

Sports Sector Recovery Post-COVID-19

The Covid pandemic has created unprecedented issues for the sports sector, shutting down 95% of European fitness facilities for several weeks or months from March 2020 onwards and lately from October 2020. Even when formally open, the indoor fitness facilities almost universally suffer from a significant reduction in attendance and revenue. Combined with other lockdown measures and social distancing, this situation has already caused serious consequences for many people (customers and fitness employees) in both physical and

psychological terms. This state of affairs needs an urgent response, particularly due to the uncertainties in the near future, until some sustainable solution has been found to deal with the pandemic, in order to maintain the physical activity of the citizens, which is even more threatened during lockdowns and other public health measures - as well as the employment in the sport and fitness industry.

The recommendations of the Sport4HealthNet Project, initially developed for the municipalities of Brussels, Celje, Novi Sad, Sofia, Weert and Zagreb, but almost universally applicable, are as follows.

1. Should create programmes for further development of sports facilities, so that their functionality can be maintained and modernised where required.

2. Could consider establishing a balance between the number of sports indoor and outdoor facilities, or at least to ensure that new ones are built, and existing ones maintained.

3. Continue to ensure that data and information on the sports facilities is accurate and easily accessible on apps, websites and Google Maps.

4. Develop programmes and policies that specifically target the working population

and thus offer sports activities before and/or after working time, e.g. training sessions at evenings, or during the lunch break where applicable.

5. Cooperate, where applicable, with Sport4HealthNet project partners on sports programmes and strategies.



Additionally, we propose 3 groups of possible solutions for the recovery of the sports sector during various public health measures, whilst specifically targeting the fitness improvements of the working population:

1) Digital solutions:

- (a) in-home exercise solutions;
- (b) digital solutions for studios to stay engaged with their customers and generate revenue (online exercise classes, etc.);
- (c) health and wellness solutions for corporations for their employees working from home (similar to 1.(b), but corporately rolled out at a given time of the day, etc.);
- (d) companies such as clothing retail and sports apparel looking for partnership solutions to drive customer engagement.

2) Outdoor training solutions:

Including group walking, running and exercises/dancing programs or similar – the sport industry should not be closed, they should adapt their training programs for outdoor applications and utilise social media or local apps for advertising. This may also include physical games, cycling and similar fitness programs whilst respecting the social distancing measures. This action requires coordination with the local authorities to ensure the adequate infrastructure is available, for example: outdoor sports equipment, areas for recreations with canopies - roof covers, cycling routes, sport centres to open their outdoors facilities like athletics stadiums etc.

3) The creation of offices for active lifestyle support is essential now, in order to popularise and expand activities for support, advice and personalisation of physical activity aimed at promoting fitness, while targeting participation of sedentary groups, and particularly, the increasing population that is now working from home, having stopped commuting, all according to the development of pandemic situation.

