

DOPING PREVENTION IN RECREATIONAL SPORT AND FITNESS

1. State of play: doping concern out of the elite sporting system

Although different forms of collaboration exist in the elite sport domain, a consistent solution across Member States has been difficult to establish in the context of recreational sport and this is attributed to a shortage of responsibility and collaboration. The EU Sport Work Plan 2017-2020 identifies doping in recreational sport as a priority for the next three years: "each Presidency should provide the necessary expert input on anti-doping issues".

The current context sees a growing concern that

doping outside of the elite sporting system is an expanding and problematic phenomenon, giving rise to the belief that the misuse of doping agents in recreational sport has become a societal problem and a public health concern. The prevalence of doping in fitness among the public is still high which might be harmful to the integrity and perception of the fitness sector, although the reality shows how the use of performance and image enhancing substances involves all recreational sports.

2. The prevalence of doping in amateur sport and its perception

Doping for any sport is considered as a sensitive topic, consequently, to conduct research about the prevalence of doping in recreational sport becomes difficult.

EuropeActive, through the FAD project has indicated that approximately 2.5% of fitness centre users took a form of doping substance (for image and/or performance enhancing purposes). Nearly 40% were taking performance and/or image enhancing substances to improve their competitiveness for their sport by increasing their strength and cardiovascular performance in fitness centres.

Although there are no reliable figures for the use of performance or image-enhancing substances (PIEDS) in recreational sports, it can be assumed that in activities such as rugby, power-lifting, cycling, triathlons or marathons, the prevalence of doping would be at least comparable to that found in fitness.

Besides these figures, the perception of people shows another reality. 50% think that doping is widespread in fitness and any doping substances are easily available.

3. The social responsibility of the fitness sector

The European fitness sector needs to promote doping-free environments as a socially responsible position. Fitness facilities are principally places to increase levels of physical activity and in doing so to improve the health of citizens. Therefore, any level of doping is counter-productive to the aim of the sector, and the perceived motivations of "doping users", such as "to improve physical appearance or sporting performance", are not consistent with the aim of individuals who

engage in physical activity to improve their health and fitness. Fitness must recognize its social responsibility since it is a growing business which involves now 56 million Europeans and 650,000 employees. Doping will not have to be considered anymore a sensitive topic but rather an issue to face in order to allow a future growth not only in terms of revenues but also for enhancing its public image.



4. EuropeActive recommendations for the fight against doping in recreational sport

EuropeActive believes that after many efforts to fight doping in the elite sporting system, there is a need for facing this issue as well in recreational sport. As the leading not-for-profit organisation representing the European Health and Fitness Sector with 20 National Fitness Association partners, thousands of fitness centres across Europe and hundreds of thousands of exercise professionals, EuropeActive has the capacity to positively contribute to the fight against doping.

EuropeActive recommendations can be summarised as follows:

1. **Raise the awareness about the risks of doping:**

EuropeActive organises every year an annual Forum on doping in amateur sport but also participates in several conferences organised by EU Institutions, National Doping Agencies and Sport Organisations.

2. The fight against doping should, not only be based on controls, but also on an **"education and information campaign" for fitness stakeholders (managers, personal trainers, gym owners and users)** policy makers and finally the general public.

3. Stakeholders as EuropeActive have to propose

and share anti-doping action plans, continue to undertake further research into doping practices as well as monitoring current anti-doping interventions.

4. Any differences between Member States in terms of legal, administrative and political arrangements should be reduced through an improved collaboration also with NADOs and recreational sport organisations.

5. **Collaboration among fitness sector and recreational sport organisations**

6. To prevent a pro-doping culture developing, more than enforcements, controls, sanctions or even criminalisation, it is important **to pursue effective education of exercise professionals, club managers and the fitness centre users themselves.**

7. Concerning food supplements for sportspeople, there is a need for **effective testing and labeling to protect consumers and fitness clubs** that sell these products. Consequently, EuropeActive supports the work of the CEN Working Group 453

8. Oppose the easy access **to doping products over the Internet.**

