



Promotion of Physical Activity of the Youth through Active Mobility to School

About PAYAMOS

Youngsters are no exception to **problems of physical health**, such as obesity, that stem from physical inactivity. Less than 20% of 11- to 17-year-olds meet the World Health Organization's daily recommendation for daily physical activity, and similar rates have been reported in younger children too. With **physical activity declining in Europe**, these issues are becoming even more pressing, and policymakers are desperate for solutions.

One of the reasons attributed to physical inactivity among youth is passive mobility. Many youngsters are driven to and from school by car. **Walking and cycling to school** are alternatives that hold massive potential, benefiting not only the youth themselves but their environment too.

PAYAMOS is an **Erasmus Plus Sport Collaborative partnership** between Germany, Italy, Greece, Netherlands, Croatia, Turkey and Poland to promote physical activity and active mobility among young people. For more information on the project visit <http://payamos.myerasmus.net/>

Benefits of active mobility



Cardiovascular fitness and reduce obesity



Cognitive performance and spatial awareness



Independence, positive emotions, and social inclusion



Habits that carry on into adulthood



Less traffic and air pollution

Barriers to active mobility

Within our project several built environment characteristics were shown to be linked to **positive physical health outcomes** of children, making them worthy to consider in promoting active school travel.

Higher number of intersections

Lower distances to school

Greater street connectivity

More access to public transport

Other research also shows some of the **perceptions** that exist among children and teenagers that stop them from using active mobility.



My parents don't want me to walk to school alone

I'm not sure my school even has bike racks

I'm scared around many cars and trucks that drive fast



Nobody I know walks or cycles to school

I'm not comfortable around the area and people I don't know

I don't know how to cycle



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Interventions to consider

»»» Calm traffic

The traffic that youth encounter walking or cycling to school can greatly hinder the uptake of active mobility, even more so in cases of obesity and low income. Consider implementing strategies like **lowering speed limits** around schools, **improving street connectivity**, **temporarily restricting motor traffic** at school gates at drop-off or pick-up times, or **transforming streets for shared use** of pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. These tactics can improve actual safety, reducing the number of injuries and fatalities, while also enhancing perceptions of safety for both youth and their parents. To illustrate, lowering the speed limit in areas of Bristol, UK was associated with a rise in walking (1% to 21%) and cycling (4% to 22%).

»»» Build parental awareness

A lack of parental support can prevent children and teenagers from walking or cycling to school. The **face-to-face engagement and education** of parents can help address their perceptions and increase their knowledge about the benefits of active mobility as well as practicalities such as infrastructure networks, making cycling and walking a more viable option. In the case of children, who are less independent and less concerned about image than teenagers, **involving parents in initiatives** promoting active travel such as cycling training, walking school buses, or even one-off promotional events like family bicycle rides can help improve attitudes and secure buy-in.

»»» Ensure access to public transport

In cases where distances between schools and homes are too large to expect a one-to-one shift from driving to cycling or walking, ensuring widespread access to public transport becomes ever more important. Not only does this mean improving public transport **coverage and service frequency**, but also enhancing the **connectivity between public transport and other modes** – for example, by providing **bicycle racks** on metros and ensuring the availability of **bicycle sharing docking stations and bicycle lanes** around stations and schools. It is crucial that children and teenagers are also made to feel safe on public transport, that they can afford it, and that information is provided in an understandable way.

»»» Promote community-based initiatives

Social support can be instrumental in getting youth to experiment with new behaviors, build their confidence, and create strong habits. For children, **walking school buses or bicycle trains** on a set route with adult supervision have been shown to be effective. To illustrate, schools with such walking and cycling schemes have seen increases in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity by 7 and 22 minutes respectively, in addition to improvements in road safety skills and attitudes. For teenagers, the benefits of access to cycling or walking groups go even further; they can be a good way for teenagers to **take ownership** over issues of active mobility and public health and to **normalize the image of walking and cycling** among their peers, making it *cool*.



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Sources

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Benefits of active mobility

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Barriers to active mobility

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Potential interventions

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White background



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