



Active Businesses



Physical Activity Programme Combined Summary Report

2020

DG EAC – ERASMUS+ Sport: Collaborative Partnership



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



**ACTIVE BUSINESSES
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMME
COMBINED SUMMARY REPORT**

www.activebusinesses.eu

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Acknowledgements

Editor:

Jeremy Yelland, Europa Sport Academy

Authors:

Viktor Sušec, Zavod APGA, Agencija Za Promocijo Gibalnih Aktivnosti

Rosina Ulokamma Ndukwe, CESIE

Osman Pisirici, Lykia İzcilik ve Doğa Sporları Kulübü Derneği LIDOSK

Malgorzata Brzezinska, Stowarzyszenie Instytut Nowych Technologii

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1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY SUMMARY

During partner meetings and reviewing the application form, a combined engagement methodology was created by UK partner Europa Sport Academy. This gave each partner a suggested engagement pathway including methods to identify companies, how to approach them and how to commit them to the programme.

In the most cases all partners followed the following process.

1. Research / Identify possible companies to work with
2. Identify HR managers or director contacts of said company
3. Write a letter or email to these contacts
4. Phone call follow up to the approach letter
5. Meeting with employers to present the programme.

Some partners chose to write a letter or email, based on the local culture and best ways of respecting communication to receive the best outcome.

Some partners, Slovenia for example, created a mini brochure which was shared amongst senior staff at potential companies.

When a company agreed to the programme the following activities took place in each partner country.

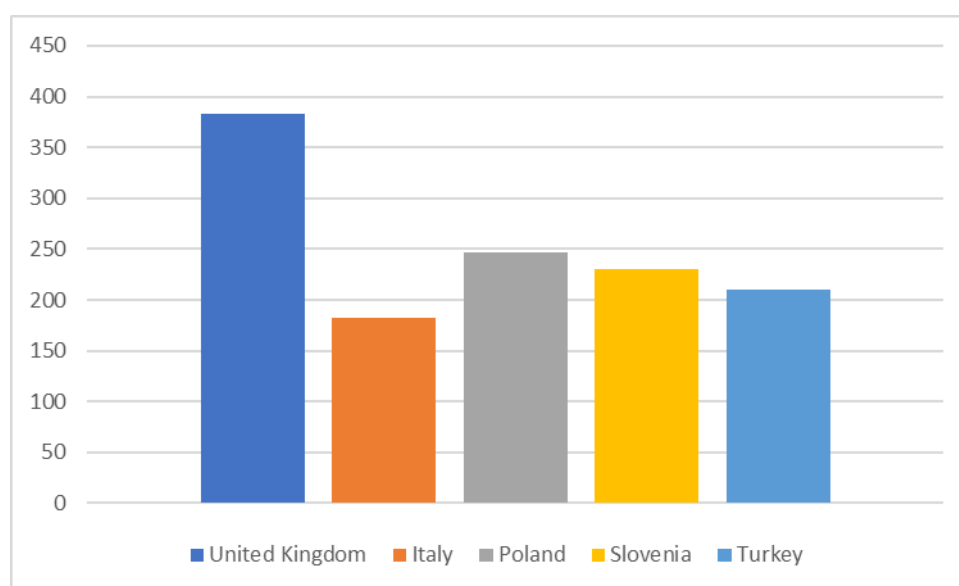
1. Draft contract was agreed with the organisation
2. An internal work place audit was undertaken by the country partner to assess the work places
3. A physical activity plan was presented to the employer
4. Employees then informed of the programme via marketing, emails and bulletin boards.
5. Employees recruited to the programme and signed an NDA to certify they have no underlying health problems and can take part in the programme
6. The Employer complete a questionnaire about their employees and workplace
7. Employees complete a physical fitness questionnaire.

Once all of these items were completed, partners who did not have in-house instructors then recruited sports fitness instructors who would be delivering the physical activity programme in workplaces, these were subsequently trained at a partner meeting in Italy.

All partners carried out continuous quality assessment reviews during the Physical Activity Programme to ensure the employees were getting the maximum out of the programme and gain valuable feedback on possible improvements.

2. PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS SUMMARY

The Active Businesses consortium engaged with a large number of companies working in a diverse range of sectors, including manufacturing, banking, administration and logistics. The following table shows the breakdown of participants per country during the Active Businesses Physical Activity Programme:



Country	Total
United Kingdom	383
Italy	182
Poland	247
Slovenia	230
Turkey	210

In total we reached over **1252** participants in the programme during the duration of the Physical activity programme. Drop out was far lower than expected in each country for the work places based activities.

Each country had between 2 and 5 instructors implementing the Physical Activity Programme's in the workplace for 18 Months, most partners completed the programme between 1st February 2019 – 31st August 2020.

Each partner also looked at running activities outside of the work place and working hours, this proved more challenging due to financial issues, space issues and reluctance of employees. On the whole the work place activities were far more successful.

3. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED SUMMARY

Each partners said they initially they encountered some reservations from employers who were concerned over the time the programme would take and the disruption to workplace activities and finally health and safety concerns. They were convinced by the demonstration of the professional nature of the project, its background and only trained instructors will be participating in the activity.

Some specific challenges encountered in each country are as follows (please refer to individual country reports for greater detail and context)

United Kingdom:

- From an employee perspective, they were concerned the exercises would be of an high intensity which they were not willing to do during the working day. We demonstrated the videos and some of the physical activities at the workstation, and they were happy to try the programme.
- Keeping employees engaged with similar exercises each week was a challenge but we encouraged our instructors to engage more, vary the exercises and we also rotated the instructors so the same one was not at each session.
- Due to different work demands of each company it was not also possible to book fixed weekly time sessions, the instructors had to be flexible and work with the companies to resolve this.

Poland:

- Lack of equipment that was used during stationary physical classes in companies or at the gym. The exercises were tailored so that each employee could implement them at home.
- Staying engaged and motivated during online classes. Implementation of classes not at specific times, but publishing regular videos for the group. Employees could use the resources at any time of the day.
- Convincing business owners and managers to implement physical activities during working hours. Most of the groups did their exercises before or after working hours.
- Maintaining employees' motivation to participate in regular exercises. We implemented additional activities in the event of cancellation of classes by the trainer, falling holidays on that day, etc.

Turkey:

- Trouble finding the enterprises to be included in the program. This was due to the fact that the society was unconscious about the active life and the workplace owners did not want employees to take care of something else during their working hours.
- There was a problem in setting the appropriate time for all participants while making exercise adjustments.

Slovenia:

- Reluctant to disturb the production process.
- Covid19: Due to a (partial) lockdown in the country all exercise classes were stopped, both in the companies and at the local gym

Italy:

- The high level of bureaucracy faced from delivering the programme was a big obstacle to overcome. At the beginning, some of the businesses/organisations who were interested to join (e.g. banks) demanded a very complex contract with a lot of terms and conditions applied.
- Extra insurance and medical certificates were required
- Getting employers involved and convincing them to implement physical activities during the working hours of their staff and inside the workplace.
- Lack of financial resources to rent a gym or sports facility and provide employees with enough adequate space for carrying out the activities outside the workplace.

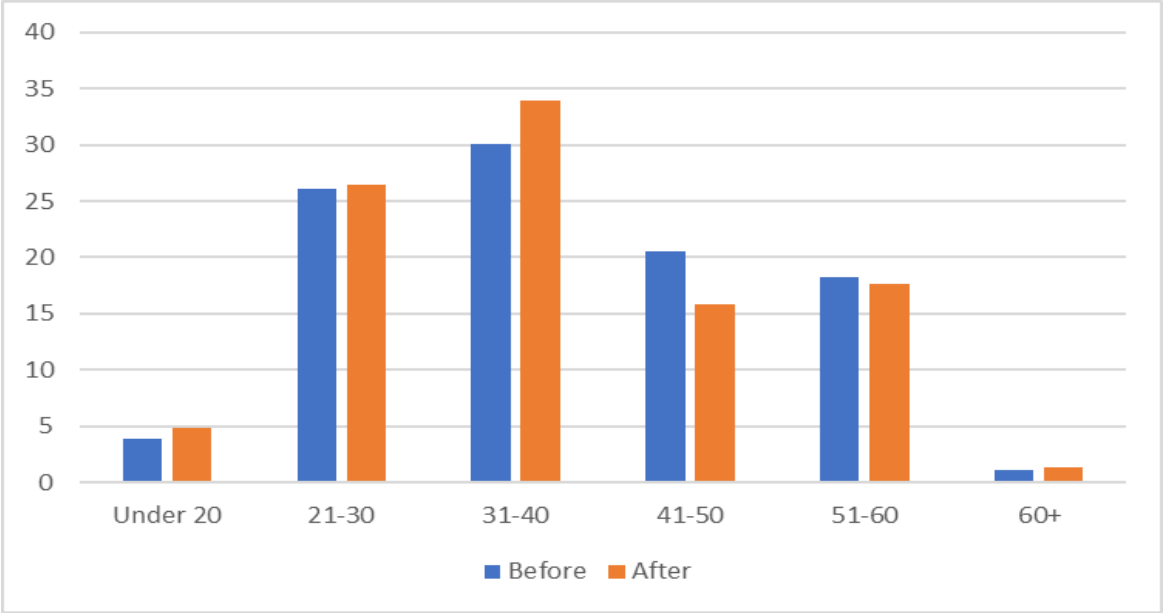
One unexpected disruption to the programme was the Covid:19 global pandemic which had an impact on the programme and the lives of the partners, employees and employers.

All partners overcame this problem by using technology such as social media groups, online videos and WhatsApp groups to maintain regular communication with the participants of the programme.

4. BEFORE AND AFTER DATA COMPARISON SUMMARY

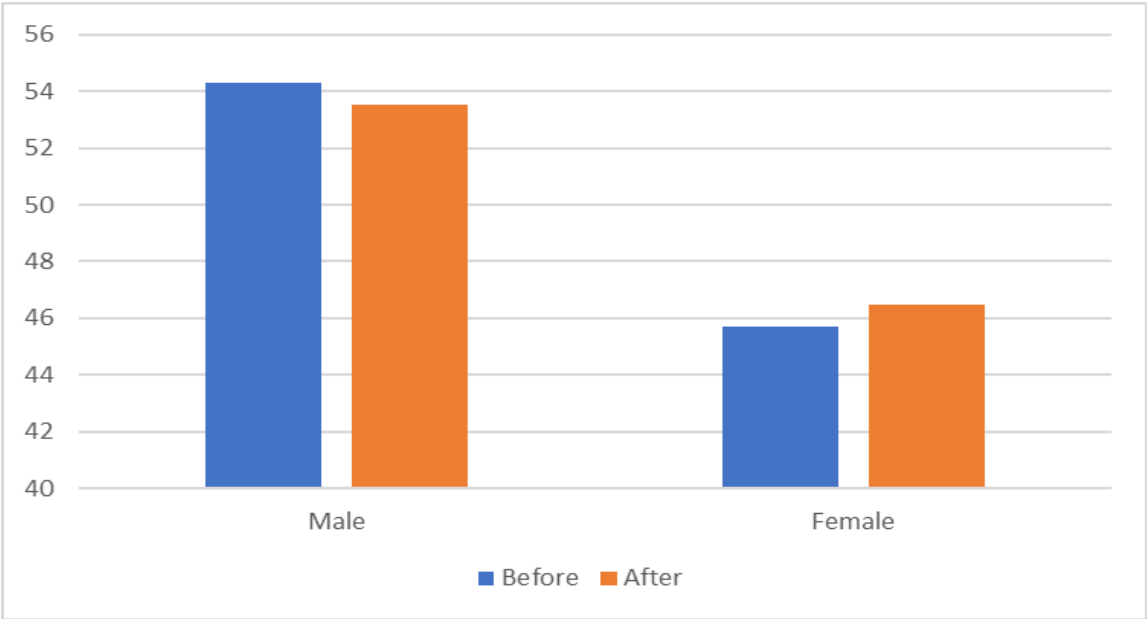
Employees were asked to complete a lifestyle questionnaire at the beginning & end of the programme implementation. The following graphs and explanations are from key questions and are a combined average summary of the people that took part.

Age Groups



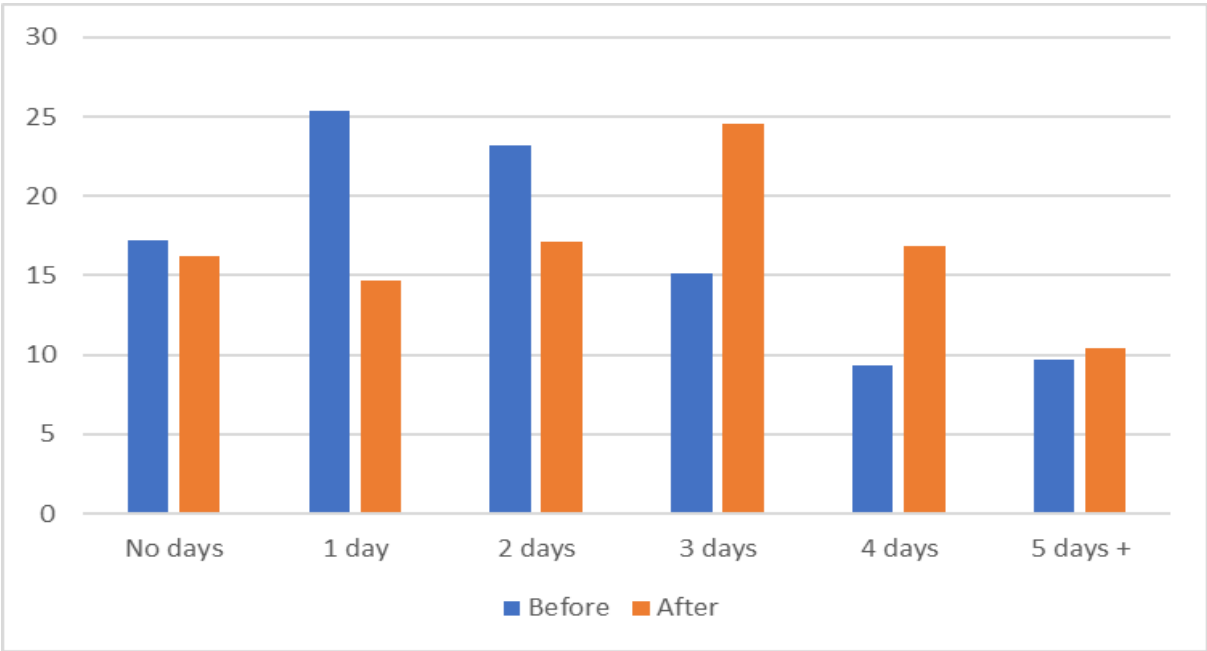
The age groups of participants remained very consistent in all countries during the programme implementation. There was a small increase in the 31-40 age group.

Gender



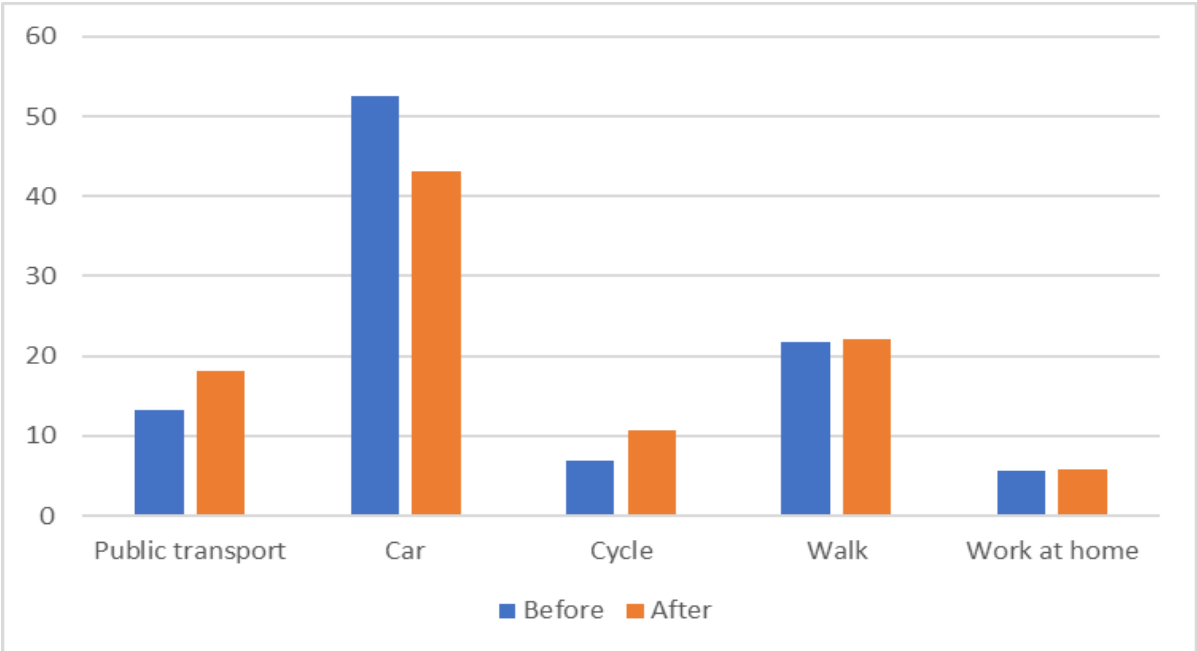
There was a very equal balance of genders taking part in the programme in each partner country. No significant changes were noted.

In a typical week, on how many days do you take part in any sport or physical activity?



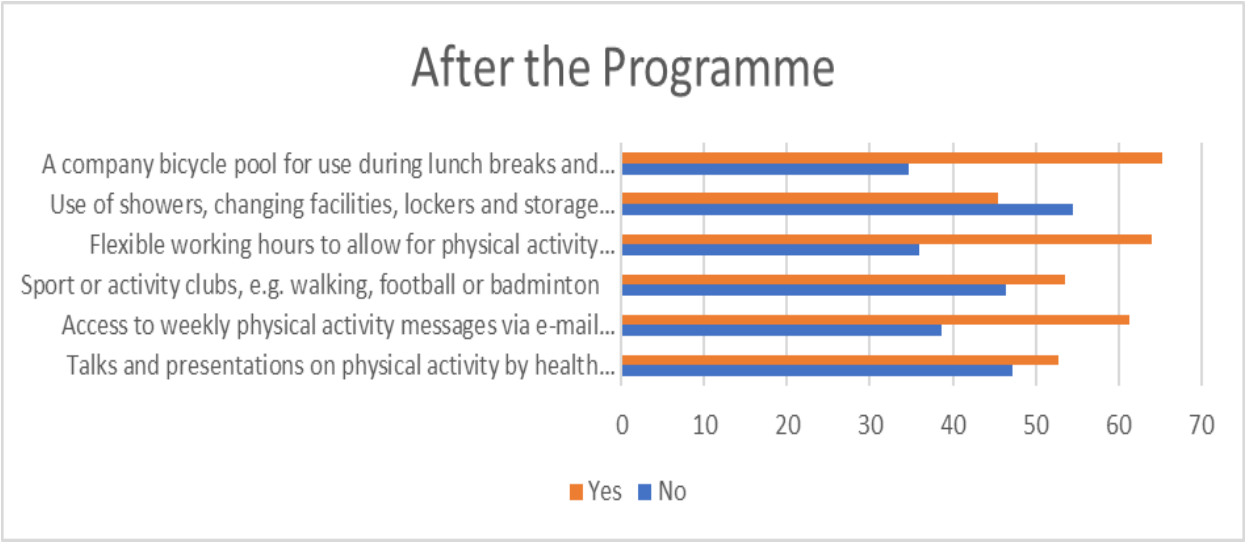
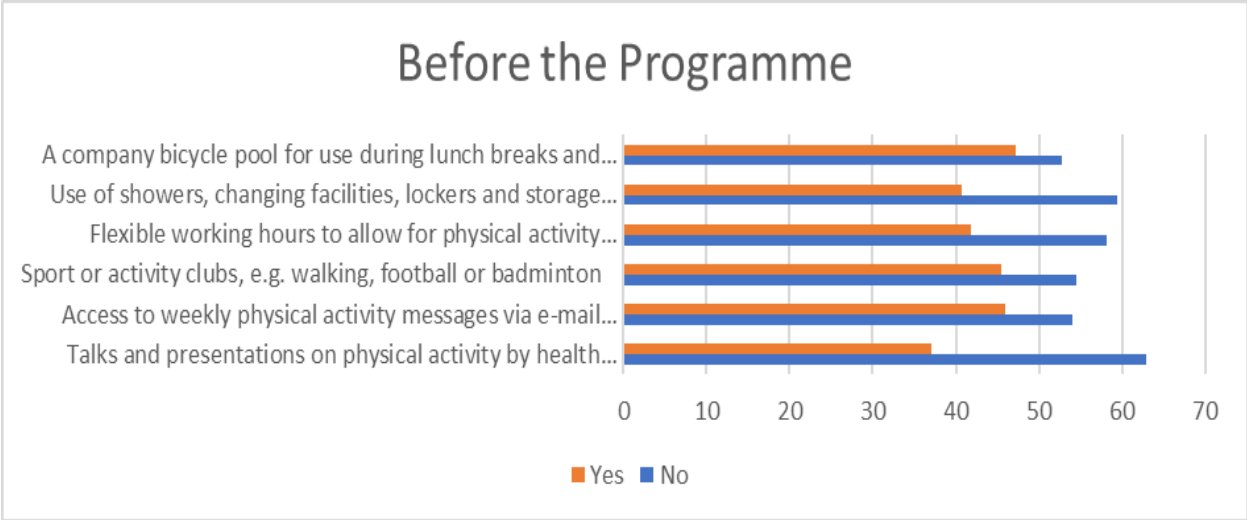
This was a very interesting result because it shows increases in sport and physical activities in all indicators. The results show that participants in all countries became more active after completing the programme.

How do you mainly travel to and from work?



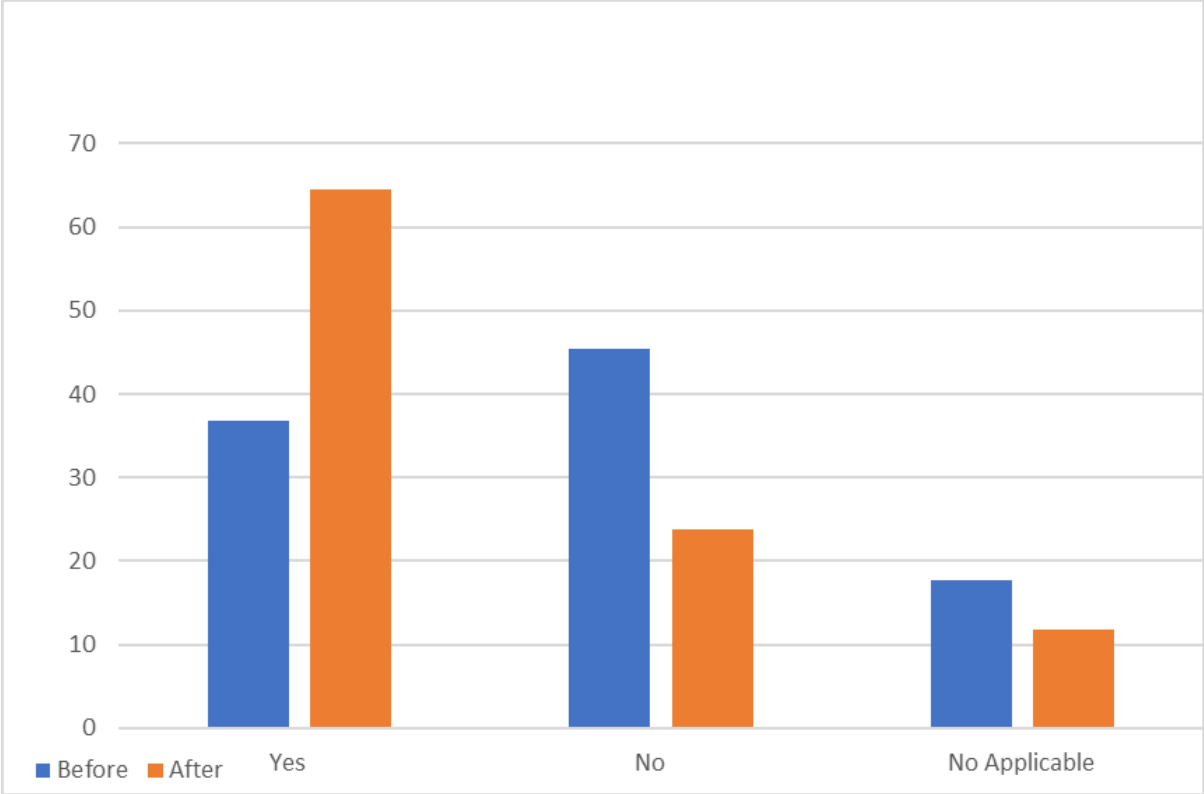
The results show that there was a decrease in using a car to get to work and an increase in cycling and walking. The UK, Poland and Italy saw significant increases in cycling to the workplace

Are any of the following physical activity initiatives offered at your place of work?



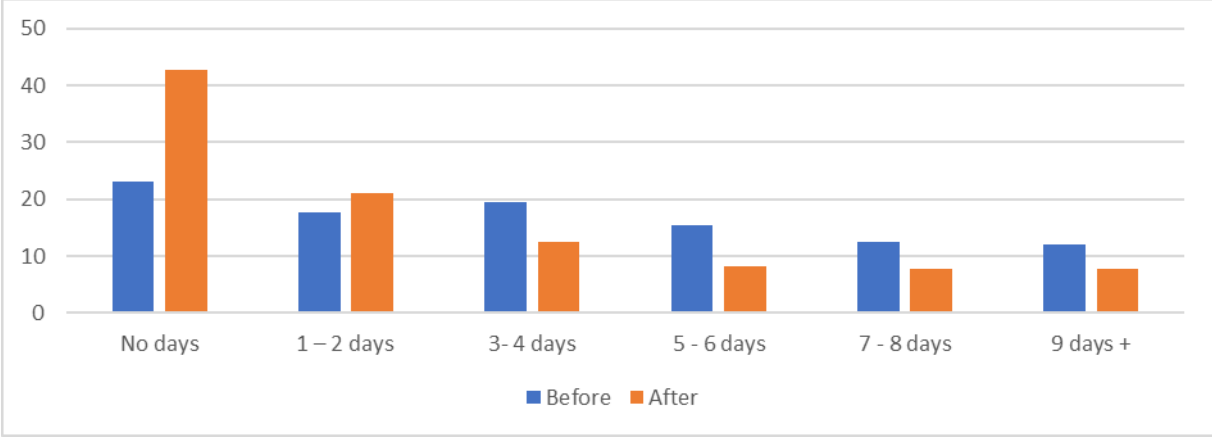
Completion of the programme clearly showed that they were more interested in having better facilities in their workplace. The biggest increase was the introduction of cycle storage units in workplaces.

Are you satisfied with the opportunities you have for looking after your health and mental wellbeing before, during or after work?



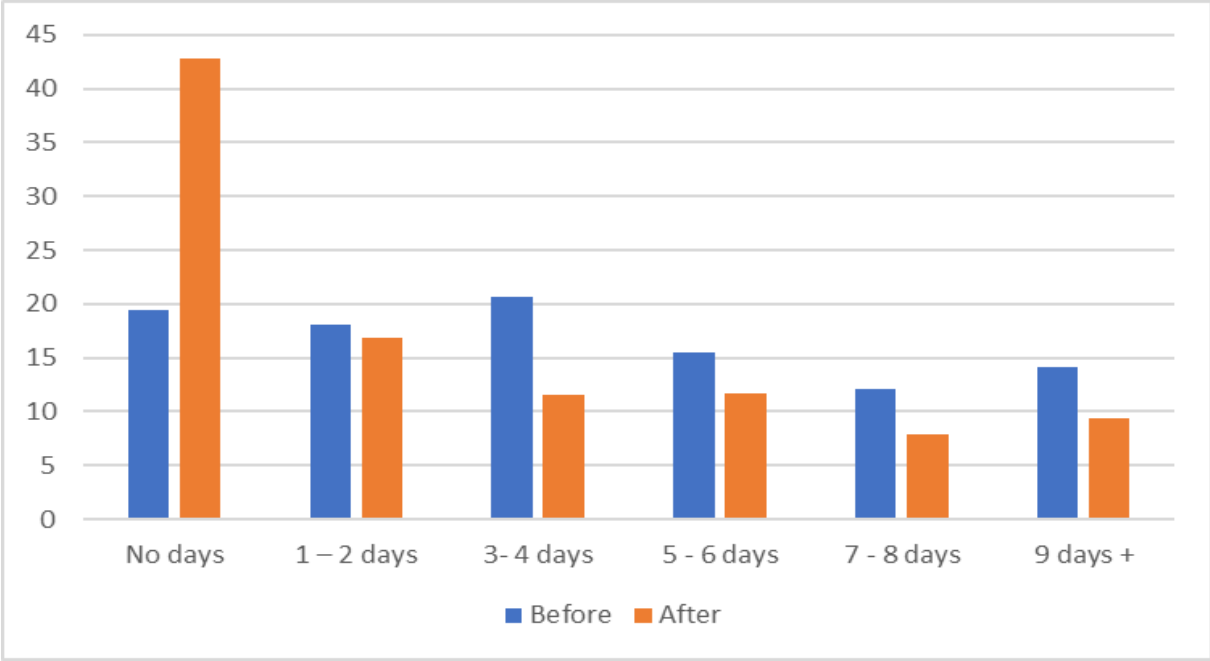
The result of this question shows the employees have valued the programme and appreciated the effort by their employers. The biggest increases were in Poland and the United Kingdom. Turkey only experienced minor changes.

In the last 12 months, roughly how many days have you been absent from work due to personal illness or injury?



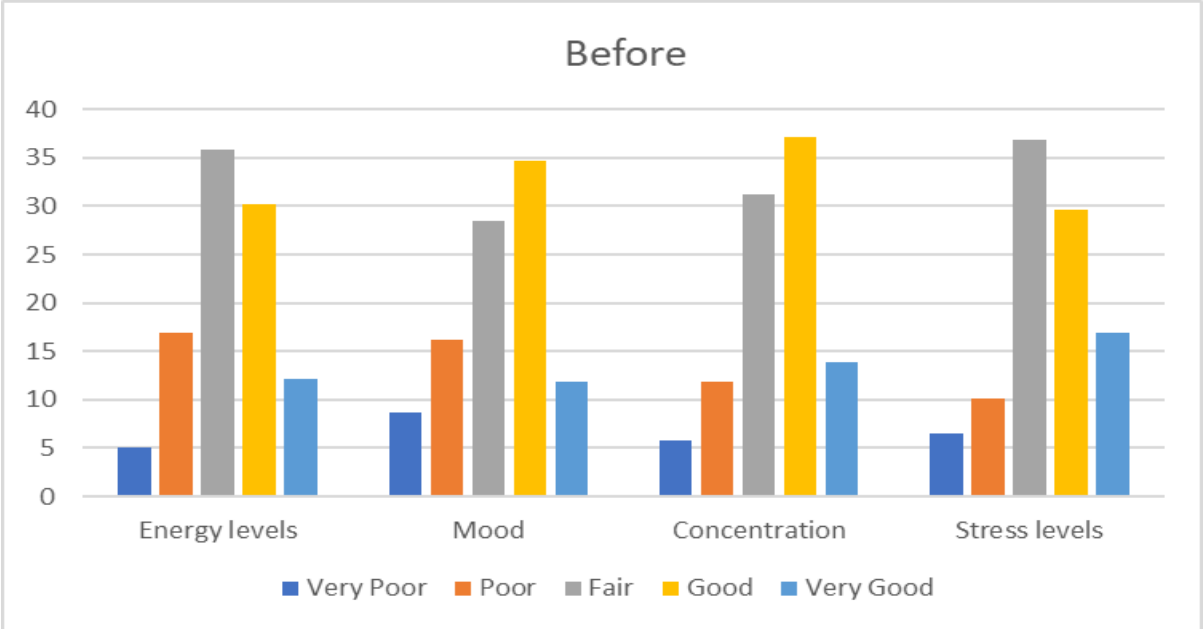
The result show there has been a slight decrease in the number of days of absence due to being unwell. It is too early to draw conclusions from this data and would require many years of research to fully confirm the trend. Turkey noticeably had a major decrease in the number of absenteeism during the programme.

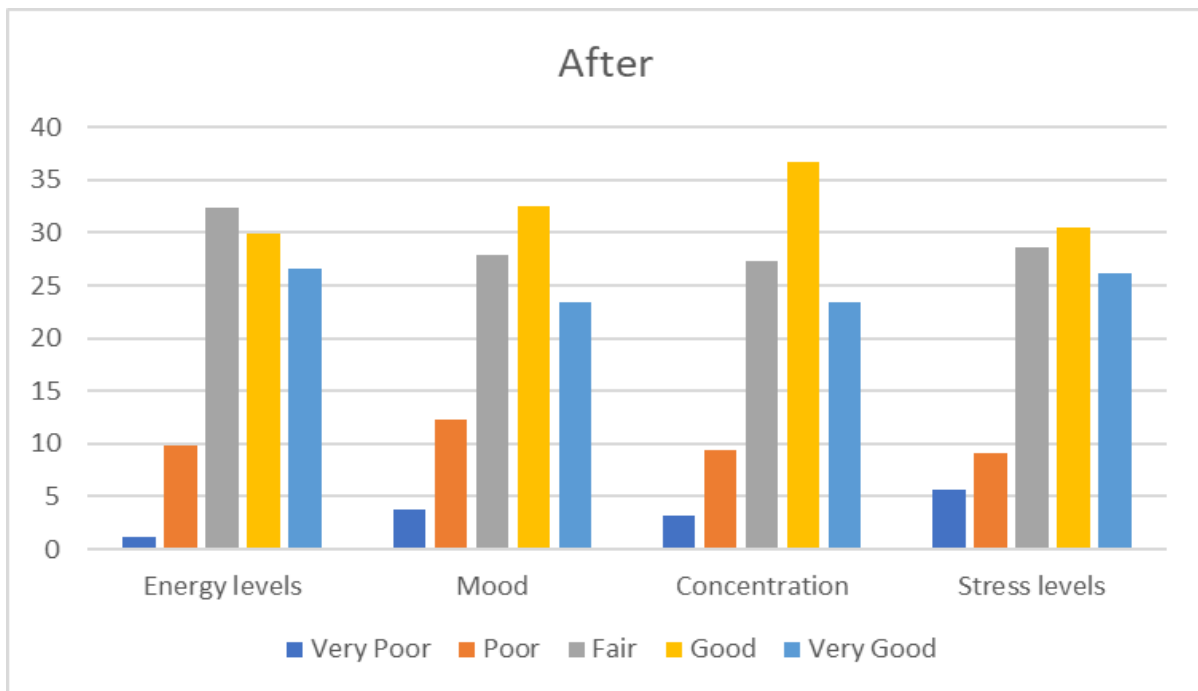
In the last 12 months, roughly how many days have you been present at work being ill?



The result showed that after the programme employees were least likely to attend work whilst being ill, unfit for work. The biggest changes were in Slovenia, Italy and Turkey.

How would you describe the following when you are at work?



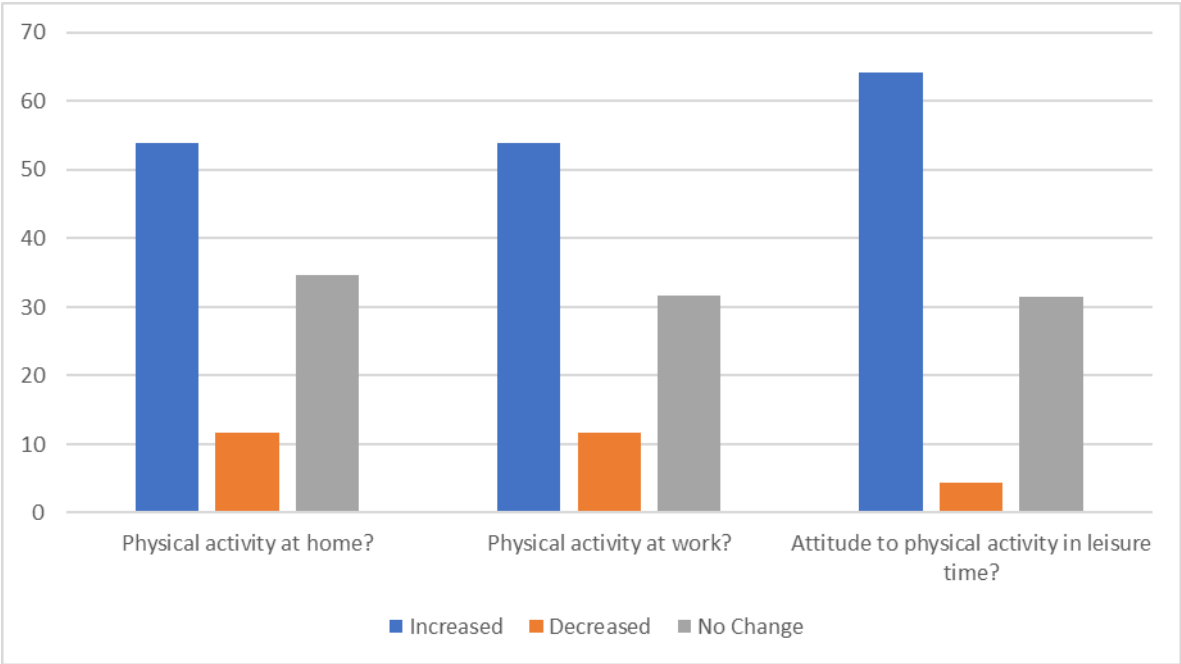


Comparing the data there has been a general improvement in all areas after completing the physical activity programme, this was consistent across all partner countries.

5. POST PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMME REVIEW DATA – EMPLOYEES

In addition to the full evaluation questionnaire, employees from each country were asked questions to review the overall effectiveness Programme upon completion. The results are as follows:

Since participating in the Active Bushiness Physical Activity Programme have you changed your habits / routines in any of the following areas:



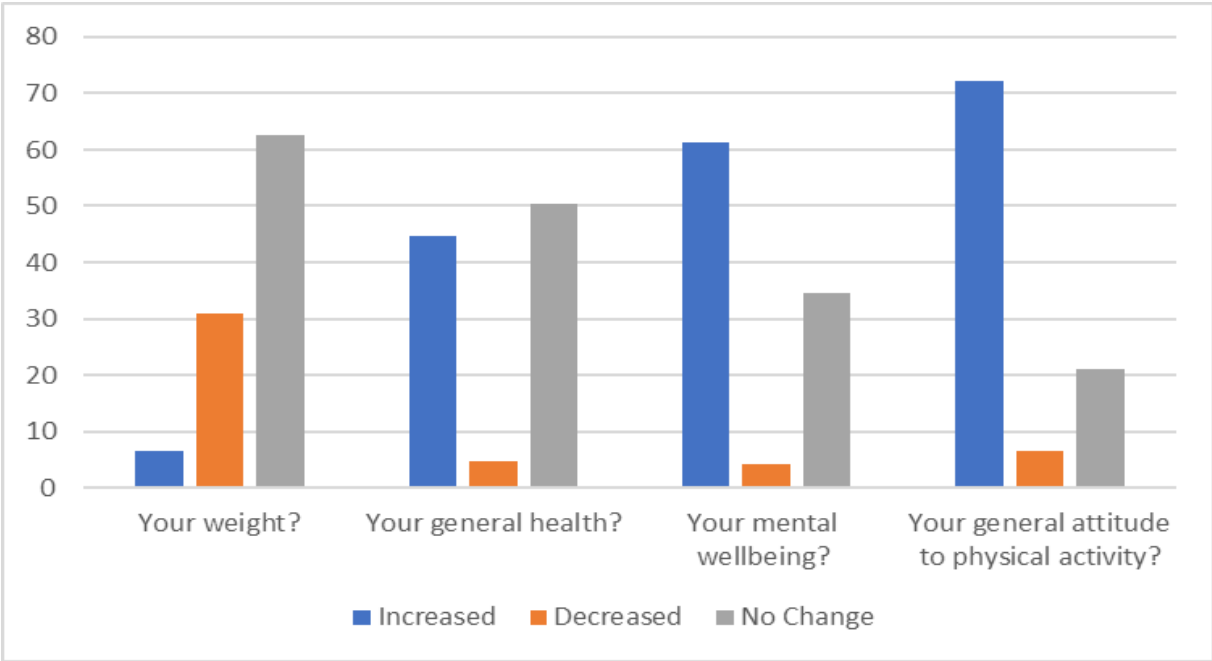
The after programme data clearly shows that the PA programme has had a dramatic effect on the lives of people who participated in it. Physical activity in the home and work has massively increased along with the attitude towards the attitude to physical activity.

All countries reported a significant increase to the positive benefits from the programme. England, Poland and Turkey show massive increases in their attitude to physical activity in leisure time, UK 88%, Turkey, 80% and Poland 73%.

The main aim of the Active Businesses Programme was to encourage employees to be more active within the workplace, the results of the project clearly show this has been a success. In the UK there was a 68% increase in physical activity at work. 65% in Turkey, 56% in Slovenia, 72% in Poland and 58% in Italy.

The surprising and positive outcome was how the programme has inspired participants to be more outside of the workplace, specifically at home, UK 55%, Turkey 68%, Slovenia 34%, Poland 70% and 42% in Italy.

Since participating in the Active Business Physical Activity Programme have you noticed any changes in:



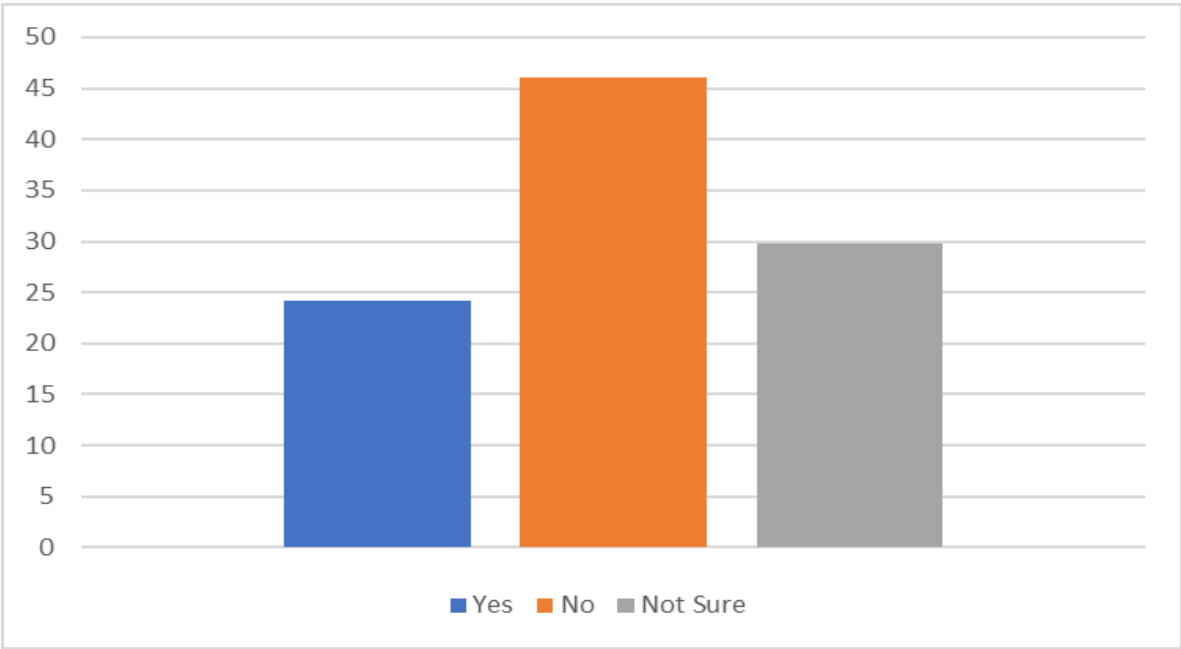
The results from the employee feedback are very interesting. Marginal decreases in weight were noted, but this was not the main objective of the Active Businesses Physical Activity Programme.

One of the most surprising but positive results was the employees opinions on their own mental wellbeing after completing the programme. Four countries noted a significant increase in their mental wellbeing with the UK seeing an increase of 52%, 85% in Turkey, 70% in Poland and 75% in Italy. Interestingly Slovenia only saw an increase of 24%.

Another objective of the Active Businesses PA programme was to improve employees general attitude to physical activity and to see how this could help them in not only their working life but also their personal life. Once again the results show the success of the project. In the UK 69% said the programme had increased thier general attitude to physical activity, 85% in Turkey, 54% in Slovenia, 73% in Poland and 80% in Italy.

In regards to the general health of employees, after the programme there was some clear significant increases in people’s perceived general health in some countries more than others. Turkey had an increase of 75% and Poland an increase of 69%. Slovenia showed the lowest increase of 20%

Have you noticed any changes in absences from work due to health issues?



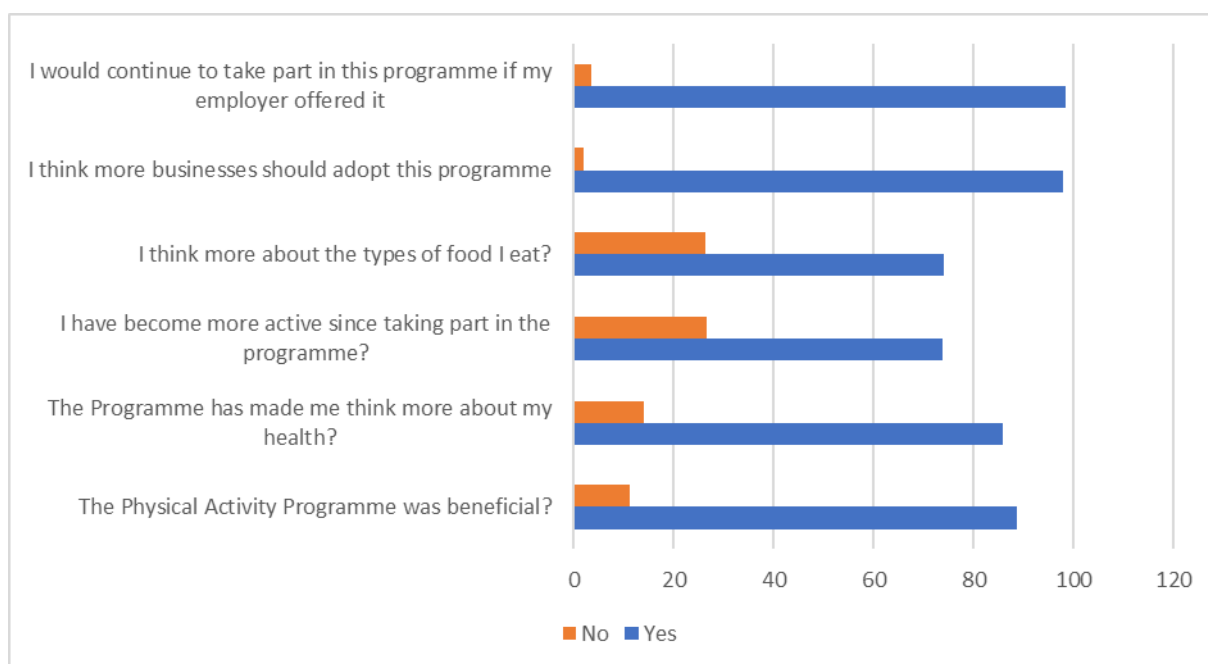
This question was always going to be the hardest to interpret the results. The programme only ran for 18 months and the long term benefits are hard to judge at this early stage, although overall 24% of participants had noticed a difference.

Interestingly 61% of participants in Poland noticed a difference and only 3% in Italy.

Employees in Slovenia, 73% and Turkey 62% reported that there was no difference in their level of absences from the workplace due to illness or health issues.

Italy 54% and the UK 50% reported that they were unsure if there were any differences in their levels of absences from the workplace due to illness or health issues.

What is your overall opinion of the following:



96% of participants said they would continue to take part in this programme if their employer offered it.

98% of participants said they think more businesses should adopt this programme. In Turkey, Slovenia and Italy, 100% agreed in the UK and Poland 95% agreed.

One question that provided different results in one country was, 'I think more about the types of food I eat?'. In most countries between 80-90% of participants agreed they think more about the food they eat, but in Slovenia only 46% said they changed their views. There could be two interpretations of this, firstly in Slovenia they could already eat healthy and have no need to change or other countries promoted this more during the Active Businesses Physical Activity Programme.

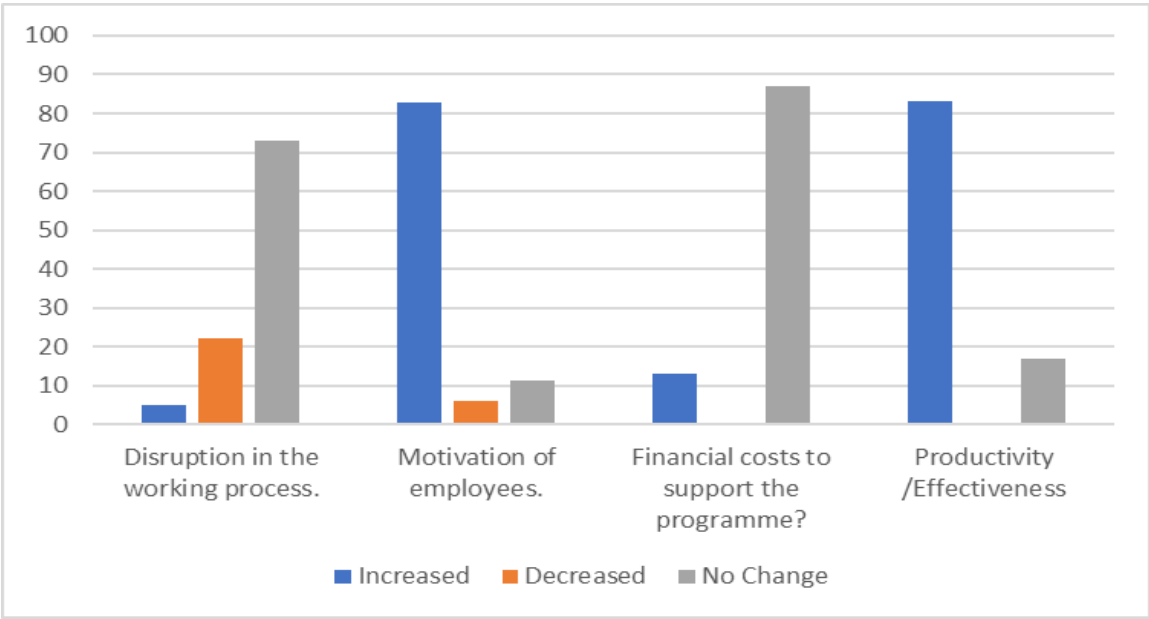
A real positive of the Physical Activity Programme was the response to the question 'The Programme has made me think more about my health?' In the UK, Turkey and Poland over 90% said the programme had really made them think more about their health which can only be seen as a positive. Italy and Slovenia recorded results of between 60% - 70%.

Finally 89% of participants said the PA programme was beneficial to them. In Turkey Slovenia and Poland almost all participants agreed, In Italy 70% agreed and the UK 82%.

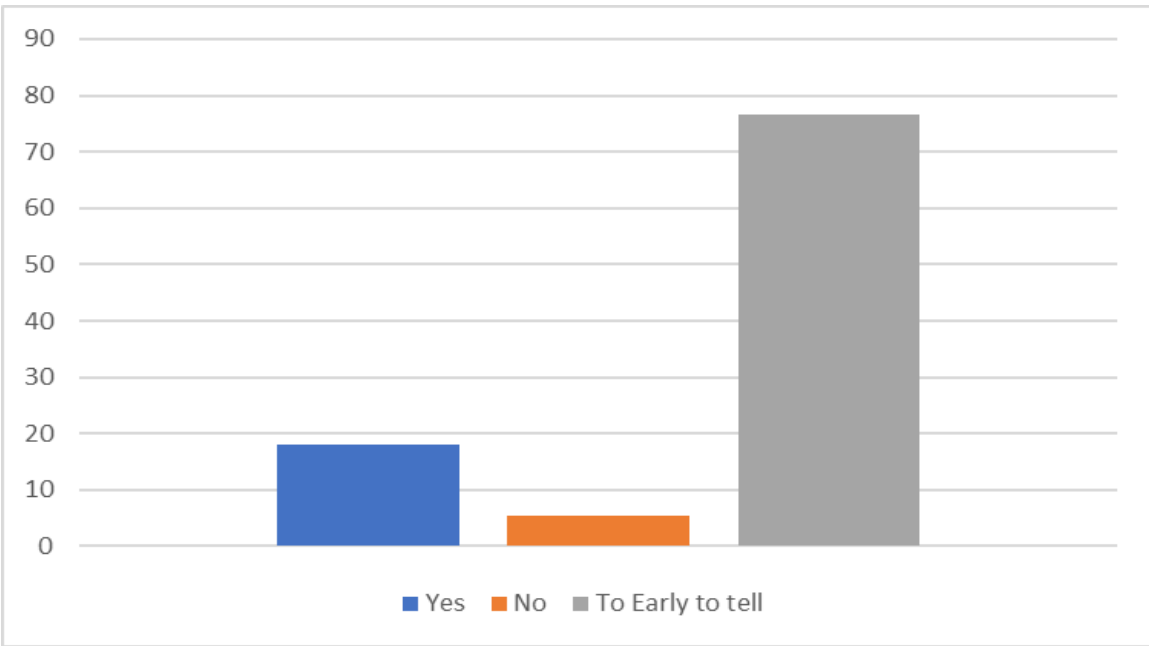
6. POST PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMME REVIEW DATA – EMPLOYERS SUMMARY

At the end of the programme a selection of employers, HR manager, line managers and directors were asked for their feedback on the programme. These are the findings:

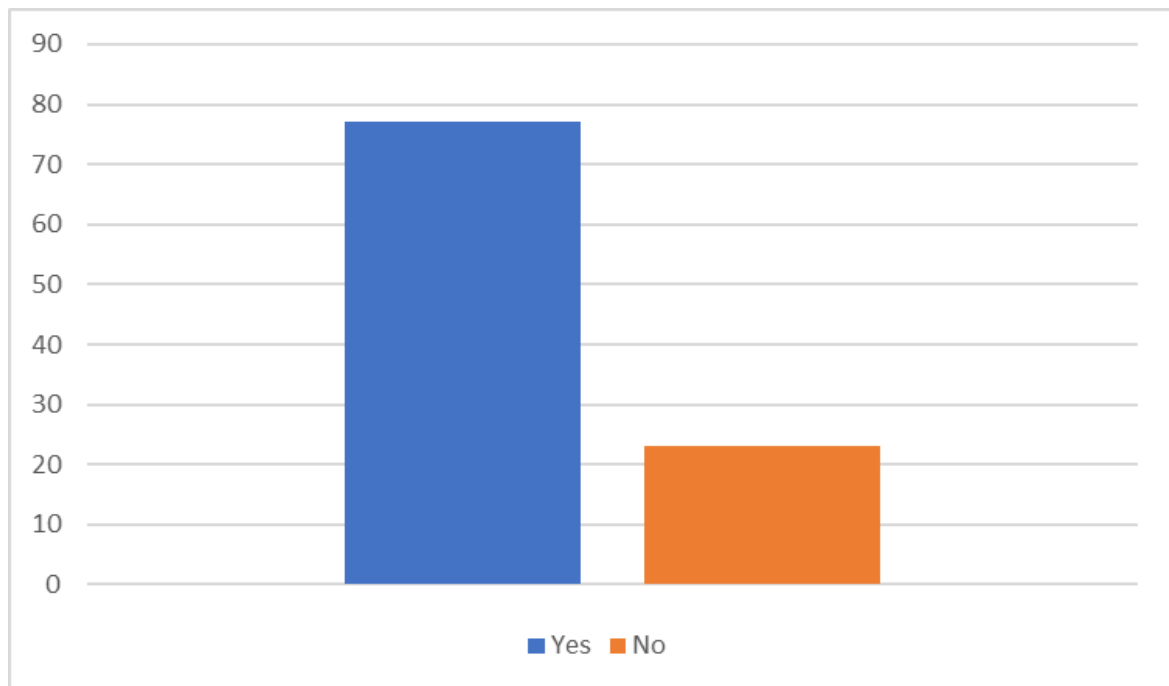
How did the Active Bushness Physical Activity Programme impact your organisation?



Have you noticed a reduction in health based absenteeism?



Will you continue with the Active Businesses Physical Activity Programme?



Reasons for not continuing (direct feedback from Employees):

- Without funding the programme ourselves then it would be too much.
- We ran the programme as an experiment to see if it boosted employee performance and although it did I'm not sure the long term positives would continue.
- If it was not for the Covid:19 virus then it would be a yes but we cannot have external people in our building.
- While the idea is good, I do worry about the health and safety and insurance liability of employees getting injured at work, although we see the benefits. Further exploration would be needed.
- The cost to fund this programme would be too much. Thankfully the Erasmus Sport funding is a huge benefit and we will talk with the board to see if this type of programme could be developed.
- We have the problem with the allocation of space for the group exercises. We did not want to generate costs for renting the room out of company. The board has agreed to work before and after working hours so as not to disrupt working hours".

7. CONCLUSION SUMMARY

From partner research and experience during the implementation of the project, all partners noticed great potential in implementing this type of physical activity programs in organizations after the project ends. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a lot of negative effects on the program as the participants' motivation and commitment decreased. Nevertheless, they hope that the program will come back in the future as the world adjust and adapts to new working methods and practices.

Employees Conclusions

The evaluation of the programme by the employees was very interesting with some real clear positive effects of the programme. For example there as a very clear result that the programme had significantly increased the employees physical activity at home and at work, along with a large change in their attitude towards physical activity in their leisure time.

The physical benefits to employees also showed positive improvements, slight weight losses were recorded along with increase in beliefs towards their general health. There was a massive increase in the employees mental wellbeing and their attitude towards physical activity, which it is a true positive indicator for a programme like Active Businesses in the workplace, and shows that the mental health of a workforce can be dramatically improved with a minor cost implication.

As expected, with the programme running for only 18 months the impact on staff absenteeism as hard to quantify and cannot be fully linked to the programme without further research.

Finally, as a direct result of the Active Businesses Physical Activity Programme, the majority of employees had an extremely positive opinion of the programme. Over 75% wanted to continue the programme.

Employers

In general almost all employers thought the programme was a good idea and had an impact on their business, however in the UK, the majority said they were not sure if they would be able to fund it without the help of the government or EU.

In Slovenia and most countries Employers did not notice disruptions in the working process because of the program. The motivation for work and the productivity increased during the program but they cannot notice any changes in health-related absenteeism (it is too soon).

In Both Turkey and Slovenia all companies agreed that they would continue to run the programme internally within their employees. Other countries, Italy and Poland, whilst the employers seemed positive about continuing, the current worldwide pandemic made them question if it was possible. In the UK it was more a concern of how to fund this programme without external funding.

Despite initial concerns by employers in almost all countries, the Active Businesses Physical Activity Program was in fact, easy to implement, because it was done in the workplace at convenient times to the employers. Workplaces had sufficient space to effectively execute active breaks. One general observation from the coaches was that more employees took part in the active breaks in autumn/winter months than in the spring/summer months.

On the whole, in each partner construed the feedback from the Employers was extremely positive and almost all believe in the long term benefits of a programme like this.



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