

# The Physical Activity Environment Policy Index (PA-EPI)

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## What is already known on this topic

### Priority of the problem

- Insufficient physical activity (PA) is a global issue for health.
- A multi-faceted response, including government action, is essential to improve population levels of PA. An ecological and multi-level, as well as a comprehensive whole system approach has been recommended.
- To address physical inactivity, a 'healthy' PA environment is paramount.
- An unhealthy PA environment may be caused by a lack of 'upstream' policy progress in domains known to have a positive impact on PA behaviour, and when combined with a lack of effective infrastructure support for policy implementation (5), then the inactivity pandemic is likely to sustain, as the 'system' or environment remains unchanged despite best 'downstream' or programmatic efforts.

The purpose of this study was to develop the PA-EPI monitoring framework to assess government policies and actions for creating a healthy PA environment. The PA-EPI is based on learnings from the INFORMAS Food-EPI, adapted to answer 'How much progress have governments made towards good practice in improving the PA environment and implementing physical inactivity/NCD prevention policies and actions?'

## What our studies add

To the authors knowledge, the PA-EPI is the first attempt at developing a tool that aims to assess the extent of implementation of government policies and actions, with the goal of creating a policy index to assess the healthiness of the PA environment.

- An iterative process was undertaken, which involved a review of policy documents from authoritative organisations, a policy audit of four European countries, and systematic reviews of scientific literature.

The PA-EPI (Figure 1) is conceptualised as a two-component 'Policy' and 'Infrastructure Support' framework which includes 15 domains, namely:

- **Policy Domains (N=8):** education, transport, urban design, healthcare, public education (including mass media), sport-for-all, workplaces and community.
- **Infrastructure Support Domains (N=7):** leadership, governance, monitoring and intelligence, funding and resources, platforms for interaction, workforce development, and health-in-all-policies.

An online consultation with academic experts (N=101; 20 countries), and policymakers (N=40, 4 EU countries) followed, where quantitative and qualitative data alongside theoretical and pragmatic considerations were used to inform PA-EPI development.

- **Forty-five 'good practice statements' (GPS)** or indicators of ideal good practice within each domain concludes the PA-EPI. These statements were formulated through consensus workshops based on the specific recommendations derived from the methodological processes described above.

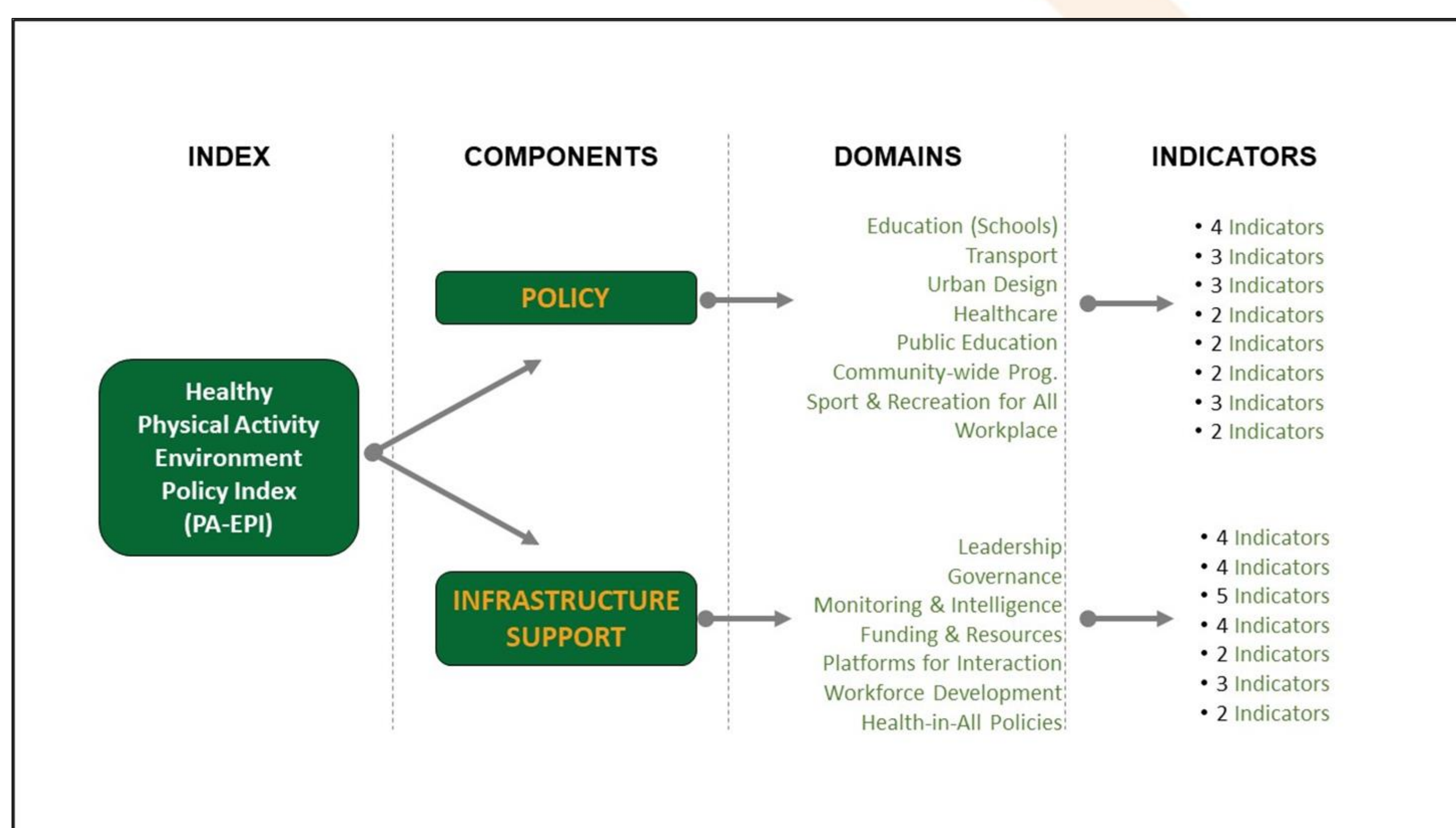


Figure 1. The PA-EPI Framework

### Literature references

C Woods, L Kelly, K Volf, P Gelius, S Messing, S Forberger, J Lakerveld, NR den Braver, J Zukowska, B Swinburn and E García Bengoechea on behalf of the PEN consortium (2022). The development of the Physical Activity Environment Policy Index (PA-EPI): a tool for monitoring and benchmarking government policies and actions to improve physical activity. *European Journal of Public Health*. (In Press)

## Policy recommendations

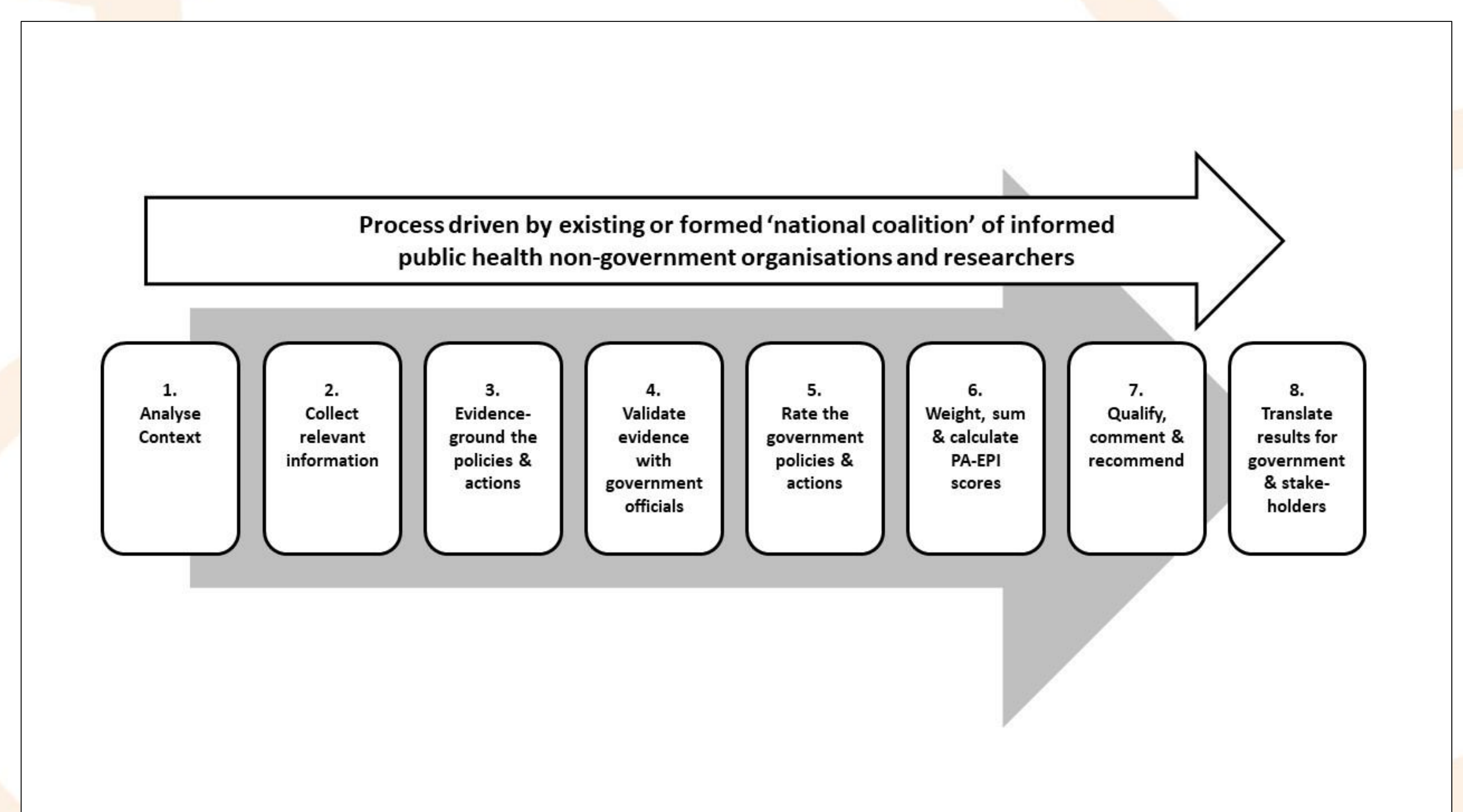


Figure 2. Process for assessing policies and actions of governments to create healthy physical activity environments and determining the government Healthy PA-EPI (adapted from Swinburn et al., 2013)

### Policy Recommendations

- The PA-EPI is a tool that can be used to independently monitor and benchmark public sector PA policies and actions.
- Conducting a PA-EPI can help identify and prioritise actions needed to address critical gaps in government policies and infrastructure support for implementation.
- In time, the PA-EPI will evolve into benchmarks established by governments at the forefront of creating and implementing policies to address physical inactivity.

The projected steps (Figure 2) in the use of the PA-EPI to compare government policies, over time and across countries, to stimulate actions to improve the healthiness of the physical activity environment. These steps are modelled after the INFORMAS monitoring framework currently used in 30 countries worldwide.

Conducting the PA-EPI would involve establishing a 'national coalition', a group of non-government public health and/or other stakeholders to manage the process or, alternatively, an existing public health NGO or association to take the lead.