, lower expenses for health care, higher work productivity and reduction of emissions by supporting pedestrians, cyclists and public transport [1].

### II. IMPACTS AND BENEFITS OF SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ON LIFE AND HEALTH

The European Charter on Sport from 2001 defines sport as a phenomenon that includes all forms of physical activity that, through occasional or organized participation, lead to an increase in physical fitness and mental well-being, shape social bonds and enable achieving results in competitions at all levels [2].

Sport is a phenomenon that cannot be underestimated and its importance continues to grow worldwide. Physical education and sports organizations represent one of the most mass movements in the world, sport has a positive effect on a person's health, a full-fledged life, influences the development of an individual's personality, has educational aspects, affects moral-willed qualities, eliminates national, social and religious differences, contributes to the improvement of

international relations and easing tensions, is a source of entertainment and cultural experiences, employs a large number of people and still creates new job opportunities. It has a positive, direct and indirect, economic effect for the state [3].

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Playing sports and regular physical activity benefits health in many ways. Physical activity can reduce the risk of premature death from non-communicable diseases, as well as reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, stress, anxiety and depression. It also helps reduce hypertension, regulate body weight, prevent osteoporosis and manage chronic pain [4]. Therefore, it is essential that every person regularly participates in sports and physical activity, regardless of age or gender.

According to WHO recommendations, adults over 18 should [5]:

- perform moderately intense aerobic physical activity at least 150-300 minutes per week (equivalent to approximately 20-40 minutes per day),
- or at least 75-150 minutes of high-intensity aerobic physical activity per week,
- limit the time spent in a sedentary way and replace it physical activity of any intensity.

Across Europe, physical inactivity and lack of regular sporting activity from any cause contribute to more than 500,000 deaths per year. Adding to the very disturbing facts is the fact that these are preventable deaths. Therefore, Europeans are encouraged to lead a lifestyle that achieves the recommended physical level. According to the WHO, physical inactivity is the fourth leading global risk factor [6].

In terms of world population, the latest global estimates show that 1.4 billion adults, i.e. 27.5% of the world's adult population, do not perform physical activity at the recommended level. The situation worsens with increasing age, when people become less active despite the fact that physical activity benefits older adults to prevent falls, remain independent, reduce isolation and maintain social connections [7].

### III. IMPACTS AND BENEFITS OF SPORT ON THE ECONOMY

Sports and physical activities bring not only fun, improvement of health, but are also associated with economic income. In developed countries, sport directly participates in economic activity. When properly integrated into the economic policy of the state, it can be a catalyst for a wide range of other economic activities, for example in the field of services and production. The sports industry is also one of the most important employers in the economy.

The impact of sport on the Slovak economy compared to other countries and the average of the European Union (EU 28) states is shown in Table 1. Due to the fact that the price level of the compared countries is at a different level, which results in a distortion of the GDP per capita indicator, the purchasing power parity method according to the OECD methodology was used to equalize the values [6].

Table I Comparison of the impact of sport on the economy [6]

COUNTRY (DATA FOR 2012)	SHARE OF GDP (EURO PER CAPITA)	(EURO PER C. PPP*)	SHARE OF GDP (%)	EMPLOYM ENT (%)
<b>SLOVAK IA</b>	176.83	272.79	1.31	2.03
<b>DENMA RK</b>	710.61	544.17	1.56	2.45
<b>SLOVEN IA</b>	296.10	379.80	1.69	2.43
<b>LITHUA NIA</b>	94.72	162.80	0.85	1.62
<b>CZECH</b>	195.54	287.89	1.27	1.76

<b>REPUBL IC EU AVERAG E</b>	188.34	193.91	1.56	2.17
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\* The value of the share of GDP per capita converted by purchasing power parity (PPP) from 2021 based on OECD data

As can be seen from Table I, sport forms a significant and non-negligible part of the economy in the Slovak Republic. Despite this, entrepreneurship in the sports industry is not systematically supported in Slovakia, and in terms of financing sports, Slovakia achieves one of the lowest levels of government contribution to sports in percentage comparison with state budget expenditures, and also in per capita terms.

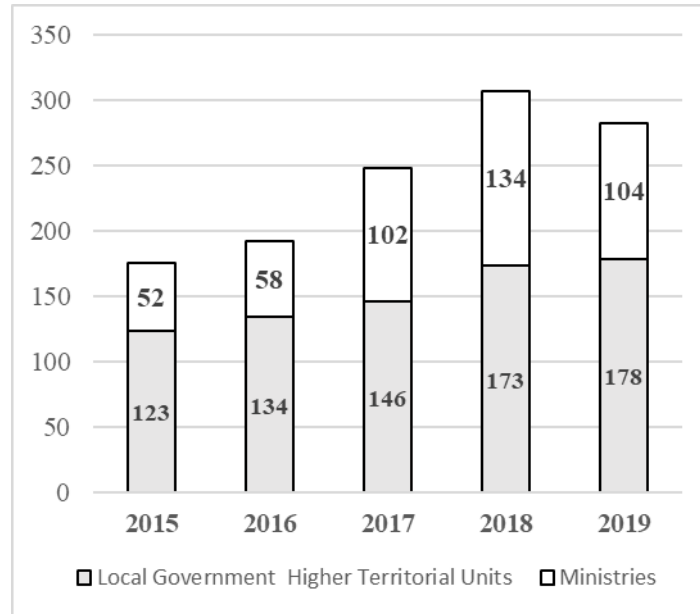
Financing of sports from the state budget is primarily legislatively regulated in the Sports Act No.440/ 2015 Coll., specifically in its fifth part. The law regulates funds that can be provided in three forms [8]:

- Contribution to a recognized sport,
- Subsidy
- Contribution to the national sports project.

Another source of funds for sports comes from the budgets of local governments. They play a key role in the financing of sports clubs and the reconstruction of sports infrastructure. When analyzing local government subsidies for leisure activities, the share of sports reaches more than half. Due to the fact that in Slovakia the budget classification of expenditure defines expenditure on sport as "recreational and sports services", the Table II and Graph I below shows the total funds from public sources that were provided for sport and recreation in Slovakia in the time horizon of 2015 to 2019. In the classification in question, the financing of activities related to "sport for all" is carried out as part of recreational services.

Table II Financing of sport in Slovakia in million Euro 2015-2019 (category recreation and sport services) [6]

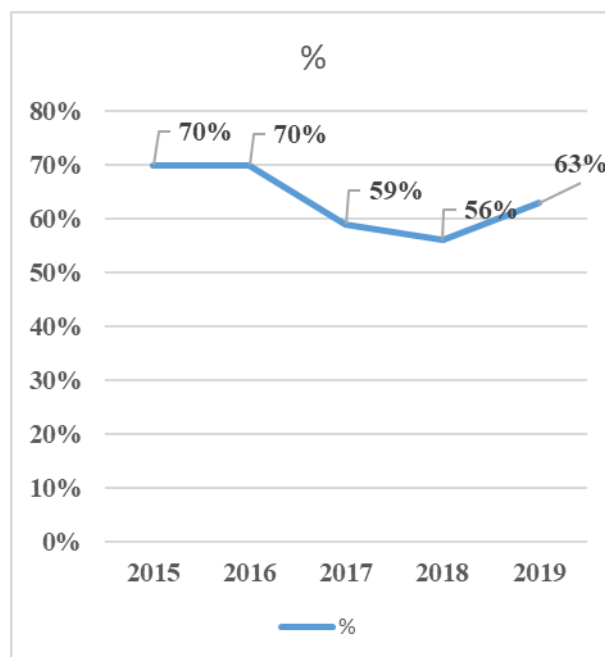
<i>Year</i>	<i>Local Governments and Higher Territorial Units</i>	<i>Ministries</i>	<i>Sum</i>
<b>2015</b>	122,94	52,47	175,41
<b>2016</b>	134,18	57,76	191,94
<b>2017</b>	146,07	102,44	248,51
<b>2018</b>	173,19	133,53	306,72
<b>2019</b>	177,92	104,48	282,40



Graph I Financing of sport in Slovakia in million Euro 2015-2019 (category recreation and sport services) [6]

From the values mentioned above, it is noticeable the continuous increase of funds for the support of Slovak sport by local governments. In financial resources from the state budget, there is a noticeable drop in value in 2019, which was caused by a decrease in investments in sports infrastructure.

As can be seen from the above-mentioned data, local governments participate in the financing of Slovak sport with a larger financial volume than Ministries, and their share in the financing of sport from public sources was in recent years between 56% and 70% of the total funds spent on sport (see Graph II). However, unlike funds from the state budget, funds provided by municipalities are not claimable and are allocated on the basis of local, generally binding regulations. In the long term, it is possible to observe a continuous increase in the volume of funds spent.



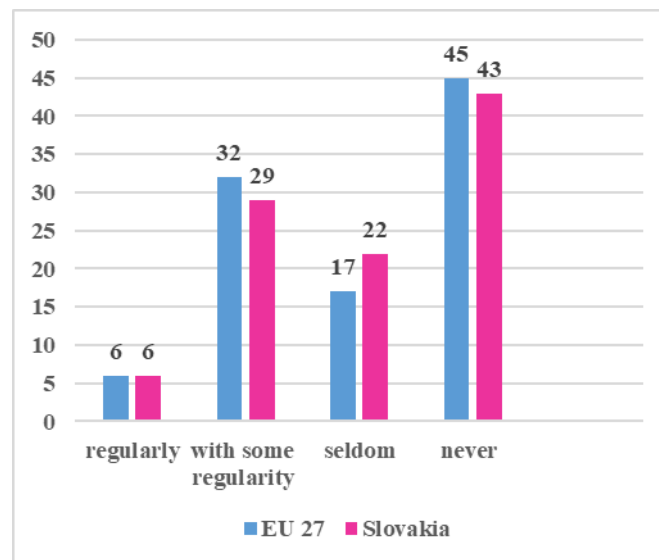
Graph II Share of Local Government and Higher Territorial Units and Ministries on costs of Slovak sport [10]

Regarding the impact of sports and physical activity on the country's economy, it is important to remember that insufficient physical activity is associated with a whole range of chronic diseases and premature deaths, which represent not only the loss of human lives, but also economic costs.

#### IV. ANALYSIS OF INVOLVEMENT IN SPORTS IN SLOVAKIA AND THE EU

The Slovak Republic currently does not have a health monitoring and surveillance system that would include the measurement of physical activity in adults. However, according to the results of the fifth Eurobarometer 2022 survey dedicated to sports and physical activity, in which 26,580 respondents from 27 member countries of the European Union participated, including 1,011 Slovaks, only 6 percent of Slovaks regularly exercise or play sports, 29 percent with some regularity, 22 percent rarely and 43 percent do not exercise at all [9].

The comparison of the Slovak Republic with the average of European Union countries in terms of the frequency of sports and physical activities is shown in Graph III.

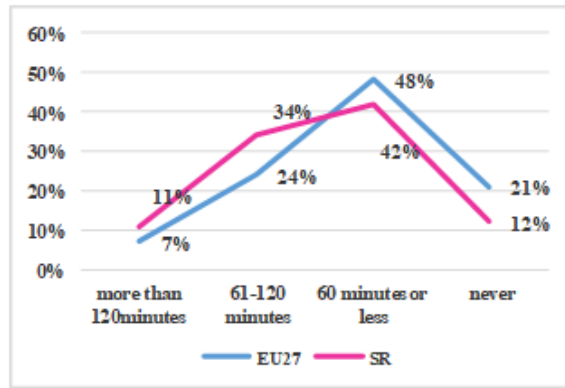


Graph III Frequency of exercise or playing sport in EU and Slovakia [10]

In terms of the activity of different age groups, men and women over 55 are the least active. In terms of species jobs and occupations are the least active retired people (87%), unemployed (81%) and householders (65%). The most active segments of the population in Slovakia are students and men and women aged 15 to 24.

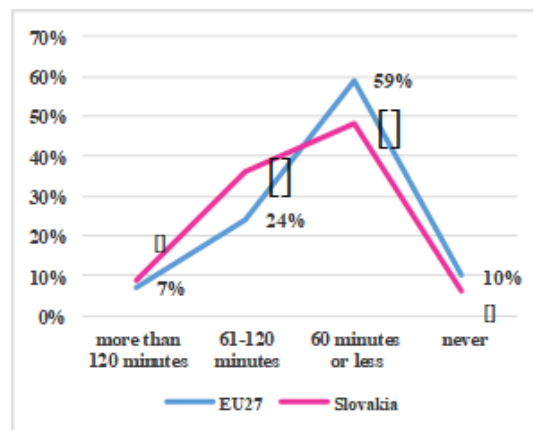
The percentage comparison of the Slovak Republic with the average of the countries of the European Union in terms of time and intensity of sports and physical activities is shown in Graphs IV and Graph V.

11% of adults in Slovakia engage in intensive physical activity for more than 120 minutes a week, 34% exercise intensively from 61 to 120 minutes and 42% at least 60 minutes, 12% do not exercise at all (see Graph IV).



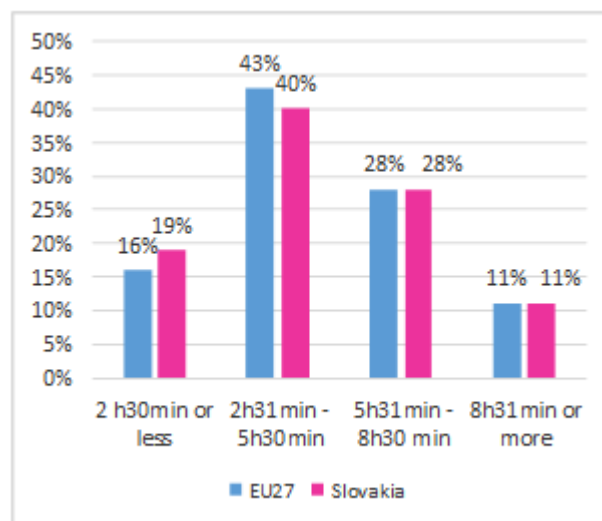
Graph IV Intense physical activity in EU and Slovakia [10]

As for moderate physical activity, 9% of adults do it more than 120 minutes a week, 36% exercise moderately from 61 to 120 minutes and 48% at least 60 minutes, 6% do not exercise at all (see Graph V).



Graph V Moderate physical activity in EU and Slovakia [10]

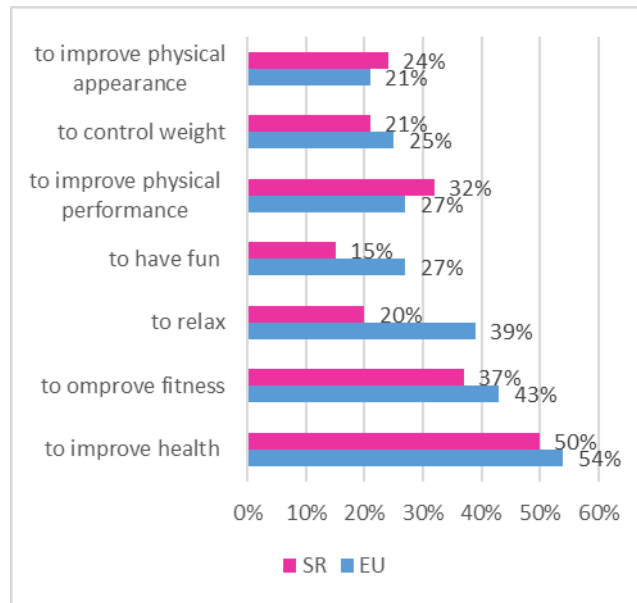
Comparison of the Slovak Republic with the average of European Union countries in terms of the length of time spent sitting during a normal day is shown in Graph VI.



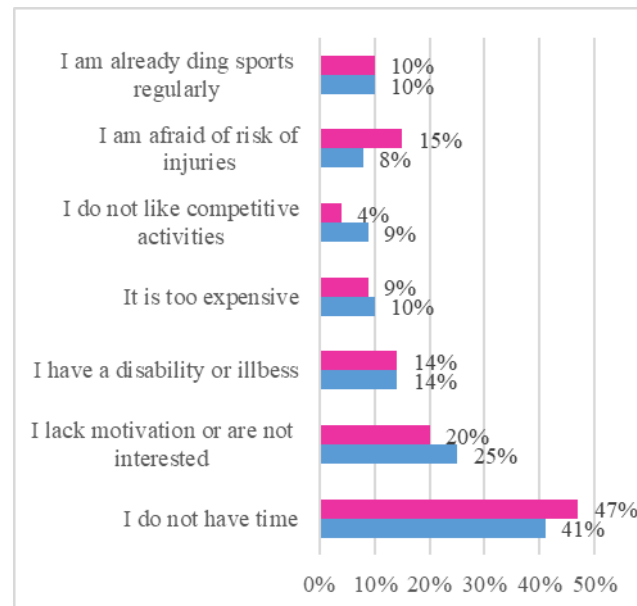
Graph VI Time spent sitting during a typical day in EU and Slovakia [10]

11% of people in Slovakia spend more than 8 and a half hours sitting during a normal day, which includes e.g. time spent at the desk, visiting friends, studying or watching TV, 28% spend time this way from 5 and a half to 8 and a half hours, 40% from 2 and a half to 5 and a half hours and only 19% less than 2 and a half hours.

Among the most common reasons why people engage in physical activity, reasons such as improving their health and state of health, increasing their physical condition and physical appearance are mentioned for Slovakia (see Graph VII). The least percentage received playing sports as a source of entertainment, only 15% of respondents said so. Among the reasons that prevent residents from exercising regularly are mainly lack of time (47%), followed by lack of motivation or lack of interest (20%) and fear of the risk of injury (15%) (see Graph VIII).



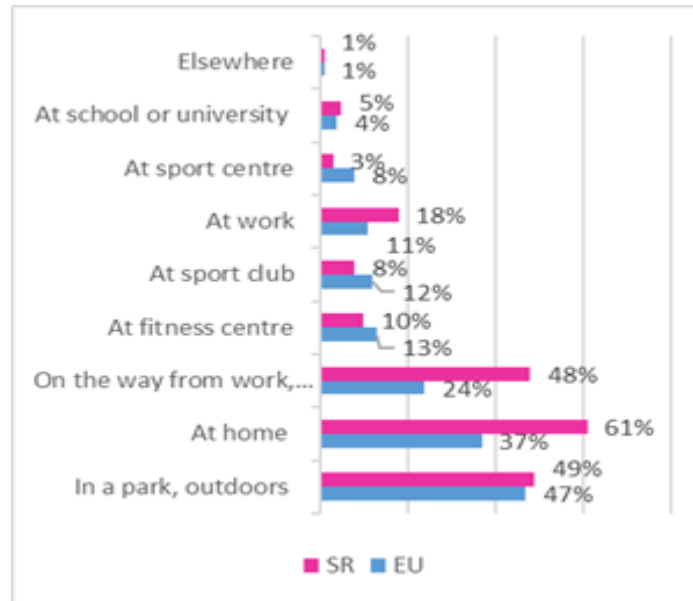
Graph VII Motivators to sport participation in EU and Slovakia [10]



Graph VIII Barriers to sport participation in EU and Slovakia [10]

In Slovakia, 20% of respondents completely agreed that they have enough opportunities to play sports. Rather, 39% agreed. As for the offer of sports activities in local sports clubs and local providers, only 12% of Slovaks

completely agree that there are enough opportunities. In connection with these findings, the result of the survey is confirmed which indicates that in Slovakia, more than half of the population who do sports mostly do sports at home (61%). Slovak is followed only by Hungary (63%) and Lithuania (68%). Then there are outdoor sports grounds, a park, the way home, and gyms and fitness clubs (see Graph VIV).



Graph VIV Settings where people engage in sport or other physical activity in EU and Slovakia [10]

## V. KEY PROBLEM AREAS

The level of performing physical activity on a regular basis (1 to 5 times per week) in Slovakia corresponds to the average of EU countries. In Slovakia, however, there is a lack of systematic state support for a healthy lifestyle in connection with the subsequent involvement of the population in sports. The continuous growth of the number of organized athletes can be positively assessed [6].

There is a noticeable lack of opportunities for sports in Slovakia. Slovakia is one of the EU countries where the largest number of people practicing sports at home practice sports. This fact underlines the significant absence and obsolescence of sports infrastructure. Considering this fact, many sport representatives, if they want to achieve significant international success, are forced to prepare abroad, and many children do not play sports because they have nowhere to go. At the same time, the lack of sport infrastructure that meets international parameters makes it impossible to organize the most important European and world sports events in individual sports on the territory of the Slovak Republic, and it is currently impossible to organize a multi-sport event in Slovakia. The only exception was the two ice hockey world championships, for which new winter stadiums were built in Bratislava and Košice. In addition to sporting opportunities, Slovakia also loses economic income from tourism and positive promotion abroad.

In Slovakia, a comprehensive database of the number of individual sports facilities is not available. For this reason, it is not possible to precisely define the priority areas of its development, either from the point of view of individual sports areas or the regional distribution of future investments. The infrastructure is also characterized by a high energy demand and its operation is not in accordance with the requirements of long-term sustainability.

Recently, several infrastructure projects have been implemented in Slovakia. Unfortunately, their preparation and implementation were not systematically approached. There is also no information on possible positive effects on youth or sports results. An important milestone in this direction is the beginning of the activities of the Sports Support Fund, established in Slovakia in 2019 by Act No. 310/2019 Coll. with the aim of ensuring effective



support and development of youth sports, elite sports, sports representation of the Slovak Republic, but also sports for all and health-disadvantaged people [11].

According to the methodology of the national satellite accounts, in the last period the sports industry brought more than EUR 950 million annually to the Slovak economy, which is a significant disparity between the subsidy for sports from public sources, which reaches a value of around EUR 300 million per year. In terms of the share of sport in GDP per capita, Slovakia was below the average of EU countries, while the significant deficit of sports funding also plays a role in the given comparison [6].

The health of the Slovak population has improved considerably over the past 20 years. However, most indicators of the health status of the population remain below the EU average. Not performing sports activities and physical inactivity often lead to serious diseases. Inactivity also contributes to the deterioration of mental health.

Top athletes run into social security issues not only during their active career, but also after it ends. Although some activities of the Slovak Olympic and Sports Committee are noticeable in this regard, there is no systematic support from the state [6].

Smaller sports organizations in Slovakia present problems with the fulfillment of administrative duties required of them by the Sport Act. In Slovakia, there is no comprehensive structure of knowledge and recommendations necessary for the effective administration of a sports organization. Also, Slovak sport does not have the necessary funds to secure jobs, which must subsequently be replaced by volunteer activities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The mission of sports and physical activity is to contribute to the physical and psychological well-being of a person, to strengthening health, individual development and supporting a healthy lifestyle. Sport and physical activity make it possible to spend free time in a meaningful way and with a sense of fulfillment, to acquire habits and a relationship to a physically active lifestyle, socialization, community life, competition at a sports event.

Among the measures that will support the creation of a positive relationship with the physical activities of residents of all age categories can be included:

- Development of human resources - preparation and development of human resources - teachers of physical and sports education, coaches and instructors, sports service providers, volunteers and other workers in sports.
- Create a motivation scheme for creative teaching of physical and sports education. Involve sports experts in the educational process at schools in the initial years of primary education. Create conditions for increasing the qualifications of physical and sports education teachers in primary education.
- Sports infrastructure - provision of conditions for the implementation of safe and motivating physical activities, systematic development of sports infrastructure, especially school sports grounds, regional sports infrastructure, active zones and sports infrastructure for all. Support the development of sports infrastructure in nature - especially tourist infrastructure and signage, cycling, water, equestrian, skiing and other routes. Ensure sufficient human resources for the development and operation of sports infrastructure.
- Promotion of an active lifestyle and innovations in sports - systematic promotion of sports and media campaigns - to increase the awareness of inhabitants about the importance of physical activity for health and quality of life, about the positive role of sports in education and personality formation, in building social relationships and supporting physical and mental health. Target the campaign as a priority at the part of the population that does not regularly participate in physical activities. Build networks and partnerships between sports organizations, industry and knowledge organizations in the field of sports.=

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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