

# THE FITNESS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SECTORAL SKILLS POLICY CONTEXT

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## From 'Active Leisure' to 'Fitness and Physical Activity': background and context

### 1. Establishing the Active Leisure Sector (2008-2021)

- 2008: The **Active Leisure sector** was identified as a combination of the fitness and outdoor sub-sectors.
- 2012: EuropeActive and the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE) signed a cooperation to launch the **Active Leisure Alliance**.<sup>1</sup>
- 2013: A Eurofound Study<sup>2</sup> confirmed the representativeness of resp. EuropeActive and EC-OE for Active Leisure. EuropeActive (then called EHFA: the European Health and Fitness Association) set up EHFA-e (EHFA-employers) as a new not-for-profit association for employers in the European fitness sector.
- 2013-2021: EuropeActive and EC-OE continuously followed and supported the Lifelong Learning Programme and their **occupational standards for fitness trainers and outdoor animators**, which have been developed and informally referenced to the European Qualification Framework (EQF).
- 2014-2016: EuropeActive and EC-OE completed the classification of the main occupations of the Active Leisure sector as part of the European **Skills Competencies Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO)**<sup>3</sup> expert referencing. The ESCO work also confirmed the sector definitions. 2014-16: EuropeActive and EC-OE launched the

**Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure**<sup>4</sup>, comprised of a strategic cooperation between key stakeholders: employers, operators, trade unions, research and training institutions...

- 2016-2021: After supporting the social dialogue test-phase for Sport and Active Leisure with the DIAL project (2013-2014)<sup>5</sup>, the Alliance ran **2 major EU-funded actions**:
  - The **SIQAF project** (2016-2018), which explored possibilities for Active Leisure industries to take sectoral qualifications through the stages of referencing to National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) and linking to the EQF, with the aim to support labour market mobility in the sector.<sup>6</sup>
  - The **BLUEPRINT project** (2018-2020), which promoted education, skills, and employment cooperation in the sector with a focus on improving skills intelligence and addressing skills shortages.<sup>7</sup>

### 2. Moving forward with the Fitness and Physical Activity Sector (2021 onwards)

- 2020: the **BLUEPRINT final report** concluded that "the growing 'healthy lifestyle for all' concept [will] demand an even higher supply of skilled workers and business solutions", and that "the Active Leisure sector must move forward to realise a new and enhanced position as part of more broadly conceived healthcare services. This must be done by acknowledging the increasing recognition of the importance of healthy lifestyles for all policy actions and the role of health-

<sup>1</sup> Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Sport and active leisure industry, Adam Georg. 13 June 2013. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/3lVoFWt>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/3ITzisN>

<sup>4</sup> Active Leisure Alliance. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/3o2evG7>

<sup>5</sup> Social Dialogue for Active Leisure (DIAL) project. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/3iomU3l>

<sup>6</sup> SIQAF project. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/3i4WJOF>

<sup>7</sup> Blueprint for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure project. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/3Al9xlr>

enhancing <https://bit.ly/3i4WJOF>physical activity.”<sup>8</sup>

- 2021: EuropeActive broadened its definition of the sector using the denomination of **Fitness and Physical Activity Sector**, which can be defined as providing a diverse range of products, services, and opportunities to people from all ages and backgrounds so they can have active lifestyles that support them in developing their physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. Fitness and physical activity can be supervised by skilled trainers and instructors to help people maintain a healthy balance of mind and body.

### Activities and initiatives: promoting employment, protecting the sector

#### 1. The Sector Skills Alliance for Fitness and Physical Activity

- 2021: Based on this new sectoral definition, EuropeActive launched the **Sector Skills Alliance for Fitness and Physical Activity (SSA4FPA)**, which broadened the scope of, and thus replaced, the previous SSA for Active Leisure (2016-2021). This new body envisages a broader range of stakeholders, organisations, and strategic partners from across the sector to cooperate in the promotion of healthy and active lifestyles.

The purpose of a SSA is to identify sector-specific labour market needs, demand for new occupational profiles, and the skills needed to perform in one or more professional sectors by using scientific evidence. The Alliance acts as a forum with representatives from independent fitness professionals and employer organisations, members of education and training systems (incl. from VET and higher education), public authorities and other relevant governmental and institutional agencies, with the aim to improve cooperation and coordination at European and national level for the benefit of the sector.

#### 2. Sectoral Qualifications and a European Certifying Organisation: the way forward

As demonstrated by the previous referencing work carried out in the Active Leisure sector by EuropeActive and its partners through EU-funded actions, most notably in the BLUEPRINT project, the incorporation of fitness and physical activity qualifications into more and more NQFs is unfortunately not a way forward. Although there are already some Active Leisure qualifications on NQFs, establishing credible and reliable pathways for education and training systems, this *modus operandi* has not yet been fully recognised in employment conditions.

Therefore, to keep momentum and meet sector demand, the final report of the BLUEPRINT project recommended that “the sector organisations continue to develop their own tried and tested systems to broaden the reach and appeal of its qualifications”.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, a Certifying Organisation (CO) is the privileged means to design, develop, support the delivery of, and the awarding of qualifications for the European Fitness and Physical Activity Sector. Such a CO is about to be set up, with 4 key functions: qualification development; a common assessment strategy; enhanced quality assurance; and the certification of individuals.

This underlines that the mutual recognition of qualifications will only be effectively achieved if the training providers delivering international qualifications are subject to a comprehensive external or third-party quality assurance process.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Blueprint Compendium report of the intellectual outputs, findings, and recommendations, Blueprint project. 2020. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/3ocBzSy>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.