

# Irish Sports Monitor 2013

Interim results from first six months of data collection

**Note: This report is based on interim results from the first six months of data collection. A further six months of data will be collected before finalising the results for 2013. As such these results may be subject to change due to factors relating to weighting, seasonality etc.**

## Key points

- Increase in sporting participation from 45% in 2011 to 47% in the first half of 2013
- Personal exercise remains the most popular sporting activity, with running seeing a notable increase in participation (from 6% to 9%)
- Younger females may be transitioning their physical activity from recreational walking to running
- The previously identified trend towards activities participated in on an individual basis continues
- Recreational walking remains the most popular activity, with 65% having participated in this in the previous seven days
- Thirty-two percent are meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines, and the proportion that are sedentary has declined from 13% to 12%
- Initial results suggest declines in volunteering, club membership and attendance at events

## Introduction

This report provides an overview of active and social participation in sport during the first six months of 2013. Data for this report is taken from the Irish Sports Monitor, a bi-annual study of sporting participation conducted by the Irish Sports Council. Previous studies were conducted each year between 2007 and 2011 (except 2010). The key focus within this report is a comparison between data from the first six months of 2013 and the equivalent time period in 2011.

The study is representative of the Irish population aged 16+ and employs large sample sizes in order to identify the nature of sporting participation within small subgroups within the population. The sample size for the first half of 2013 is 5,001, and is 4,166 for the same period in 2011.



The survey questionnaire covers the full spectrum of active and social sporting participation including:

- Physical participation in sport
- Recreational walking
- Walking for transport
- Cycling for transport
- Club membership
- Volunteering
- Attendance at sporting events

Data collection will continue for the remainder of 2013, and a detailed report will be published during 2014.

## Physical participation in sport

This study previously identified a considerable rise in weekly sports participation from 34% in 2009 to 46% in 2011. Furthermore it found that whilst participation in team-based sports remained steady, participation in individual sports such as personal exercise, running, cycling and swimming had risen considerably. In terms of the profile of individuals participating in sport, the increases were strongest amongst the younger (aged under 25) and the older (aged 55 or older) age groups. In addition it was noted that there was a notable increase in participation amongst the unemployed.

The 2011 report found that much of this increase was likely to be correlated with recessionary factors (i.e. changes in employment status and reduced working hours), and this is a factor that has remained constant since then. The Standardised Unemployment Rate in June 2013 was 13.6%<sup>1</sup>, which represents a decline since June 2011 (14.5%) although remains well ahead of where it was in June 2009 and June 2008 (12.3% and 6.0% respectively).

The trend of increased levels of sporting participation has continued since the previous study and has risen from 45% during the first six months of 2011 to 47% during the first six months of 2013. Based on a population estimate<sup>2</sup> of 3.6 million individuals aged 15+, this 2.5% increase would equate to an additional 90,000 people regularly participating in sport.

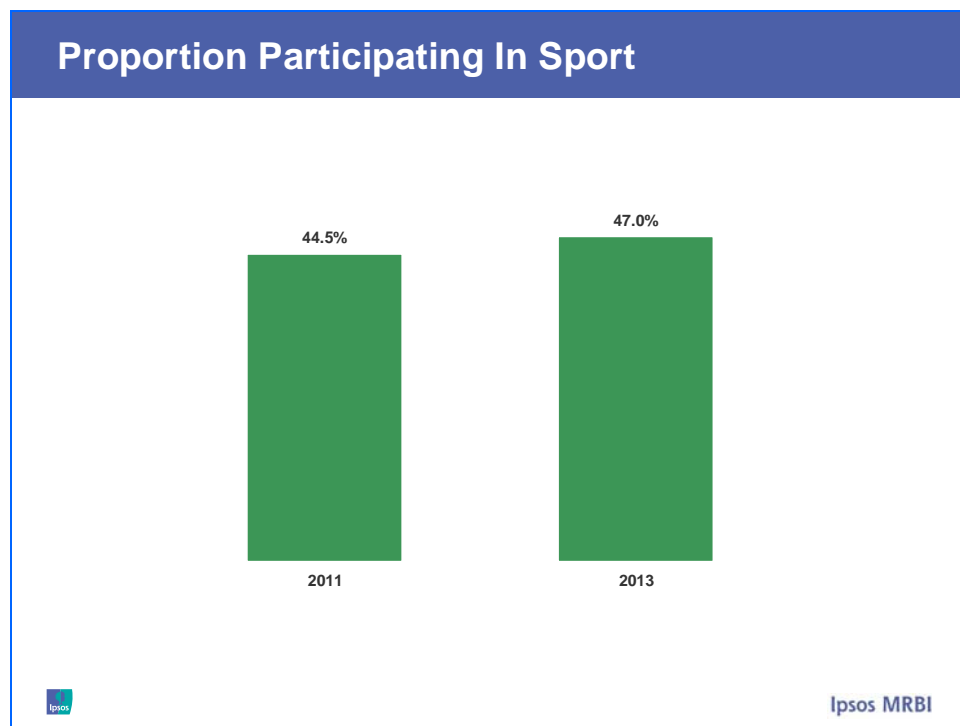
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<sup>1</sup> Source: Central Statistics Office

<sup>2</sup> Source: Population & Migration Estimates, Central Statistics Office, September 2012



**Figure 1:**



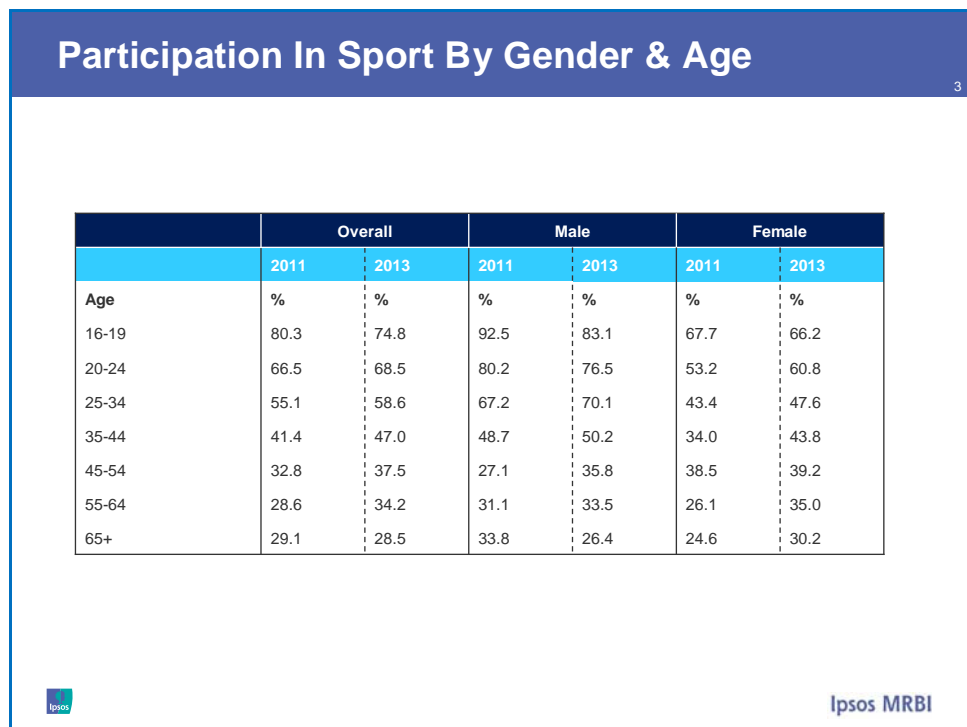
An analysis of the profile of individuals who are participating in sport shows that the increase in participation levels is strongest amongst those aged 25 to 64. This in contrast to the 2011 study which identified that the increase was coming from outside this age group, so could represent a further change in the nature of sporting participation amongst those of an age that is more likely to be working.

The pattern of increased participation is not consistent across all age groups, and the youngest age group (those aged 16 to 19) shows a slight decline in participation levels from 80% in 2011 to 75% in 2013 (although it remains the age group most likely to participate in sport). This decrease is most pronounced amongst younger males, declining by nine percentage points to 83%. The reasons for this are not immediately clear, and a full year of data will be necessary to explore this trend in more detail.

An analysis of participation levels by gender across age groups shows that it is females who are more likely to have increased their sporting activity, particularly those aged 35 to 44 for whom participation levels have increased from 34% in 2011 to 44% in 2013.

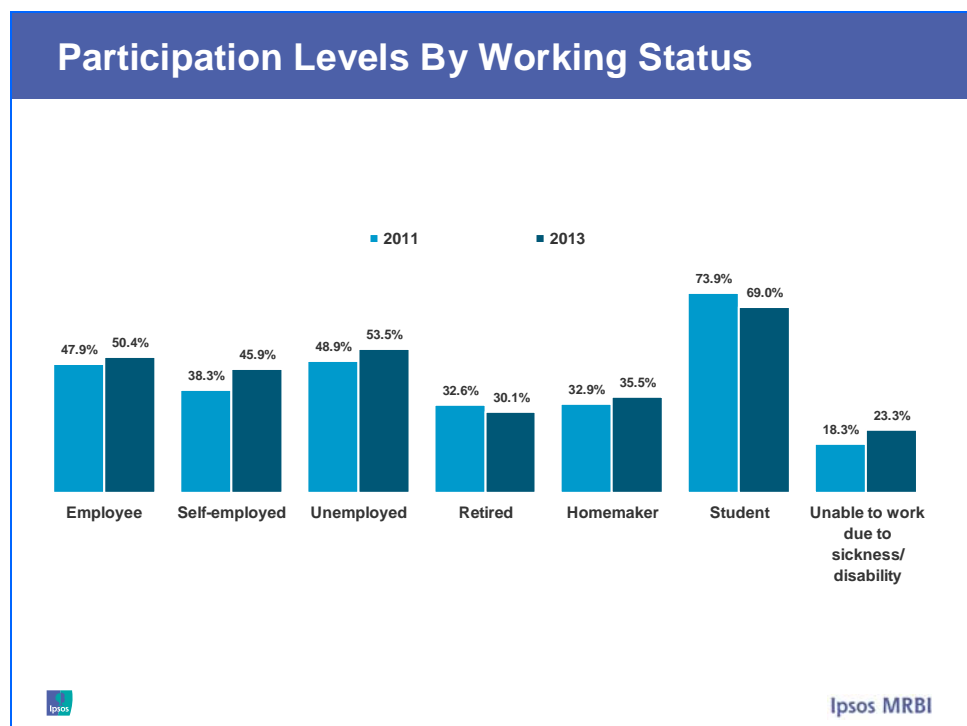


**Figure 2:**



An analysis by working status demonstrates an increase in participation levels across most groups, with the exception of the oldest and youngest groups (students and retired). The trend of increased participation amongst the unemployed group noted in the previous report has continued in 2013.

**Figure 3:**



Looking at the type of activities being participated in shows that the shift towards sports played on an individual basis identified in the 2009 study has continued to develop, with 42% of individuals now participating in an “individual” sport – an increase of four percentage points since the first half of 2011. In contrast the proportion participating in team-based activities has declined from 12% to 11% over the same time period.

Personal exercise (predominantly accounted for by gym-based activities) remains the most popular activity, whilst running is the activity that is seeing the strongest increase in participation, with 9% having run in the previous seven days, compared to 6% in 2011. This supports anecdotal evidence of a “running boom” in Ireland, both in terms of running for fitness (either on a solo basis or with Fit For Life groups) and more competitive running within the increased number of 5 kilometre and 10 kilometre races being organised throughout the country. Females aged 25 to 44 are most likely to have increased their activity in this area, with a threefold increase since 2011, from 4% to 12%, in the proportion of females in this age group who run.

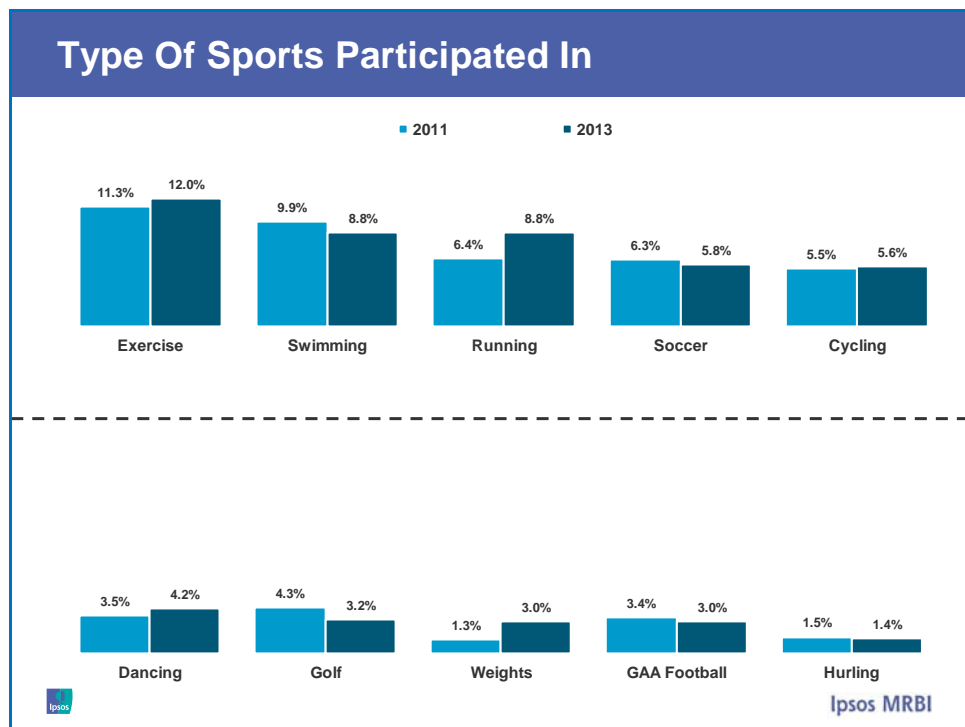
Of the five most popular sporting activities, swimming has seen a slight decline in participation levels since 2011, with 9% swimming in the previous seven days, compared with 10% in 2011. Part of this decline may be due to recessionary factors as individuals reduce their membership of clubs/health centres or are less likely to swim on a pay-as-you-go basis. However it will be necessary to wait until the full year of data is available before identifying conclusive findings on this, as swimming behaviour during the summer months of July and August may impact on this trend.

Two other sports worth noting in the context of changes in participation level are golf and weights. There has been a decline in the proportion participating in golf, from 4% in 2011 to 3% in 2013. The poor weather in the early part of this year may have been a contributory factor here. This is matched by a decline in golf club membership (identified later in this report), and is a trend that is most pronounced amongst males aged 45 and over (where participation has declined from 9% to 6%).

The number of people reporting that they have participated in weights activities has more than doubled to 3% over the past two years. Unsurprisingly this activity is more popular amongst males than females, and particularly younger males with 8% of males aged 16 to 35 saying they had participated in the previous seven days.



**Figure 4:**

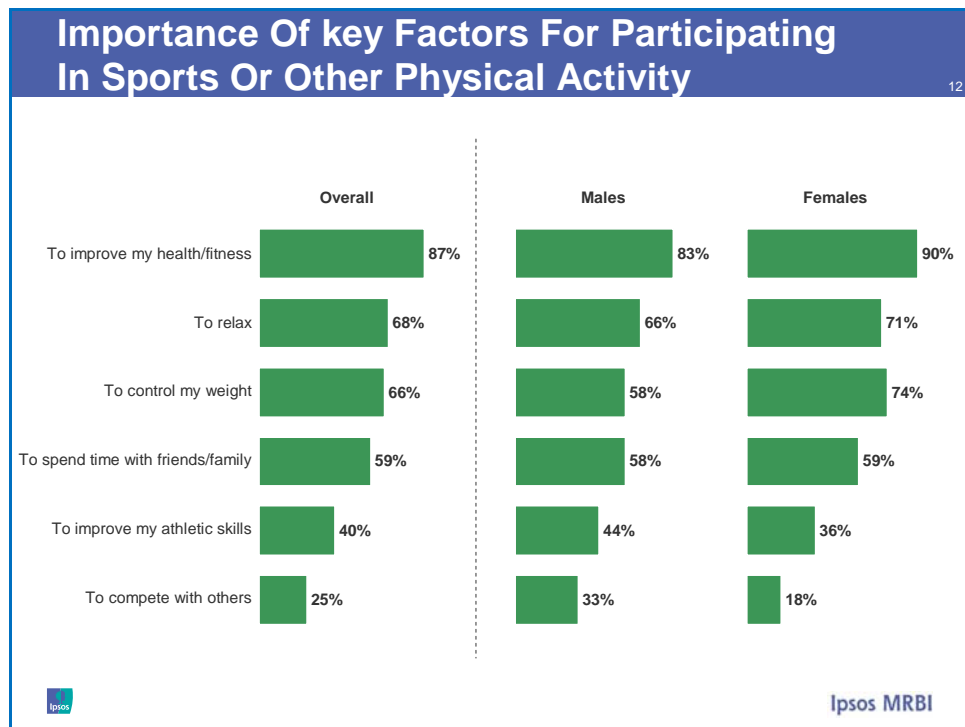


Within the 2013 study a series of additional questions was asked to explore differences between genders in terms of their motivation to participate in sport and their perspective on the opportunities that females have to participate in sport.

In terms of motivations to participate in sport it identified that whilst improving health and fitness is the most common motivator for both genders to participate, some differences do exist in respect of other motivations with males more likely to be motivated by a desire to improve their athletic skills and competition against others, whereas females are more likely to be motivated by weight control and activity as a way to relax. This is a key consideration in developing strategies to further develop female participation in sport.



**Figure 5:**







Cycling as a form of transport is an area that has seen significant investment in recent years through schemes such as Cycle-to-Work and Dublin Bikes as well as general investment in the cycling infrastructure throughout Ireland. Whilst this was not matched by an overall increase over the past few years in the proportions cycling for transport, it showed appeal within particular demographic groups, particularly younger males and those living in Dublin. This overall trend and demographic differences remain unchanged.

The previous report discussed in some detail the gender divide that existed in terms of this activity, and found that further work was needed to address any perceived barriers that may be preventing females from cycling for transport. Initial results from the 2013 study indicate that the gender divide is not as strong as previously reported, although the changes are quite marginal with a single percentage point increase in cycling for transport amongst females (from 5% to 6%) and a decline amongst males (from 14% to 13%)

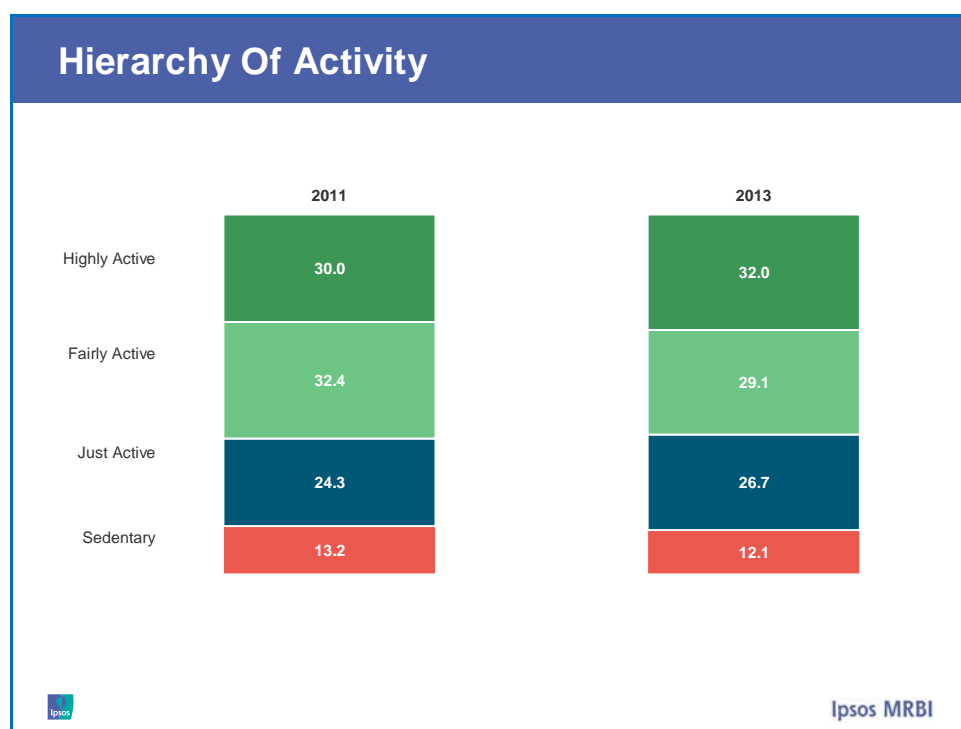


## Hierarchy of activity

In order to evaluate the extent of physical activity across the population, one of the analyses conducted is to categorise individuals as being highly active, fairly active, just active or sedentary. This categorisation combines the various forms of activity (sporting, recreational walking and walking or cycling for transport) depending on the frequency, duration and intensity of that activity.<sup>3</sup> The National Physical Activity Guidelines indicate that in order to be considered as sufficiently active, an individual must be categorised as “Highly Active”.

As outlined in figure 7 below, 32% of the population is now considered to be highly active, an increase of 2% since 2011 (accounting for an estimated 72,000 people). There has also been a slight decline in the proportion that is sedentary.

**Figure 7:**



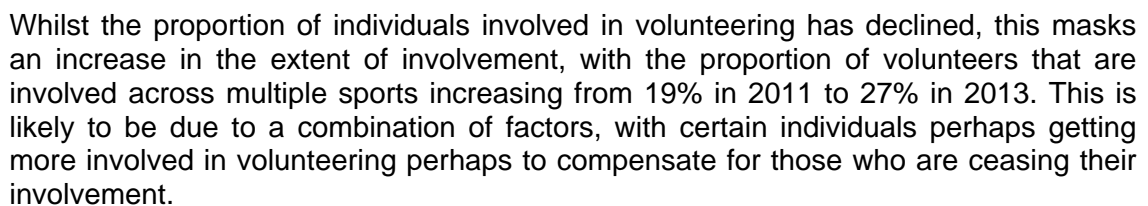
Whilst both genders see an increase in the proportion categorised as highly active, this increase is more marked amongst males (increasing from 29% to 32% between 2011 and 2013). This is interesting in the context of a stronger increase in sports participation amongst females; however whilst more younger females are meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines the proportion of older females doing so has declined. Limitations in sample size prohibit more detailed analysis in this respect, and it will be a theme that will be expanded upon in the annual report.

<sup>3</sup> A detailed explanation of the construction of this categorisation is included at the end of this report.



There has been a small decline in the proportion who are volunteering for sport, from 15% to 14%. This is consistent across all demographic groups, with the pattern of volunteering remaining the same as previously – i.e. more likely amongst males than females, and most likely to be aged 35-54 (i.e. within the family lifecycle).

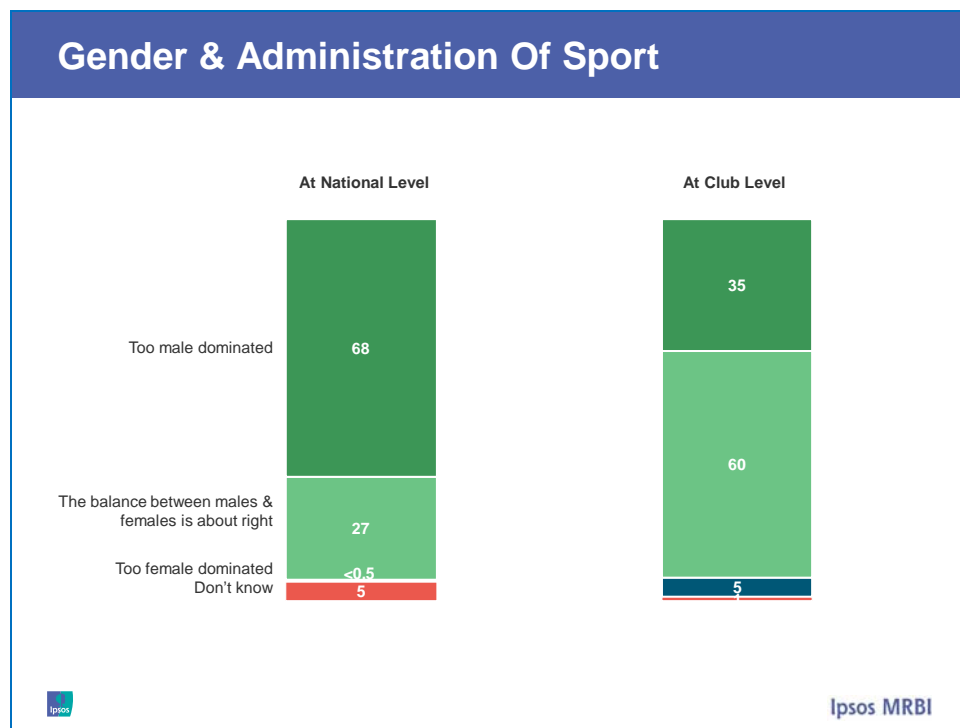
**Figure 8:**



The issue of the gender involvement in the organisation of sport was examined in more detail through an additional module on the issue of gender and sport that was added to the 2013 survey. One of the question areas in this module explored perceptions as to whether any gender bias existed in the administration and management of sport in Ireland. This was asked in two ways – firstly at an overall level, and subsequently to those who are members of a sports club (with the question asked within the context of the club that they are a member of).

Results from this module indicate a perception that the administration and management of sport generally is too male dominated, with 68% holding this view. However, when looking at the issue within their local club, respondents were more likely to perceive that the distribution in roles between males and females was about right (with 60% holding this view). This may indicate a difference in perceptions of national and local level administration, with the former perceived as being dominated by males whereas local involvement indicated a more balanced situation.

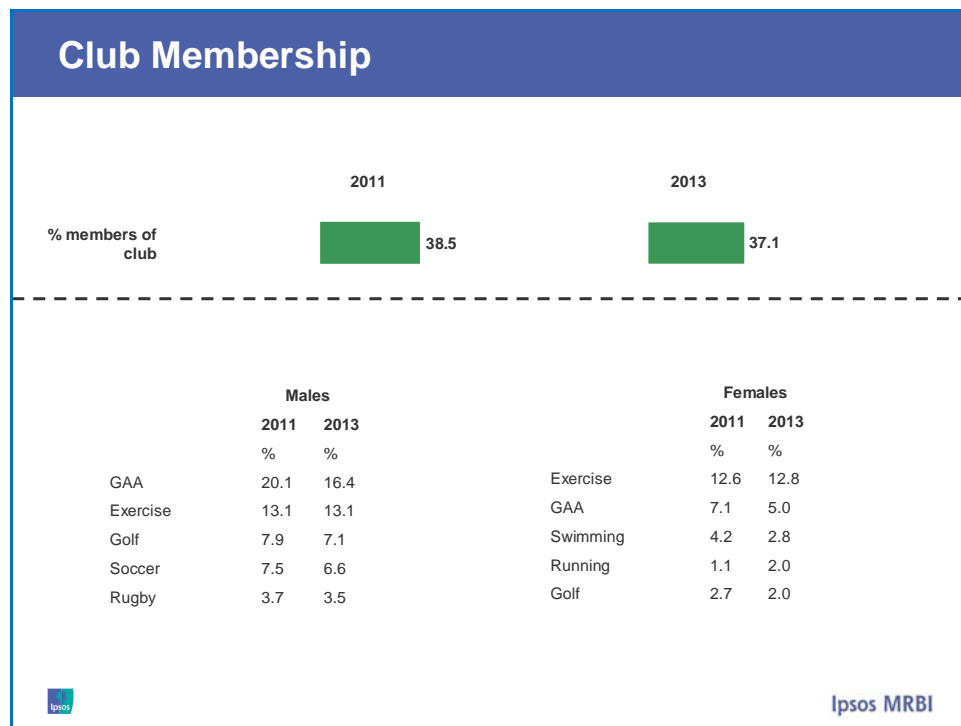
**Figure 9:**



## Club membership

As with volunteering activities, there has been a slight decline in the proportion who are members of a sports club. Thirty seven percent claim to be members of a club, a two percentage point fall since 2011. The types of clubs that individuals are members of remain broadly similar to before, with the exception of a decline in membership of GAA clubs, and running clubs becoming the fourth most popular type of club for females (reflective of the increased participation in running amongst females).

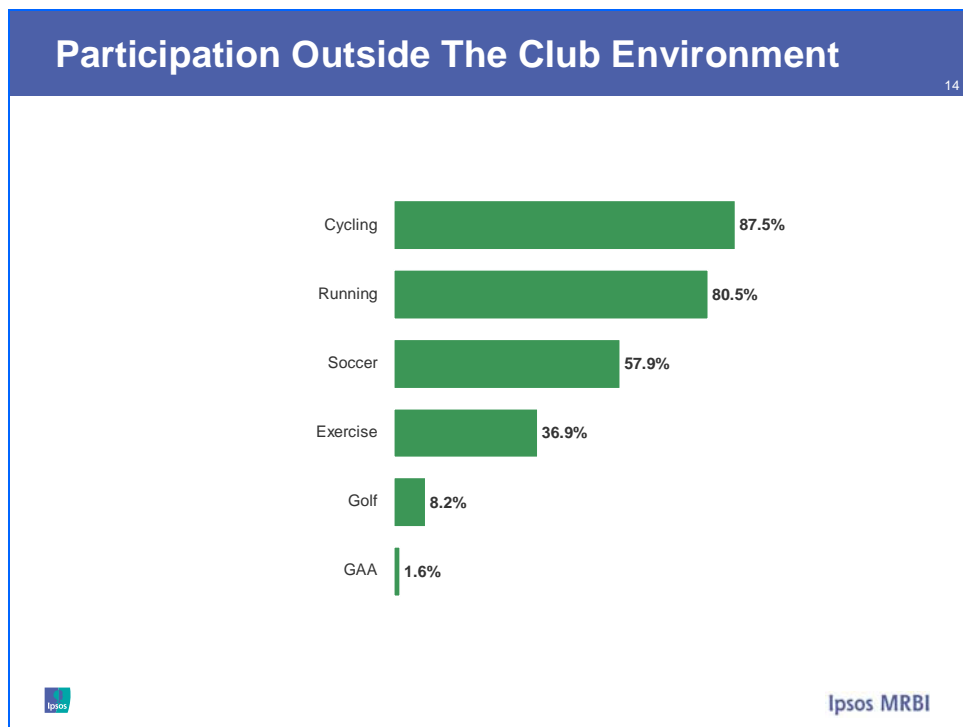
**Figure 10:**



One of the new modules in the 2013 study explored the nature of sports participation outside of the club environment. A number of sports were identified as having high levels of participation outside of the club environment, with cycling (88%) and running (81%) being particularly prevalent in this regard. A common factor with both of these sports is that there are low levels of previous participation within the club environment, and interest in joining clubs to participate in those sports. As noted in previous reports, the flexible nature of these sports being participated in on an individual basis is likely to be driving their growing appeal.



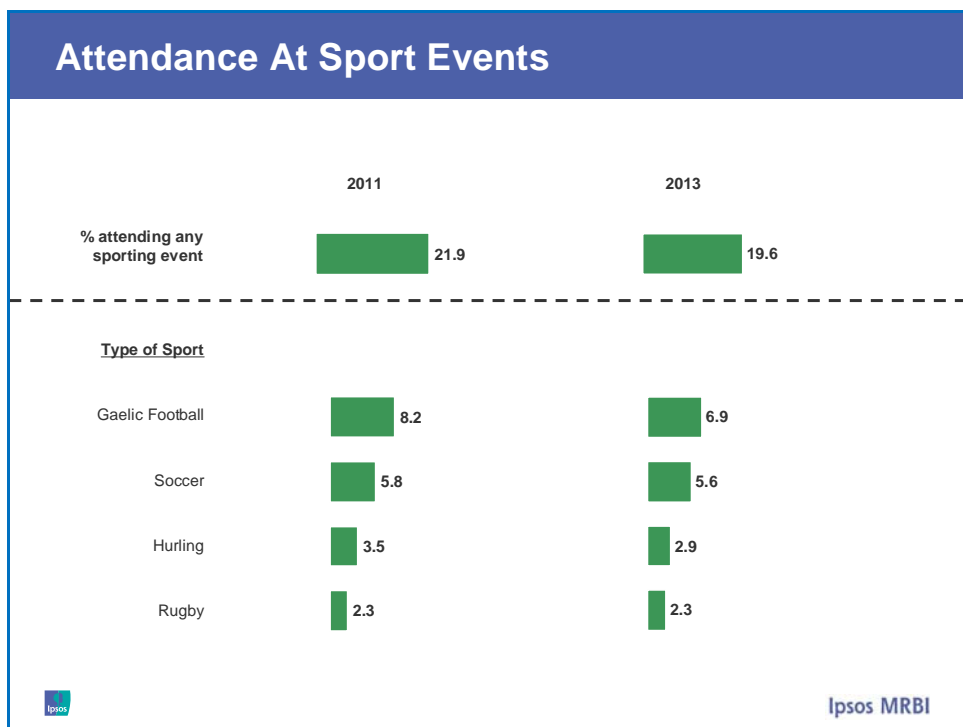
**Figure 11:**



## Attendance at events

The initial results from the 2013 study suggest a two percentage point decline in the proportion who have attended a sporting event within the previous seven days, with much of this driven by declines in attendance at GAA events

**Figure 12:**



## Explanation of hierarchy of activity

As in previous waves of the Irish Sports Monitor, the population is split into four categories determined by their level of activity across sports, recreational walking and walking or cycling for transport. This hierarchy of activity is designed to complement the National Physical Activity Guidelines in that those classified as Highly Active have achieved the required level of activity to meet these guidelines. The classification is outlined in more detail below.

<b>Highly active</b>	Participated in 30 minutes moderate <sup>4</sup> physical activity at least five times during the previous seven days (i.e. meet National Physical Activity guidelines)
<b>Fairly active</b>	Participated in 30 minutes physical activity at least twice during the previous seven days
<b>Just active</b>	Participated in a sporting activity or recreational walking for 20 minutes at least once during the previous seven days, or regularly walks or cycles for transport (at least once a week)
<b>Sedentary</b>	Did not participate (20 minutes) in recreational activity during the previous seven days and does no cycle or walk regularly for transport

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<sup>4</sup> “Moderate” activity is defined as walking that is at least at a steady pace or other physical activity that is sufficient to raise the breathing rate

