



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

IRISH SPORTS MONITOR

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



Foreword, Dr Una May, Sport Ireland, Chief Executive Officer

On behalf of Sport Ireland, I welcome the publication of the 2021 Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) Report. This 2021 ISM report covers a period of unprecedented social change in Ireland due to the COVID 19 pandemic. The pandemic has had a huge impact on Irish society and the way people live their lives, and as a result it changed how people engaged with sport. Many sporting activities were necessarily put on pause for extended periods of time in 2020 and in 2021. However, Ireland's dedication to sport and physical activity saw people adapt their behaviours, while complying with COVID protocols, as rates of running, cycling and recreational walking skyrocketed in the early lock downs.

I believe the 2021 ISM is a testament to the resilience of Irish sport; the participants, club members, volunteers, and spectators of Ireland who have carried the Sports sector through two extremely challenging years. I would like to acknowledge and thank the many club members who maintained their memberships through the pandemic in solidarity with the sporting communities they hold so dear. I would especially like to thank the many people who continued volunteering throughout the pandemic, supporting clubs to develop COVID 19 protocols, filling out COVID grant applications and facilitating safe sporting activities whenever they were permitted.

Although sports engagement rates are down when compared to 2019, I am encouraged to see the figures trending upwards throughout 2021. In the latter half of 2021 especially, it has been heartening to see the surge of people taking part in sport, engaging with sport clubs, volunteering at local events and being in the stands to support their favourite team. I expect that together, we will exceed the 2019 levels of sports participation in 2022 to then continue our progress towards the objectives of the National Sport Policy.

While it is positive to see the growing engagement through 2021, I must also acknowledge the considerable challenges that remain if we are to ensure that the wide-ranging benefits of sport are shared equitably throughout our society. Previous progress made in narrowing the gender, disability and socio-economic gradients have been somewhat eroded by the pandemic. We must now redouble our efforts to actively re-engage with all of society and ensure that sport is designed and delivered in ways, in places and at times that are accessible and affordable to everyone.

We will continue to monitor progress throughout 2022 with an additional full year ISM report, which is being complemented with a 2022 Children's Sport and Physical Activity Study. Further ISMs are also scheduled for 2023 and 2024 making it possible to track and understand the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on Sport.

I thank Kieran O'Leary, Conor Cotton and the team at Ipsos MRBI as well as Benny Cullen, Elizabeth Loughren and the Research team in Sport Ireland for their work over the past number of years on the ISM and for developing this insightful 2021 report.

Dr Una May
Sport Ireland CEO

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Introduction

The Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) provides a robust biennial measurement of sports participation in Ireland. It considers sports participation in a broad sense including both physical and social participation as well as measuring various other forms of physical activity.

Since 2007 it has provided a trend series on participation levels, with the most recent annual report identifying that significant progress was being made towards achieving the target of 60% of adults in Ireland regularly playing sport by 2027.

It has tracked sports participation over time, using a consistent definition of participation which includes all forms of active participation in sport, recreational walking, volunteering and attendance at sports events during the 7 day period before the individual was surveyed. It also measures current club membership and regular walks or cycles for transport.

A large sample size of 8,500 respondents per annum means that in-depth analysis can be conducted across population cohorts. Survey interviewing is spread over the course of the year to minimise any seasonality effects on participation.

This latest report covers a period that was dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions that were introduced to limit the spread of the virus. In order to measure its impact on sport a number of additional survey waves were conducted during 2020 (when the ISM was not scheduled to take place) as well as the standard ISM measurement during 2021.

The various impacts of these restrictions are clearly laid out throughout this report. While at times the additional free time available to people, combined with the limited range of other activities, led to increased participation in sport, these were short-lived gains. The net effect has been a decline in sports participation, coupled with an increased gender gap and widening social gradients.

In addition to the core measurements of physical and social participation in sport, the ISM also includes a number of flexible modules that were asked for short periods during 2021. The results of three of these are presented in this report covering issues related to wearable technology, diversity and inclusion within sports clubs and attitudes towards the Olympics and Paralympic Games.

While sports participation in all its forms increased over the course of 2021 there is still considerable ground to make up in order to restore participation back to 2019 levels. There is even more to be done in order to achieve the targets set for 2027.

This progress will be closely monitored through ISM 2022 and data collection for this wave is currently underway. With further ISMs scheduled for 2023 and 2024 it will be possible to understand the longer-term impacts of the changes in sports participation seen over the past two years.

Executive Summary

Sports participation & physical activity during the Covid-19 pandemic

- The period of Covid-19 restrictions resulted in significant fluctuations in physical activity. While record levels of activity were measured at one point in 2020, the level of inactivity had returned to the pre-pandemic level by the end of 2021.
- The restrictions introduced during the pandemic period meant that a more limited range of sports were available. This led to notable increases in the numbers cycling and running.
- While many sports saw participation return to pre-pandemic levels during 2021, participation in the two most popular activities - physical exercise and swimming - remain behind 2019 levels. As a result, overall sports participation levels at the end of 2021 were lower than in 2019.
- There were notable movements in the various gradients in sports participation. For a short time, the gender gap in sports participation was eliminated, although it gradually re-emerged during 2021. Additionally, the social and disability gradients widened over the course of the pandemic due to declines in participation among lower socio-economic groups and those with a disability.
- Club membership remained broadly stable over the course of the pandemic, although there was a decline in gym membership during the early part of 2021. The numbers volunteering and attending events recovered during 2021, and in Q4 2021 were only slightly behind the levels seen in 2019.

Participation in Sport

- Participation in sport has declined sharply during the 2021 ISM wave, with 40% of the population playing sport regularly – a 6 point decline since 2019.
- A change in the nature of sports participation can also be seen, with indoor and team-based activities negatively impacted by the pandemic restrictions and activities such as cycling, weights and running seeing higher levels of participation.
- This same dynamic can also be observed in terms of the context in which sports are played. For the first time the majority of participation took place alone rather than in the company of other people. Similarly, participation was more likely than previous years to be in public places or at home as access to facilities were restricted for much of the year.
- The gender gap has widened to the same level measured in 2017 – most notably among the youngest and oldest cohorts. However, the gender gap is still at a much lower level than at the start of the ISM series.
- The social gradient in sports participation has also widened due to a larger drop in participation among those in lower socio-economic groups. However, there has been an increase in participation levels among the unemployed, although this may be partly due to the changing nature of this group due to rising unemployment levels.

Broader Physical Activity

- In addition to sport, this study examines three other forms of physical activity – recreational walking, walking for transport and cycling for transport. In contrast to participation in sport, broader physical activity has increased since 2019. 74% regularly walk for recreation (2019: 66%), 48% walk for transport (2019: 45%) and 11% cycle for transport (2019: 10%).
- The proportion classified as 'Highly Active' (considered to be meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines) has increased significantly since 2019, from 34% to 41%. Similarly, the proportion that is sedentary (did not participate in any activity during the past 7 days) is broadly unchanged over the same time period, (2021: 11%; 2019: 12%).
- The proportion that is highly active has increased across all age and gender groups. Those aged 16-19 remain the most active age group, with a significant increase in the proportion of women in this group being classed as highly active during this wave (2021: 51%; 2019: 39%). Strong growth in the popularity of recreational walking during 2021 has driven this increase in activity levels.
- Women (43%) remain more likely to be highly active than men (39%), with similar increases since 2019 in the proportions that are highly active across genders (7 and 6 points, respectively).
- The social gradient in activity levels which began to emerge between the 2017 and 2019 ISM waves has significantly worsened in 2021. Significantly stronger rates of growth in activity levels among those of higher socio-economic status mean that a social gap in overall physical activity has opened up which did not exist four years ago.
- Substantial shifts have been observed in rates of recreational walking by region, with 12 point increases observed in Dublin (74%) and Ulster (73%). Other regions see smaller upticks since 2019.
- Despite the shift towards working from home during the pandemic and increased levels of unemployment during this period, rates of walking for transport increased in 2021, including among those in employment (2021: 45%; 2019: 40%). Rates of walking for transport among students fell, however (2021: 65%; 2019: 69%).

Social Participation in Sport

- Social participation in sport has fallen across all three areas surveyed during this ISM wave. Overall, 32% of the population regularly participate socially in sport, a decline from 47% in 2019.
- The numbers participating socially in sport have fallen by similar levels across the board. Three in ten (30%) report being a member of a sports club (2019: 36%), 9% report attending a sporting event (2019: 19%) and 7% report volunteering at sport (2019: 12%).
- Across all three activities, some of the largest declines in social participation have come in key age groups. These include 20-34 year old club members (2021: 35%; 2019: 45%), attendance at events among 35-54 year olds (2021: 12%; 2019: 25%) and volunteers in the 45-54 age group (2021: 11%; 2019: 20%).
- This wave has seen the gender gap in social participation narrow overall in favour of women, although differences exist by activity type. The gap in volunteering and attendance at events now stands at 1 point for both activities (2019: 4 points and 6 points, respectively). Less progress has been observed in club membership, however, where the gender gap now stands at 13 points, compared to 14 points two years ago.

- The strong socio-economic gradient in social participation remains persistent, with those in employment, of higher socio-economic status and with higher levels of education significantly more likely to be involved socially across all three activity types. The greatest shift observed here has been a widening of the gap between those in social class AB and all other groups.
- A larger decline in active sports participation among club members than non-club members means that, for the first time in the ISM, more than half of the population who actively participate in sport are not members of a sports club (51%).
- Just over four in five (81%) of those who regularly volunteered before the pandemic say they plan to return to doing so post-Covid-19. Similarly, 89% of club members plan to renew their membership the next time it's due, while 53% plan to regularly attend a sporting event. Encouraging social participation in sport among both new and former participants should be a priority for policymakers post-pandemic, especially in volunteering.

Wearable Technology

- More than half of the population (54%) currently use technology to measure the amount or nature of physical activity they undertake, with 66% having done so at some point in the past. Use of wearables has almost doubled since it was last measured in the 2017 ISM wave, when the respective figures were 28% and 43%.
- Among those who use the tools measured by this module, nearly half (48%) are highly active. This compares to 32% of those who do not currently use any of these tools.
- Use of at least one technology for exercise is also concentrated among those aged under 35 (70%), women (58%) and those in higher social classes (ABC1: 61%), with particularly strong growth in technology use identified among women since 2017.
- Three in ten (31%) technology users say that it has a “major influence” on their physical activity. Analysis indicates that increased activity as a result of technology use remains concentrated among those who were already highly active.
- The ways that exercise technologies are used differs by gender. Women are more motivated by the targets and encouragement they provide before and during exercise, while men tend to be more receptive to the ability to track their performance and progress post-physical activity.
- The decision to stop using technology continues to be tied to personal factors, such as lack of motivation from the user or changes in exercise patterns, as opposed to issues related to the technology itself.
- Across the five technologies surveyed, between 63% and 76% of those who had stopped using the tool did so within six months.
- Between 18% and 22% of those who have never used a given tool say they are likely to start doing so within the next year. As was the case in 2017, those most likely to intend to take up a technology tend to be those who are already physically active.
- Nearly one in four (24%) took part in online exercise classes during the Covid-19 pandemic, though only around a quarter of this group are still taking part in these classes. Participation is again concentrated among the most physically active groups, as well as women.

Diversity and Inclusion

- Strong majorities believe that most Irish sports clubs 'actively welcome' those from diverse ethnic backgrounds (70%) and members of the LGBTI+ community (59%). Perceptions of inclusion of members of the Irish Traveller & Roma communities (32%) are significantly more pessimistic.
- Belief that clubs practice active inclusion is generally higher among those aged under 25, with young men in this age group holding the most positive perceptions of sports clubs in this respect. However, younger people are also more likely to report their club needs to do more to reach out to members of minority communities.
- Sports club members generally hold significantly more positive views of the levels of inclusion practiced by clubs, although variations exist depending on the minority group in question.
- Having members or volunteers from minority groups is the most common way of those mentioned in which Irish sports clubs practice inclusion and diversity. More conscious actions, such as inclusive days for minority communities and gender-neutral toilets, are less common.
- A strong majority of club members (85%) agree that 'Everyone knows they are welcome' in their club. Support for measures by clubs to promote inclusion are somewhat less strong, however, with 50% supporting and 25% opposing such actions.
- Around a third (34%) of club members report that their club tries to reach out to minority communities currently. Support for these measures is highest among younger people and women.

Olympic and Paralympic Games

- This module examines public perceptions of sport in Ireland in the context of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, which took place in July-September of 2021.
- A slight majority (59%) report having been interested in the 2020 Olympic Games. There is little variance in overall levels of interest before, during and after the Games. A similar figure (60%) express interest in the Paralympics.
- Certain events, such as athletics, boxing, swimming and rowing, tend to receive significantly higher levels of reported interest than others. Engagement with some events in the 2020 Games such as boxing and rowing also differs overtime, due to the success of Irish athletes in these events.
- Interest in the Olympics and Paralympics is concentrated among those already engaged in sport, such as those who play sport, those classed as highly active and sports clubs members.
- The main reported impact of these events on public sentiment is one of increased national pride and togetherness. Nearly 9 in 10 (87%) agree that Irish Olympic athletes 'set a positive example for others to follow', while two-thirds (67%) say the Olympics 'bring the country together'.

- Less than 3 in 10 agree that the Olympics motivates them to participate in sport, while this figure is 4 in 10 for the Paralympic Games. This suggests limited capacity of these events to influence adult sports participation. However, nearly 8 in 10 agree that the Olympics 'inspire tomorrow's generation to participate in sport', indicating that more research on the impact of the Olympic Games on youth sports participation may be warranted.
- TV remains by far the most common method of following the Olympics, with over three-quarters saying it was their main method of following the Games. One in five mainly followed the Games online.



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1. Sports participation & physical activity during the Covid-19 pandemic



Sports participation & physical activity during the Covid-19 pandemic

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Introduction

While the ISM was not scheduled to take place during 2020, a number of additional survey waves were conducted over the course of that year in order to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on sports participation. Coupled with the results from ISM 2021, this provides a comprehensive overview of the changes that occurred to sports participation* during the various stages of the pandemic.

In order to demonstrate the impact of the pandemic on sports and physical activity, this section of the report presents the findings from the measurements conducted in 2020 as well as quarterly measurements from ISM 2021. The fieldwork dates and sample sizes for the 2020 surveys are shown in the table below. Fieldwork during 2021 was undertaken on a continuous basis with a sample size of approximately 2,125 respondents per quarter.

Fieldwork dates	Sample size
16-31 March	1,003
1-13 April	1,009
16-30 April	1,006
30 April-13 May	1,000
14 May-11 September	3,414

*Sports participation includes any active participation in exercise or sport during the previous seven days. It excludes walking which is measured separately.

This period is characterised as one when routines were disrupted in previously unimaginable ways. With many people spending more time at home than ever before, but with limited access to social activities, the time available for sports and physical activity increased dramatically. However, this was counterbalanced by sports facilities being closed for much of the period, and limits placed on team sports. Furthermore, travel restrictions at various stages during the pandemic meant that individuals were not permitted to travel more than a specified distance from their home.

Previous waves of the ISM have identified a lack of free time as a key barrier to increased sports participation. However, during this time almost two-thirds (65%) reported that they now had more time to be physically active – this rose to 85% of those aged under 25. How then did individuals respond to increased free time, albeit with restricted access to sports facilities?

The ISM provides a unique understanding of this turbulent period. It provides a robust measurement of how active and social participation in sport was affected by key behavioural changes within the population.

This initial section of the report explores the changes in sports participation that occurred during 2020 and 2021, with later sections exploring this within a longer-term context.

Sports participation during the Covid-19 pandemic

ISM 2019 identified that 46% of the population aged 16 and older participated in sport on a regular basis – the highest level of sports participation in this research series and a clear indication that the target set by the National Sports Policy of 60% participation by 2027 could be achieved.

The earliest phase of the pandemic saw a sharp decline in participation as people adjusted to newly imposed restrictions on travel and mixing with other people and various facilities closed to public access. During the period of 16 to 31 March 2020 (the initial restrictions were announced on 17 March 2020) the proportion participating in sport declined to 41%. Over the remaining 18 months the numbers participating in sport rose and fell in line with the prevailing public health situation. However, during the second half of 2021 it returned to the same level as at the very start of the pandemic.

Figure 1.1 - Participation in Sport during previous 7 days (%)

2019	2020					2021			
ISM	16-31 March	1-13 April	16-30 April	30 Apr-13 May	May-Sept	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
46%	41%	45%	49%	51%	44%	35%	41%	43%	42%

April and May 2020 saw increased levels of activity, although only through a small number of sports as detailed later in this section. During the first two weeks in May the majority of the adult population were actively participating in sport – the highest level of sports participation ever measured through the ISM. This came about as a result of additional free time with a more limited range of recreational activities available to people. Furthermore this period was one of exceptionally fine weather increasing the appeal of outdoor activity.

However, sports participation declined during the latter months of 2020. It reached a low of 35% during the first quarter of 2021 much of which involved an extended period of severe restrictions during winter months. While sports participation recovered slightly during the remainder of 2021 it did not rise above 43%.

Figure 1.2 - Activities participated in (%)

	2019	2020			2021			
	ISM	16-31 March	1 April - 13 May	14 May - 11 Sept.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Personal exercise	16	13	17	15	12	11	13	14
Swimming	9	1	1	3	1	3	9	6
Running	7	13	19	12	10	8	8	7
Cycling	4	10	11	11	6	10	7	6
Soccer	3	3	2	2	1	2	3	3
Yoga	3	4	5	3	3	3	2	3
Golf	2	2	-	2	-	2	3	2
Gaelic football	2	1	1	1	-	2	3	2
Weights	2	5	6	4	6	6	3	3

In order to stay active many existing participants would have had to change their type of activity if their regular activity was unavailable. Over the course of 2020, almost 1 in 5 (19%) adults reported taking up a new activity during the pandemic. This rises to a majority (53%) of under-25s, and the vast majority (90%) expected to continue that activity on a regular basis once restrictions were lifted.

A key dynamic in sports participation over this time was the increased levels of activity in sports that could be participated in on an individual and informal basis in order to comply with the public health restrictions. As such, there were increases in the numbers cycling and running, while the numbers that participated in team-based sports or in gym-based activities or swimming declined over this period.

The changing nature of sports participation during the pandemic is also clearly evident through shifts in participation among socio-demographic groups. The most noticeable change is the temporary elimination of the gender gap during April and May 2020 when severe restrictions were in place.

Figure 1.3 - Participation in Sport during previous 7 days by gender (%)

	2019	2020			2021			
	ISM	16-31 March	1 April - 13 May	14 May - 11 Sept.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Men	48%	43%	48%	48%	35%	45%	49%	43%
Women	45%	38%	49%	42%	34%	38%	38%	40%
Gender gap	-3	-5	+1	-6	-1	-7	-11	-3

The earliest stage of the pandemic in March 2020 brought about a decline in participation for both genders. However, a sharper recovery in participation among women during the “Stay at Home” phase of the pandemic meant that women were more likely to participate in sport than they were during 2019, while participation among men returned to the same level as in 2019.

While a decline in participation among women during the latter part of 2020 led to a re-emergence of the gender gap it was eliminated again during Q1 2021 when Ireland returned to more severe forms of restrictions to control a rising number of Covid-19 cases. As was the case during 2020, the loosening of restrictions later in 2021 led to a faster increase in male participation and a re-emergence of the gender gap which by the end of the year was 3 percentage points, the same as was measured in 2019.

There are a number of factors that likely explain the differing trends by gender. It may be partly explained by wider lifestyle changes during the pandemic meaning that childcare and work responsibilities were more equally shared among couples, freeing up time for mothers to participate in sport. Further explanation can be found through team sports being unavailable for much of this time. This may have had a bigger impact on male participation as the more popular team sports – soccer, gaelic football and hurling – are more likely to be played by men. In contrast, activities more favoured by women – such as yoga and pilates – could potentially be participated in at home.

Figure 1.4 - Participation in Sport during previous 7 days by age (%)

	2019	2020			2021			
	ISM	16-31 March	1 April – 13 May	14 May – 11 Sept.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
16-24	70	60	75	75	58	70	68	61
25-34	57	44	58	56	45	53	53	57
35-44	49	50	55	51	39	44	51	43
45-54	42	38	41	38	28	37	38	41
55+	31	25	30	25	19	23	26	25

Changes in participation over the course of the pandemic were observed across all age groups, and while some age groups had returned to pre-pandemic participation levels by Q4 2021 this was not universally the case.

The highest levels of participation have always been among the youngest age groups, and this remained the case throughout 2020 and 2021 with those aged under 25 more likely than any other age group to participate regularly in sport. However, while this age group participated in sport in greater numbers during early parts of the pandemic, it also saw sharper declines during the second half of 2021. This is perhaps due to busier lifestyles, as well as a return to work and other activities. Notably, however, sports participation within this key group was lower at the end of 2021 than it was pre-pandemic.

This dynamic was not unique to this age group, as other age groups – 35-44 and 55+ – also had lower levels of sports participation in Q4 2021 than was the case in 2019. The other age groups saw changes in participation levels over this time period, but participation levels in Q4 2021 were broadly the same as in 2019.

Differences can also be seen across socio-economic groups. Throughout the ISM series those in the more affluent ABC1 socio-economic group have consistently been more likely than those in the C2DE group to play sport on a regular basis. At the points when restrictions were being eased this difference widened further, creating a 25 point gap between the two groups during the period between May and September 2020, and a similar gap in Q2 2021. This is perhaps reflective of the nature of employment within these groups with those in the ABC1 group more likely to work from home during the pandemic, whereas those in the C2DE group were more likely to work in roles that required their physical presence in the workplace. This may have provided greater levels of flexibility for the ABC1 group.

Despite these changes, increases in sports participation among the C2DE group in the second half of 2021 coupled with participation levels among ABC1s remaining broadly stable meant that gap in Q4 2021 was only marginally different to that measured in 2019.

Figure 1.5 - Participation in Sport during previous 7 days by socio-economic status (%)

	2019	2020			2021			
	ISM	16-31 March	1 April – 13 May	14 May – 11 Sept.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
ABC1	58	55	59	59	45	56	53	52
C2DE	39	34	40	34	26	30	33	31
Gap	-19	-21	-19	-25	-19	-26	-20	-21

Broader physical activity

While there was a high degree of volatility in the numbers participating in sport over the course of the pandemic, the numbers that walked for recreation remained high throughout 2020 and 2021.

In the earliest stages of the pandemic over three-quarters reported walking for recreation during the previous 7 days. This was considerably higher than the two-thirds (66%) measured by the ISM in 2019. The proportion walking continued to rise, peaking at 83% at the start of May 2020 (the same period as the highest level of sports participation) before falling slightly. The levels remained at a higher level throughout 2021 than was measured during 2019.

Figure 1.6 - Walking for recreation during previous 7 days (%)

2019	2020					2021			
ISM	16-31 March	1-13 April	16-30 April	30 Apr-13 May	May-Sept	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
66%	76%	78%	79%	83%	78%	76%	76%	72%	71%

Increases in recreational walking were seen across both genders, however these were more focussed on younger age groups. This is reflected in the proportion of 16 to 24 year olds who walk regularly which had risen from 60% in ISM 2019 to 86% in the earlier stages of the pandemic, and was 71% in Q4 2021. At the end of 2021 the proportion of all other age groups that walked regularly were at the same level or higher when compared to ISM 2019.

Figure 1.7 - Walking for recreation during previous 7 days by age (%)

	2019	2020			2021			
	ISM	16-31 March	1 April - 13 May	14 May - 11 Sept.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
16-24	60	75	86	83	72	78	68	71
25-34	68	76	81	79	76	83	73	70
35-44	64	81	84	76	77	74	76	70
45-54	66	80	81	78	82	77	72	76
55+	69	70	73	77	74	73	71	69

Another dynamic seen in the changes in walking behaviours are broadening gradients, both in terms of socio-economic status and disability. As with sports participation, those in the ABC1 social class have consistently throughout the ISM series been more likely to walk for recreation than those in the C2DE social class. Similarly, walking levels have always been higher among those without a disability than those with a disability.

However, in both cases the gap between the groups widened during the pandemic. This is likely for the same reasons as outlined earlier for sports participation, and additionally those with a disability were more likely to restrict their movements during the pandemic.

The impact of increased levels of sports participation coupled with increased recreational walking meant that fewer people were inactive than in 2019. During the earlier stages of the pandemic when participation in sports and recreational walking were at high levels, the proportion that were inactive (i.e. participated in neither activity) was 13%. This compares to 20% measured by the ISM in 2019. However, over the remainder of the pandemic inactivity levels gradually increased with the same proportion inactive in Q4 2021 as in 2019.

Figure 1.8 - Activity levels during previous 7 days (%)

	2019	2020			2021			
	ISM	16-31 March	1 April - 13 May	14 May - 11 Sept.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Play sport & walk for recreation	32	34	41	38	28	34	34	32
Walk for recreation only	33	42	38	40	48	42	38	39
Play sport only	14	7	7	7	7	7	9	9
Neither (inactive)	20	17	13	15	18	17	18	20

Social participation in sport

Social participation* in sport was very limited during 2020 and for much of 2021. Sports clubs remained closed for long periods of time and restrictions on social interactions meant that attendance at sports events was not permitted.

The ISM measurements that took place during 2020 only considered social participation in sport in a limited way, however measurements in the early part of 2021 showed that there was only minimal social participation in sport through volunteering and attendance at events. These increased over the course of 2021 and by the end of the year had returned close to the levels seen in ISM 2019.

Figure 1.9 - Social participation in sport (%)

	2019	2020			2021			
	ISM	16-31 March	1 April - 13 May	14 May - 11 Sept.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Club member	36	*	*	35	30	30	30	32
Attend sports events	19	*	*	*	<0.5%	4	15	18
Volunteer	12	*	*	5	2	5	9	10

* Not measured

Despite this, club membership remained relatively stable in 2020 and 2021, suggesting that despite being unable to access club facilities at various stages during the pandemic, most club members retained their memberships.

There has always been a strong age gradient in club membership with younger people more likely than older people to be members of a club. However, while club membership among younger people declined sharply during the pandemic it remained broadly stable among older people. This is perhaps reflective of the nature of club membership among younger people with higher levels of gym membership among this age group.

During the first quarter of 2021 the proportion of under 35s that were members of a sports club was lower than measured in ISM 2019, but this recovered during the second half of the year and by the final quarter was only slightly behind membership levels in 2019 among this age group.

* Social participation includes club membership, attendance at sports events and volunteering for sport

Figure 1.10 - Club membership by age (%)

	2019	2020			2021			
	ISM	16-31 March	1 April – 13 May	14 May – 11 Sept.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
16-24	54	*	*	57	41	49	48	48
25-34	43	*	*	38	28	30	34	38
35-44	36	*	*	39	32	33	28	33
45-54	35	*	*	31	32	33	27	32
55+	25	*	*	25	22	20	23	22

* Not measured

A key factor in this is likely the lower levels of gym membership in the earlier part of 2021 while these facilities were closed. Gym membership is more common among younger people, with membership levels among the under-35s in 2019 over double what they were among those older than this (24% and 10% respectively), with many gym memberships paid on a monthly basis there is also a greater degree of flexibility associated with this type of membership.

Figure 1.11 - Club membership by type of sport (%)

	2019	2020			2021			
	ISM	16-31 March	1 April – 13 May	14 May – 11 Sept.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Gym/exercise	14	*	*	14	9	9	12	12
GAA	11	*	*	10	11	11	10	10
Soccer	3	*	*	3	3	2	2	3
Golf	3	*	*	3	4	4	2	3

* Not measured

The rise in membership levels overall during 2021, and among under-35s, is aligned with a similar rise in membership of gyms which increased from 9% in quarters 1 and 2, to 12% in quarters 3 and 4. Membership levels of other popular types of sports club remained generally static over the course of 2021.



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2. Participation in Sport



Participation in Sport

- Participation in sport has declined sharply during the 2021 ISM wave, with 40% of the population playing sport regularly – a 6 point decline since 2019.
- A change in the nature of sports participation can also be seen, with indoor and team-based activities negatively impacted by the pandemic restrictions and activities such as cycling, weights and running seeing higher levels of participation.
- This same dynamic can also be observed in terms of the context in which sports are played. For the first time the majority of participation took place alone rather than in the company of other people. Similarly, participation was more likely than previous years to be in public places or at home as access to facilities were restricted for much of the year.
- The gender gap has widened to the same level measured in 2017 – most notably among the youngest and oldest cohorts. However, the gender gap is still at a much lower level than at the start of the ISM series.
- The social gradient in sports participation has also widened due to a larger drop in participation among those in lower socio-economic groups. However, there has been an increase in participation levels among the unemployed, although this may be partly due to the changing nature of this group due to rising unemployment levels.

Introduction

One of the central objectives of the ISM is to provide a robust measurement of participation in sport, both at an overall population level and among key cohorts. It achieves this through a consistent measurement that asks respondents about their participation during the previous 7 days in a broad range of physical activities other than walking. Activities are considered regardless of the context in which they take place (although activities as part of work, transport or domestic responsibilities are excluded).

This provides a reliable trend series against which progress towards various policy objectives can be measured. The 2017 ISM was used to set the baselines for the National Sports Policy 2018-2027 and the 2019 and 2021 ISMs have been used to identify changes since then. High level goals within the National Sports Policy include increasing overall sports participation from 43% in 2017 to 60% in 2027, as well as eliminating the gender gap which stood at 4.5% in 2017.

As with so many other aspects of life, participation in sport changed considerably over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was clearly demonstrated both through interim quarterly publications of ISM 2021 as well as additional measurements undertaken during 2020. The changes in participation over the course of the pandemic are examined in the previous section in this report, with this section taking an overall view on sports participation during 2021 as a whole compared to previous ISM measurements.

Overall participation in sport

This wave of the ISM identifies that 40% participated regularly in sport during 2021. However, as noted earlier and through the interim reports that were published, the general trend is towards higher levels of sports participation later in the year as Covid-19 restrictions were eased.

Figure 2.1 - Overall participation in sport 2015-2021 (%)



The necessary restrictions introduced to prevent the spread of Covid-19 severely limited people's ability to play sport. Most indoor sporting facilities such as gyms and swimming pools were closed for much of 2021, and social restrictions meant that team sports could not take place.

However, a positive outcome from the Covid-19 restrictions on work and other aspects of life was that people had more time available to them. A lack of free time is highlighted in previous studies as the largest perceived barrier to increased participation in sport. A key question then was whether or not would people fill the additional time available by participating in sport, albeit through a more limited range of activities that were accessible for much of the year.

One of the key findings of ISM 2021 is that individuals adapted to the changing situation, with transitions between different types of activities depending on the restrictions in place at the time clearly evident. However, at an overall level sports participation was negatively impacted and ISM 2021 identifies a decline in overall sports participation.

This decline follows considerable growth in sports participation between the two previous ISM waves that identified encouraging progress towards the target of 60% of all adults regularly participating in sport. It means that sports participation is now at a lower level than the baseline that was used to set this target. Furthermore, it clearly identifies the considerable amount of work that needs to be done in the years ahead, both in facilitating previous participants to re-engage with sport as well as encouraging others to take up sport.

Overall, 1.58 million people regularly participated in sport during 2021. This clearly highlights the important role that sport played for many people in enhancing both physical and mental wellbeing during difficult times. However, the decline in participation suggests that roughly 200,000 fewer people participate in sport since the previous measurement in 2019. Based on current population projections, an additional one million people will need to participate in sport on a regular basis in order to achieve the 2027 target set by the National Sports Policy.

Of further concern is a slight decline among sports participants in the time spent participating in sport. During 2021 sports participants spent an average of 88 minutes per week playing sport, a decline from 95 minutes per week during 2019. Much of this is driven by an increase in the proportion spending 30 minutes or less per week participating in sport which has risen from 15% of participants in 2019 to 24% of participants in 2021.

Figure 2.2 - Time spent participating in sport per week 2015-2021 (% of sports participants)

	2015	2017	2019	2021
Up to 30 minutes	16	16	15	24
31-60 minutes	34	34	35	32
61-90 minutes	13	15	18	14
91-120 minutes	13	13	12	11
121-180 minutes	12	11	10	10
More than 180 minutes	11	12	10	9
Average minutes	98	100	95	88

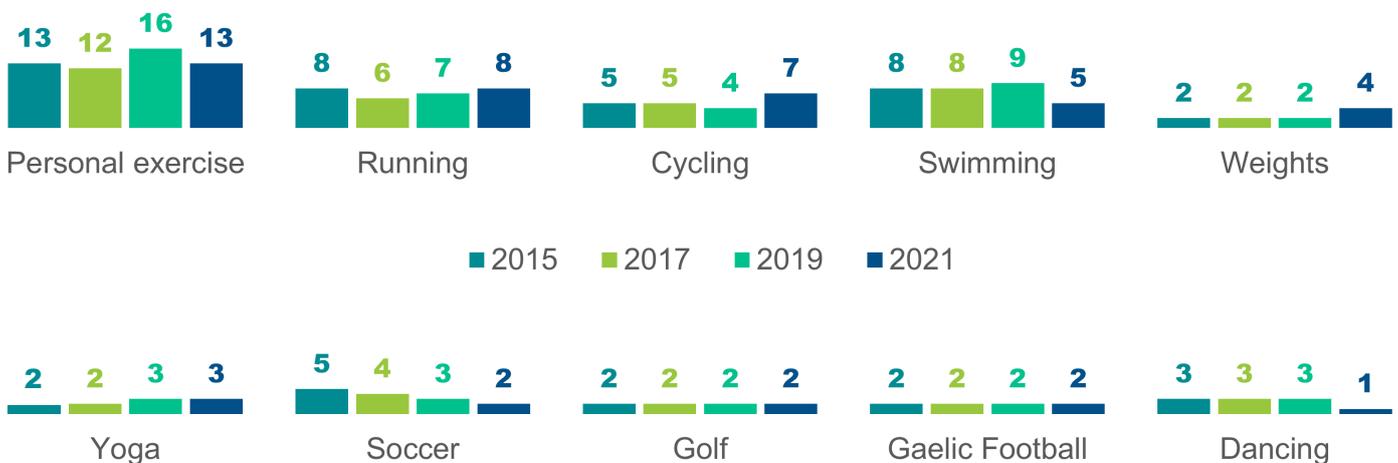
Much of this is explained by the changing nature of sports participation outlined later in this section which, due to Covid-19 restrictions, became increasingly focussed on casual participation over structured, organised training and events.

Most popular sports participated in

A key impact of the pandemic was that certain types of activities were inaccessible for parts of 2021, while participation rates in other activities increased as people replaced one form of activity with another, or had more free time or flexibility available to them enabling them to take up a new activity.

As a result, this means that while participation rates in some activities have increased since 2019, some others have experienced declines. As noted earlier in the report, much of this related to the particular restrictions during the earlier part of 2021 and there was a “normalising” of activity levels during the second half of the year as restrictions were eased.

Figure 2.3 - Participation in specific activities 2015-2021 - top 10 sports (%)



Indoor and team-based activities were particularly impacted by the pandemic restrictions and as a result there were declines in personal exercise (which consists predominantly of gym-based activities), swimming and dancing. In contrast, participation levels in activities such as cycling and weights have increased since 2019.

Despite the different changes across sports, four of the five most popular sports in 2021 were also in the top 5 activities in 2019, and the top 10 activities remain unchanged since 2019. Notably the proportion that participate regularly in multiple sports has remained broadly unchanged at 13% (2019: 14%), while the proportion that participate in only one sport has declined from 32% to 27%.

Context for sports participation

The ISM identifies the context for participation in sport. This clearly highlights the impact of the various social and other restrictions on sports participation.

Figure 2.4 – Context for sports participation 2015-2021 (% of sports participants) (%)

	2015	2017	2019	2021
On own	44	40	43	56
Casually with friends/ family	25	25	25	25
Organised training (TOTAL)	30	32	34	22
- <i>In person</i>	-	-	-	16
- <i>Remote</i>	-	-	-	6
Organised competition	7	8	7	3
Some other way	0	1	1	1

It shows that, for the first time in this research series, the majority of people participated in sport alone. Fifty-six percent of sports participants said that they participated in sport alone, an increase from 43% in 2019. Despite this the proportion participating in sport casually with family or friends remained unchanged at 25%.

Notable declines are seen in organised sport, with 22% participating in organised training (16% in-person, and 6% remotely) – a decline from 34% in 2019. Only 3% say that they participated in sport through organised competition, a decline from 7% in 2019.

Another clear dynamic as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions was the transition of sports away from private or community spaces to the home and public spaces. For example, while only 11% of activities in 2019 took place at home, this rose to 32% of activities during 2021. In contrast, there was a sharp decline in the proportion of activities taking place in gyms/sport centres (which would have been closed for periods during 2021). During 2021, 15% of activities took place in gyms/sports centres, down from 33% in 2019.

Figure 2.5 – Location for sports participation - most common locations (% of sports participants) (%)

	2019	2021
Public place (TOTAL)	23	35
- Road	-	25
- Park	-	6
- Beach/seaside	-	5
- Footpath	-	3
- Public green	-	2
At home	11	32
Gym/sports centre	33	15
Sports club	17	11

These changes are not only reflective of changes in the types of sports participated in, but also the way in which sport was undertaken. For example, each wave of the ISM has identified that personal exercise most commonly happens in gyms/sport centres, with this location accounting for 72% of personal exercise during 2019. However, during 2021 personal exercise most commonly took place at home with 58% participating in sport there compared with 17% in 2019. The proportion undertaking personal exercise in gyms/sport centres almost halved to 37%.

Similar dynamics can be seen in terms of weights, yoga and pilates with large increases in home-based participation across all three activities.

This section shows the strong impact that the Covid-19 restrictions had on sports participation, both through the level and nature of activity. The year as a whole saw a decline in participation overall with a particular reduction in indoor activity and team-based activities, and it suggests that there is considerable ground to make up in order to return to the levels of participation measured in 2019.

However, as detailed in the previous section considerable progress in regaining some of these losses was seen during the second half of 2021 as restrictions were lifted and many aspects of life returned to normal. With annual ISM measurements between 2022 and 2024 it will be possible to identify whether the Covid-19 restrictions created a long-lasting impact on sports participation or the effects were short-lived.

Socio-demographic differences in sports participation

A clear dynamic throughout the ISM series is the various socio-demographic gradients that exist in sports participation. The 2019 report identified that while encouraging progress was being made towards closing the gender gap, many social gradients – and the disability gradient in particular – were much more persistent. Eliminating these gradients has been a key priority for all stakeholders in sports, although the context around Covid-19 has hampered the ability to fully implement the required actions to make the necessary progress.

Differences across specific activities

Changes in participation levels within specific sports are more pronounced among some socio-demographic groups than others.

For example, a 3 percentage point increase in weights among men means that the proportion of men that lift weights has doubled to 6%. For women a more modest increase from 2% to 3% can be seen. This increase in weights is focussed on younger age groups with an almost threefold increase in the number of men aged between 20 and 34 who lift weights (from 4% in 2019 to 11% in 2021). Participation among women in this age group has doubled from 3% to 6% over the same time period.

An increase in running is more evident among younger age groups with 14% of those aged under-35 participating in running on a regular basis – an increase of 4 percentage points since 2019. In contrast the proportion of over-35s that run has remained broadly unchanged at 6% (5% in 2019). Although men in this age group are more likely than women to run (16% and 12% respectively), there has been a similar increase among both genders.

Differences can also be seen across social groups, both in terms of types of sports participated in as well as the changes in participation since 2019. Those in the professional/managerial social class (AB) are more likely to participate in most sports, however the gap with the semi-skilled/manual occupations and unemployed social class (DE) is larger for some sports, and is also widening in many cases.

Running and cycling have both seen increases in participation since 2019, however much of this increase is coming from the AB social group. This is leading to a widening social gap in both cases. Among the AB group, 15% participate in running and 10% participate in cycling (increases of 3 and 5 points, respectively). In contrast, there was no increase in running among the DE social group meaning that it remained unchanged at 3%, with a 3 point increase (to 6%) in cycling.

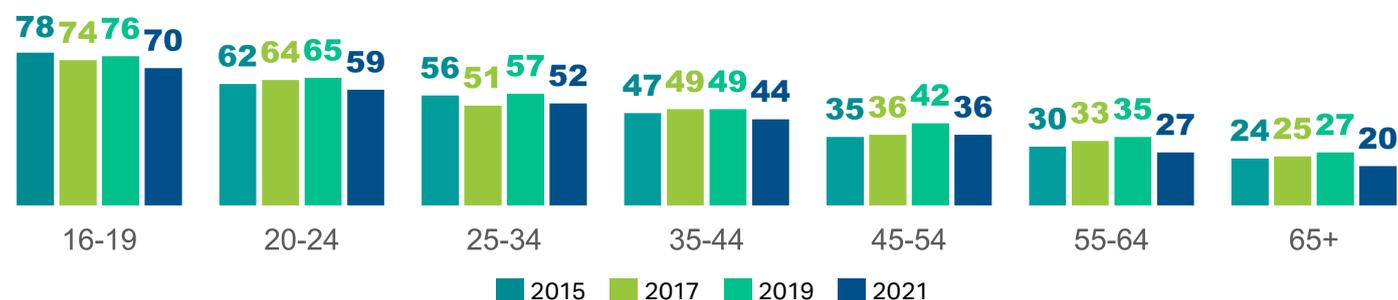
Declines in swimming can be seen among both social groups, however the decline is stronger among the DE group than it is among the AB social group. While the proportion of DEs that swim regularly declined from 8% to 2%, a smaller decline from 10% to 8% can be seen among the AB group.

Age gradient

A consistent feature throughout all waves of the ISM has been the strong age gradient that exists across sports, with participation levels declining over the life course.

This wave demonstrates that this age gradient remains persistent, with consistent declines in sports participation within each age group. However, due to the lower levels of sports participation within older age groups the proportionate decline in sports participation is larger for these groups than it is for younger groups.

Figure 2.6 – Participation in sport by age 2015-2021 (%)



This is most clearly seen within the over-65 age group for whom sports participation has declined by 7 points, from 27% to 20%, meaning that roughly a quarter of over-65s that participated regularly in sport during 2019 did not participate regularly during 2021.

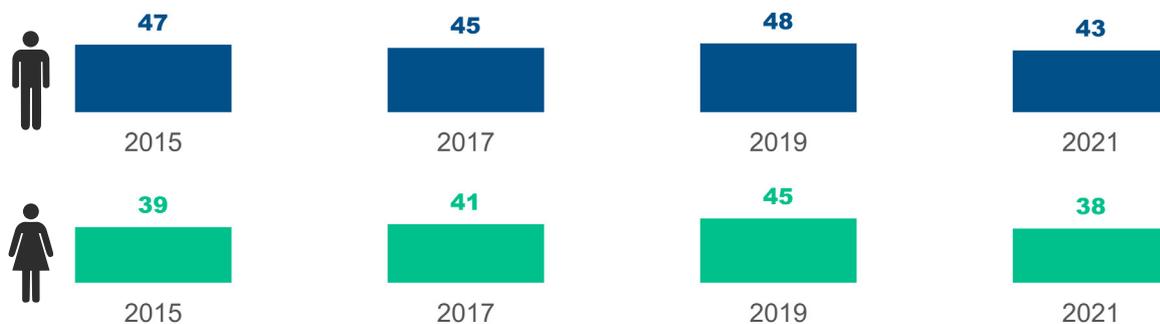
An alternative way to consider the impact of this decline is to view it in terms of estimated population numbers. Overall, approximately 150,000 over-65s participate regularly in sport, down from 190,000 in 2019. This means that despite accounting for 11% of sports participants in 2019, the over-65s account for 19% of the overall decline in sports participation since then. If the analysis is expanded to include those aged between 55 and 64 it finds that over-55s, who accounted for 21% of sports participants in 2019, account for 36% of the decline.

Gender gap in sports participation

A key focus of the National Sports Policy is to eliminate the gender gap that exists in sports participation. Every wave of the ISM has identified that men are more likely than women to play sport on a regular basis, however the previous two waves both identified a narrowing of this gender gap which stood at 3.4% in ISM 2019. This is remarkable progress over the longer term, with the first wave of the ISM in 2007 identifying a gender gap of 15.7%.

This wave of the ISM identifies that the gender gap has widened to 4.9% - roughly the same as it was in 2017. However, as identified in the previous section on changes in sports participation over the period of the Covid-19 restrictions, the gender gap fluctuated over the past two years, and at one point during 2020 there was no difference between the genders in their participation levels in sport.

Figure 2.7 - Participation in sport by gender 2015-2021 (%)



Many of the fluctuations in gender gap are explained by changes in access to different sports. For example, team sports, which are more likely to be played by men, were not possible for much of the period of Covid-19 restrictions. This led to a larger decline in participation in sports participation among men. However, as restrictions eased most returned to popular teams sports meaning that a gender gap re-emerged. This is explored in more detail later in this section as well as elsewhere throughout this report.

When considering the changing gender gap it is important to consider how this develops across the life course. It is noteworthy that the gender gap has widened among those aged under 35 as well as among those aged 65 and older. Among those aged between 35 and 54 the gender gap has narrowed slightly, and this is reflected in the gap between mothers and fathers being unchanged since 2019. Part of this may be due to changing responsibilities in the home due to increased number working from home.

Figure 2.8 – Ratio of female to male participants by age 2015-2021 (relative likelihood of participating in sport*)

	2015	2017	2019	2021
Overall	0.83	0.90	0.93	0.88
16-19	0.84	0.89	0.83	0.78
20-24	0.74	0.75	0.83	0.79
25-34	0.85	0.77	0.95	0.77
35-44	0.80	0.84	0.91	1.01
45-54	0.82	1.15	0.94	0.96
55-64	1.01	1.06	1.12	1.11
65+	0.92	1.08	1.07	0.93

*A figure under 1.0 indicates females are relatively less likely to participate than males, and a figure over 1.0 indicates females relatively more likely to participate than males. The further away from 1.0 the larger the difference between the genders.

Many of the more recent changes in sports participation appear at this point to be temporary in nature, with sporting behaviours returning to pre-pandemic levels. In this respect much encouragement can be taken from the progress seen over the past seven years in terms of reducing the gender gap which will remain a key focus in the coming years.

Social gradient

One of the key findings from ISM 2019 was the persistence of the social gradient in sports participation. While sports participation was increasing at an overall level, those from more educated and more affluent backgrounds remained more likely to participate in sport than those from less educated and deprived backgrounds.

Worryingly this wave of the ISM finds a stronger decline in sports participation among less affluent groups and those with lower levels of education. This in turn is widening the social gradient along some dimensions.

Analysis by socio-economic status finds that while sports participation has declined across all social groups the decline among social class AB is smaller than that among other groups. As a result, the 30 point gap in participation in 2019 between social class AB and social class DE has increased to 34 points.

Figure 2.9 – Participation in sport by socio-economic group 2015-2021 (%)



At least part of this is likely explained by those in social class AB being more likely to work in roles that would have required them to work from home during the pandemic restrictions. This would have provided many of them with additional free time to participate in sport.

A similar dynamic can be seen in terms of educational attainment, and while there has been a decline across all groups, this decline is more severe among those with lower levels of educational attainment. This is an outcome from two changes seen since 2019 – the more severe declines in participation among less affluent groups and also the declines among the oldest age groups, both of which are more likely to have lower levels of education.

The final element within the social gradient are the differences by working status, with those in paid employment more likely to participate in sport than all other groups (except students). While this is still the case, the changes across individual categories are quite mixed.

The largest declines in sports participation are seen among those who are unable to work due to sickness/disability, homemakers and those who are retired. These groups have an older profile so declines in participation may be expected for this reason. In the case of homemakers some of the decline will also be due to the widening gender gap as 95% of this group are women.

Figure 2.10 – Participation in sport by working status 2015-2021 (%)

	2015	2017	2019	2021
Employee	48	47	52	47
Self-employed	36	39	41	33
Unemployed	39	36	33	37
Retired	30	30	29	22
Homemaker	32	35	36	24
Student	70	68	71	67
Unable to work	20	21	33	18

A further noteworthy finding is that there has been no decline in participation among those that are unemployed and while the proportion in this group participating in sport is 4 points higher than in 2019, the increase is not statistically significant.

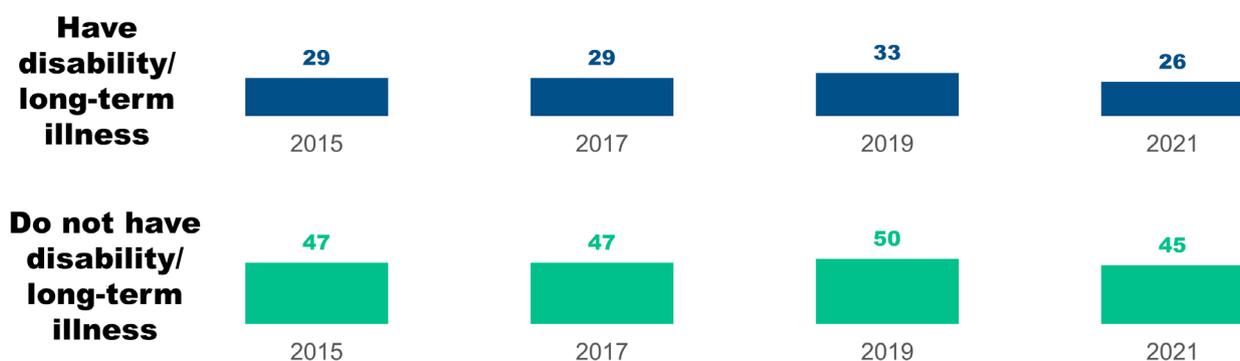
Unemployment levels rose considerably over the course of the pandemic from 4.8% at the end of 2019 to a peak of 7.9% in March 2021. For this reason the composition of the unemployed group will be very different between the two surveys due to many moving from being employed to unemployed but maintaining or increasing previous sporting behaviours.

A similar dynamic was seen in ISM 2011, as the worsening economic situation at that time led to rising unemployment, with sports participation in this group increasing over the same period as newly unemployed people continued their sporting habits.

Disability gap

The 2019 report included a spotlight on disability, noting that of all the gradients that exist in relation to active participation in sport, the disability one is the most severe. It also identified that those with a disability were less likely to participate in sport or physical activity in all its forms, both active and social. This is partly a function of age with disabilities more common among older age groups which are less likely to participate in sport on a regular basis.

Figure 2.11 - Participation in sport by disability 2015-2021 (%)



This wave finds that this disability gap is persistent and may even have widened further. There has been a 7 point decline in sports participation among those with a long-term illness, health problem or disability compared to a 5 point decline among those with no disability.

As a result this means that almost three-quarters of those with a disability do not participate regularly in sport. The previous report identified this as a key policy consideration, and if anything the challenge has exacerbated since then.



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3. Broader Physical Activity



Broader Physical Activity

- In addition to sport, this study examines three other forms of physical activity – recreational walking, walking for transport and cycling for transport. In contrast to participation in sport, broader physical activity has increased since 2019. 74% regularly walk for recreation (2019: 66%), 48% walk for transport (2019: 45%) and 11% cycle for transport (2019: 10%).
- The proportion classified as 'Highly Active' (considered to be meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines) has increased significantly since 2019, from 34% to 41%. Similarly, the proportion that is sedentary (did not participate in any activity during the past 7 days) is broadly unchanged over the same time period, (2021: 11%, 2019: 12%).
- The proportion that is highly active has increased across all age and gender groups. Those aged 16-19 remain the most active age group, with a significant increase in the proportion of women in this group being classed as highly active during this wave (2021: 51%; 2019: 39%). Strong growth in the popularity of recreational walking during 2021 has driven this increase in activity levels.
- Women (43%) remain more likely to be highly active than men (39%), with similar increases since 2019 in the proportions that are highly active across genders (7 and 6 points, respectively).
- The social gradient in activity levels which began to emerge between the 2017 and 2019 ISM waves has significantly worsened in 2021. Significantly stronger rates of growth in activity levels among those of higher socio-economic status mean that a social gap in overall physical activity has opened up which did not exist four years ago.
- Substantial shifts have been observed in rates of recreational walking by region, with 12 point increases observed in Dublin (74%) and Ulster (73%). Other regions see smaller upticks since 2019.
- Despite the shift towards working from home during the pandemic and increased levels of unemployment during this period, rates of walking for transport increased in 2021, including among those in employment (2021: 45%; 2019: 40%). Rates of walking for transport among students fell, however (2021: 65%; 2019: 69%).

Introduction

In addition to tracking sports participation, the Irish Sports Monitor includes questions designed to measure participation in three other forms of physical activity – recreational walking and active transport (including both walking and cycling for transport). This enables a more complete understanding of overall physical activity beyond sport.

This broader measure of physical activity is an important aspect of the ISM, as it provides a more accurate picture of physical activity among the population and facilitates tracking the relative contributions of sport, recreational walking and active transport, as well as to monitor how this changes over time.

Additionally, as previous reports have noted, research has shown that these alternative forms of physical activity can often act as transitory activities to participating in sport, meaning that they can form important components of maximising sports participation and overall levels of physical activity.

* *Participating in at least 30 minutes of physical activity on at least 5 out of the previous 7 days through a combination of sport and recreational walking.*

Recreational Walking

Recreational walking remains the most popular form of physical activity, with around three quarters (74%) reporting that they walk regularly for recreation. This is the highest level ever recorded in the ISM, and represents a significant increase from the 66% who reported doing so in 2019. As such, approximately 2.8 million people walk regularly for recreation, an increase of 300,000 since 2019. It is likely that the Covid-19 pandemic had a large role to play here, with reduced opportunities for participation in organised sporting activities resulting in people switching to other forms of exercise, including recreational walking. It therefore remains to be seen whether these elevated levels of recreational walking will be sustained post-pandemic.

Figure 3.1 - Participation in recreational walking 2015-2021 (%)



A consistent finding across all waves of the ISM to date has been that more women walk for recreation than men. This remains the case in 2021, with 78% of women walking regularly for recreation, compared to 69% of men. Both genders have increased their participation by similar levels since 2019, meaning that the gender gap in recreational walking remains constant, having been narrowing since 2015.

Figure 3.2 - Participation in recreational walking by gender 2015-2021 (%)



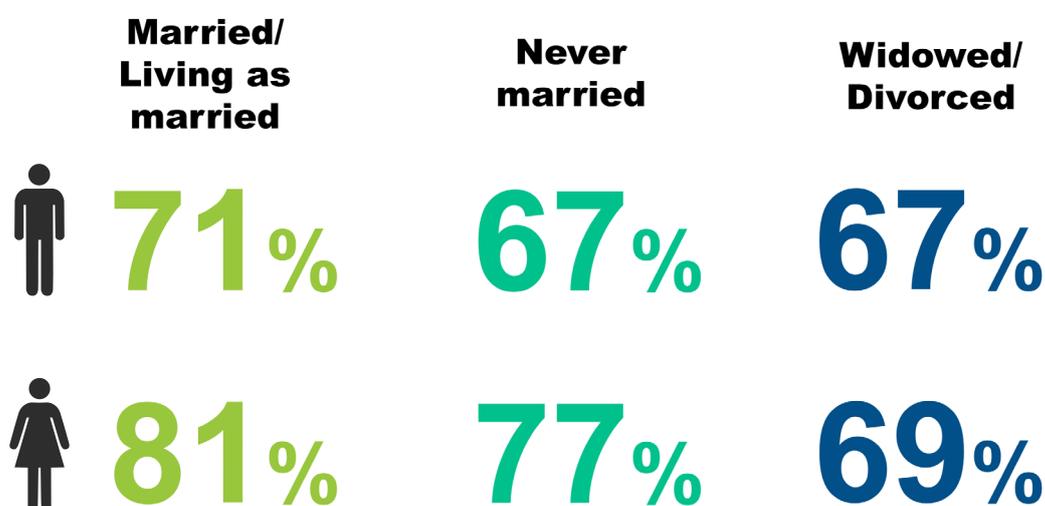
In the context of this gender gap, a dynamic that has been examined across previous waves of the ISM is the differences that exist by relationship status. Those who are married or living as married, and especially men in this group, tend to be significantly more likely to walk for recreation than those who are single.

This year's ISM represents a significant narrowing of this relationship gap, however. Among both genders, rates of recreational walking have increased faster among single respondents than those who are married. Two-thirds (67%) of single men now report regularly walking for recreation, an increase of 13 points since 2019, while 77% of single women report the same, a 10 point increase.

Recreational walking remains more popular among those who are married, 81% of women and 71% of men having done so in the past week. These figures represent smaller increases since 2019, however (8 points and 5 points, respectively). The particularly strong increase in recreational walking among single men combined with the relatively smaller increase among married men means that the gender gap in recreational walking now stands at an equal level between those who are married and those who are single (10 points).

While increases in overall levels of recreational walking in 2021 have primarily been driven by single people, as described below this shift may be more strongly related to changes in the age profile of those who walk recreationally, rather than relationship status.

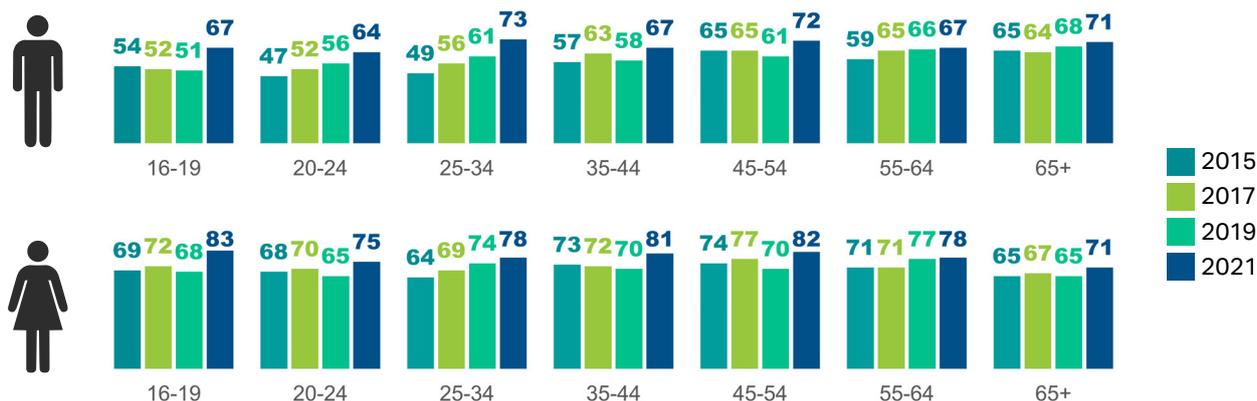
Figure 3.3 - Participation in recreational walking by gender and relationship status (%)



Another consistent finding across previous waves of the ISM has been the contrasting relationship sports participation and recreational walking exhibit with age. While sports participation tends to decrease linearly as people get older, rates of recreational walking tend to be higher among older age groups. This wave represents a slight shift in this pattern, however.

As figure 3.4 shows, while rates of recreational walking increased across all age groups, this increase was sharpest among younger age groups, and relatively small among older respondents, particularly those aged 55 and older.

Figure 3.4 - Participation in recreational walking by gender and age 2015-2021 (%)



As a result of this shift, those aged 16-19 (75%), and particularly women in this age group, are the age group most likely to walk for recreation, and 4 points more likely to do so than those aged 65 and older, having been 7 points less likely in 2019.

The shift in the age profile of recreational walkers, characterised by strong increases among younger people and weaker increases among older ones, is likely a result of two interlinked factors. First, younger people are those most likely to participate in organised sport, and therefore were more likely to need to find alternative ways to be physically active when these activities were not available during the pandemic. Second, older people are at higher levels of risk from Covid-19, and may therefore have been more wary about walking recreationally than younger people during this period, which may account for the relative lack of increase among those aged 65 and older in particular.

Overall, the generational gender divide in recreational walking remains consistent with previous ISM waves, however. Women are more likely to walk recreationally across all age groups, apart from those aged 65 and older, where no gap exists. The increase in recreational walking among those aged 25-34 observed in all waves since 2015 also continues, with 76% of 25-34 year olds now walking recreationally, the second highest rate after 45-54 year olds. This increase is particularly large among men.

The social gradient in recreational walking has widened in this wave. While rates increased across all social classes, the largest growth was among those of higher socio-economic status. As a result, the gap between those in social class AB and those in DE has widened from 8 points in 2019 to 14 points in 2021.

Figure 3.5 - Participation in recreational walking by socio-economic status 2015-2021 (%)

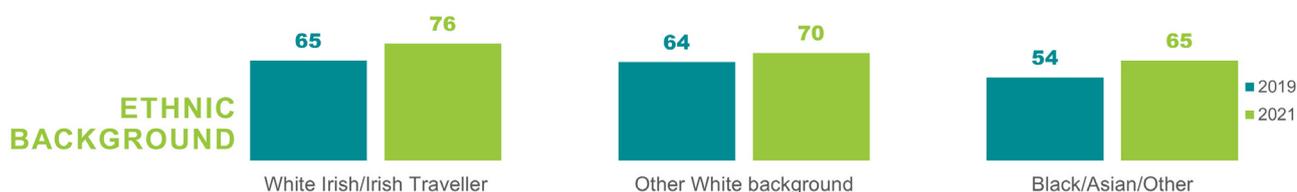


A similar pattern is observed in terms of education, with an average increase of 9% among those with a Junior Certificate education or higher, compared to just 1% among those with a Primary School education. This may partly be a function of the fact that it is primarily those in the oldest age groups who finished their education at Primary Level.

Interestingly, as figure 3.5 shows, a gap has also opened up between those who are working as an employee and those who are unemployed, one which didn't exist previously. This may be a function of those who are employed having more free time available for recreational walking as a result of working from home during the pandemic.

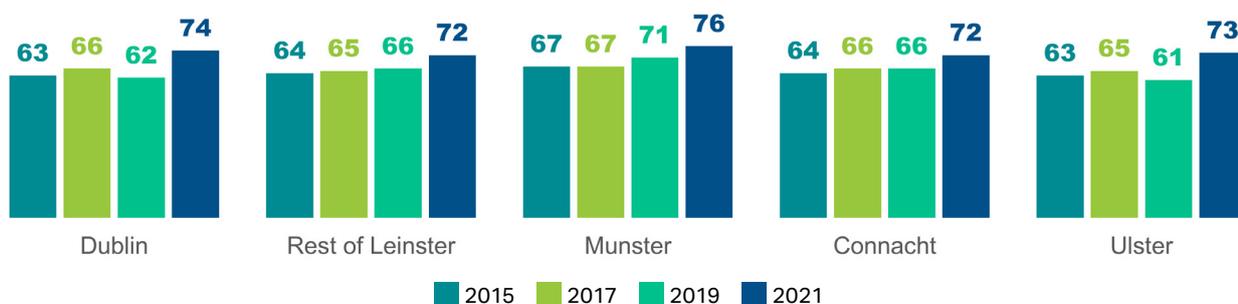
Analysis of recreational walking by ethnicity finds that participation is highest among those identifying as White Irish (76%), followed by those from Other White backgrounds (70%). As in previous waves, recreational walking is less popular among those from Black/Asian/Other backgrounds (65%). Overall, the gap between those identifying as White and those identifying as non-White has remained stable since 2019. As with the analysis of sports participation by ethnic background, analysis here is limited to those aged under 45.

Figure 3.6 - Participation in recreational walking by ethnic background 2019-2021 (all aged under 45) (%)



There have also been significant shifts in rates of recreational walking by region during this ISM wave. Having declined to 62% in 2019, the proportion living in Dublin undertaking this activity has jumped up by 12 points to 74%. The same increase is observed among those living in Ulster, rising from 61% in 2019 to 73% in 2021. Other regions also report increases of about half this size. Rates of recreational walking remain highest in Munster.

Figure 3.7 - Participation in recreational walking by region 2015-2021 (%)



Walking for Transport

Walking for transport is defined as taking walks at least once a week of over 15 minutes for transport for example, to work, to the shops or walking children to school. The proportion taking this form of activity has increased since 2019, with 48% reporting that they regularly walk for transport.

Figure 3.8 - Participation in walking for transport 2015-2021 (%)

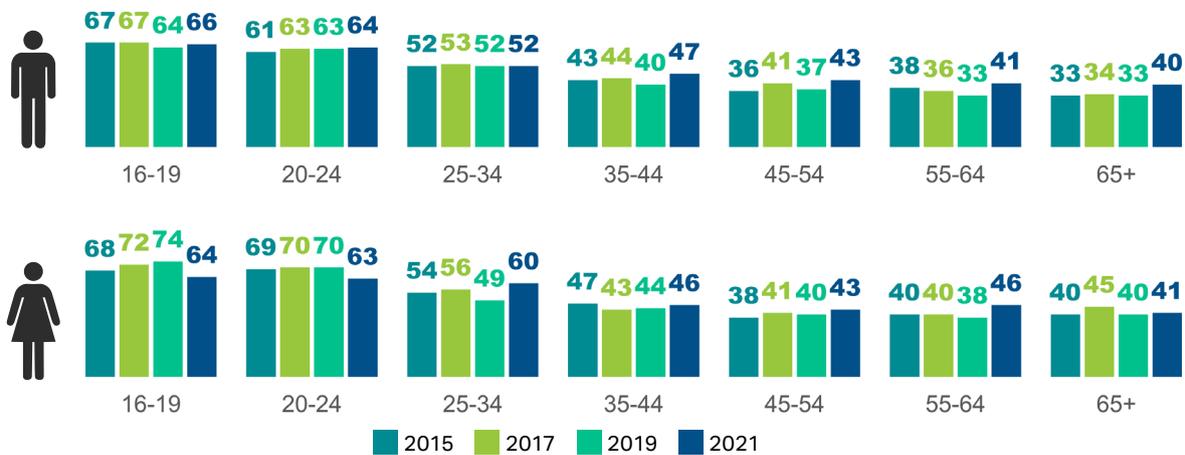


As was noted in previous ISM reports, variations in the numbers walking for transport have been thought to be closely tied to current economic conditions, with higher numbers of people in employment and increased economic activity presumed to lead to a greater number of journeys taken by foot.

However, given the unique circumstances under which the 2021 ISM wave took place, with the Covid-19 pandemic leading to significant increases in the amount of time people spent at home, as well as a rise in unemployment relative to previous years, the increase in walking for transport runs counter to this hypothesis. It may be, therefore, that this increase is a by-product of a combination of other factors, including people avoiding public transport during the pandemic, an increased focus on sustainable and active forms of transport, and the increased popularity of recreational walking during the pandemic.

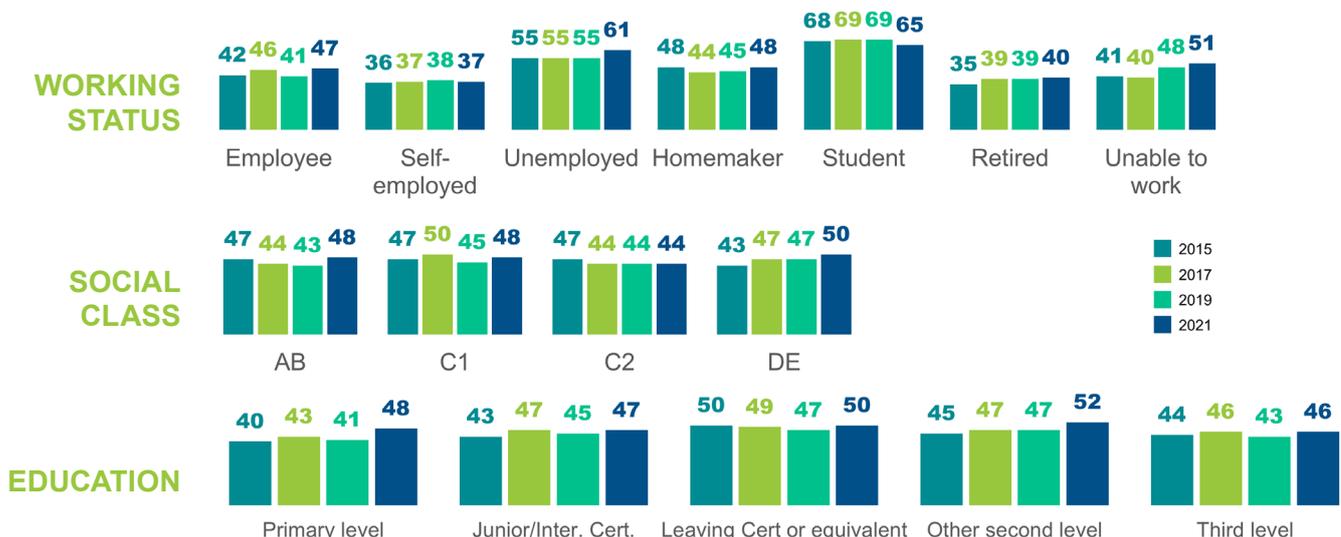
Temporal trends in levels of walking for transport differ by age and gender. As figure 3.9 shows, walking for transport declined significantly among women in the 16-19 and 20-24 age groups, although among men in these age groups it remained broadly steady. Increases in walking for transport were observed among all age and gender groups 35 and older.

Figure 3.9 - Participation in walking for transport by gender and age 2015-2021 (%)



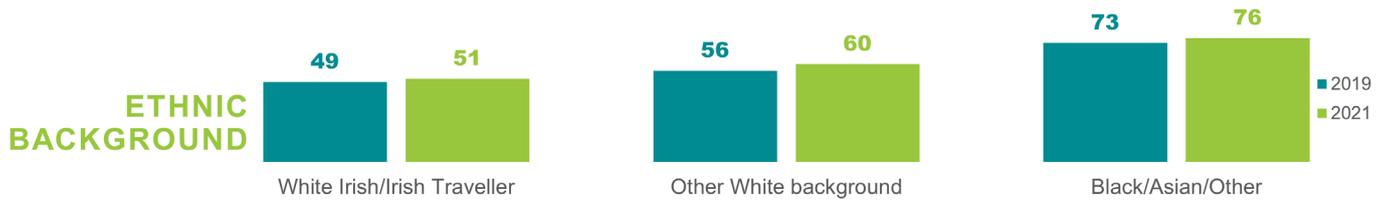
This wave identifies an increase in walking for transport among those working as an employee (47%), returning to similar levels reported in 2017. Interestingly, an increase of equal size is also reported among those who are unemployed (61%), having held at the same level in all three previous waves. This may lend support to the argument that the causes of increases in walking for transport are not principally economic in nature. In contrast, the largest decrease in walking for transport is observed among students, likely a result of increased remote learning, particularly at 3rd level.

Figure 3.10 - Participation in walking for transport by socio-economic status 2015-2021 (%)



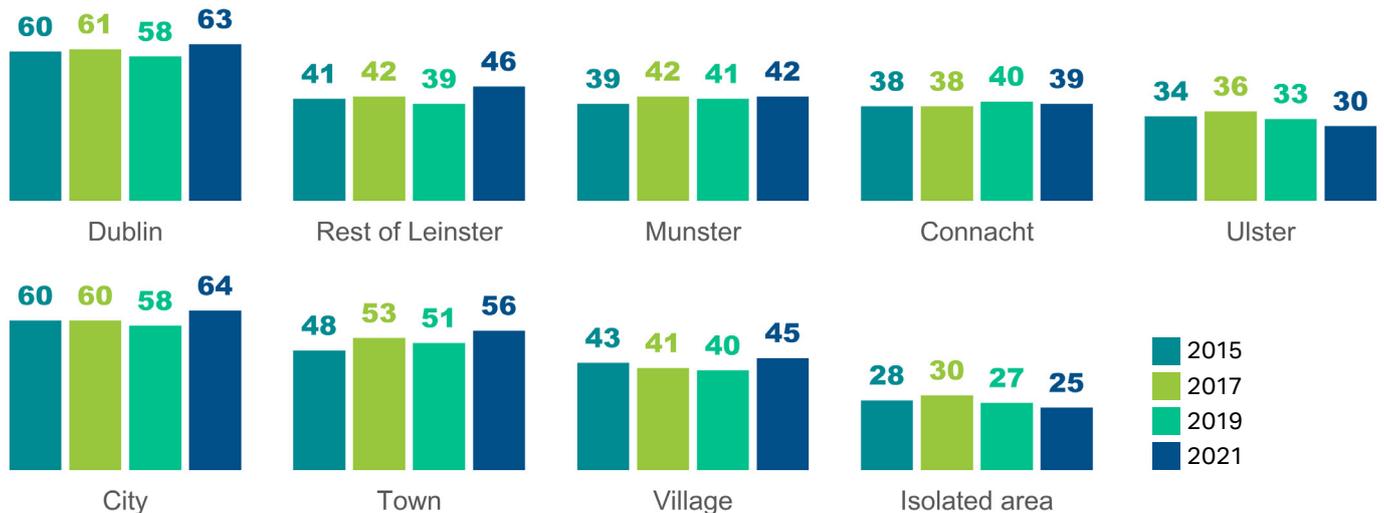
As has been noted in previous reports, analysis by ethnicity shows that while those from Black/Asian/Other backgrounds are less likely to walk for recreation, they are more likely to do so for transport (76%) than those from White Irish (51%) and Other White backgrounds (60%). This is likely a result of those of non-White ethnicity being relatively more likely to live in urban areas, where walking for transport is more common, a difference which does not exist for recreational walking.

Figure 3.11 – Participation in walking for transport by ethnic background 2019-2021 (all aged under 45) (%)



Walking for transport remains most popular in Dublin, with the largest increases reported here and in Rest of Leinster. Other regions are lower, with small declines reported in Connacht and Ulster. Walking for transport is strongly linked to the type of area an individual lives in, with those living in urban areas (60%) almost twice as likely as those in rural areas (34%) to do so.

Figure 3.12 – Participation in walking for transport by location 2015-2021 (%)



Cycling for Transport

Slightly more than one in ten cycle regularly for transport (11%). The proportion doing has remained broadly unchanged across the four previous survey waves.

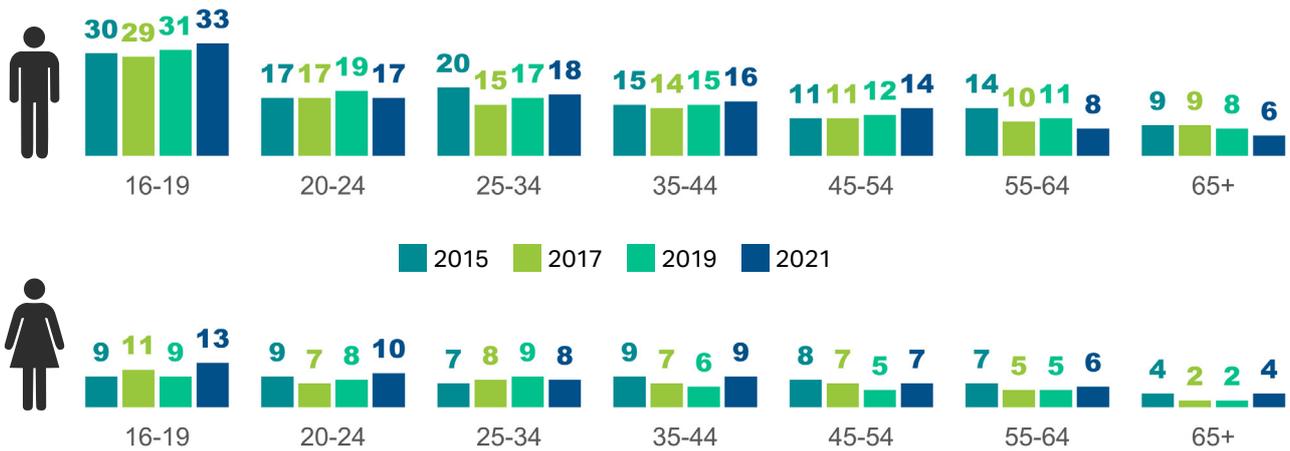
Figure 3.13 – Participation in cycling for transport 2015-2021 (%)



As reported previously, significant gender and age gaps exist when it comes to those cycling for transport. Twice as many men (14%) report doing so as women (7%), with men more likely to cycle for transport across all age groups. Those aged 16-19 are most likely to do this activity, especially among men in this age group (33%), with a slow decline from age 20-24 onwards.

Cycling for transport has increased across most age groups among women since the 2019 ISM wave, with the largest increase observed among 16-19 year olds. It is possible that a portion of the decline in walking for transport reported by this group is accounted for by a switch to cycling. Proportions cycling for transport among men remain largely steady, although declines are observed among the two oldest age groups.

Figure 3.14 - Participation in cycling for transport by gender and age 2015-2021 (%)



There remains little effect of social class or education on likelihood of cycling for transport. Students and those who are unemployed remain most likely to do so, although a decline among the latter group means the social gap has halved between those who are employed and unemployed between 2019 and 2021. There is little difference by ethnic background in likelihood to cycle for transport.

Figure 3.15 - Participation in cycling for transport by socio-economic groups 2015-2021 (%)

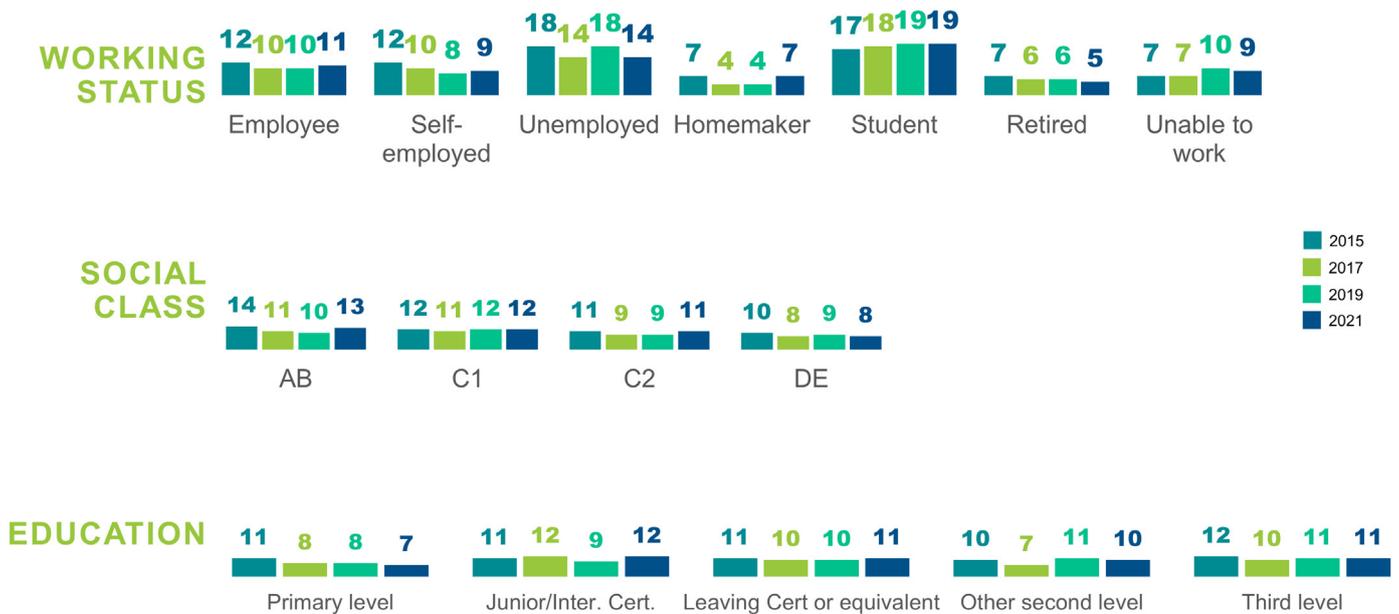
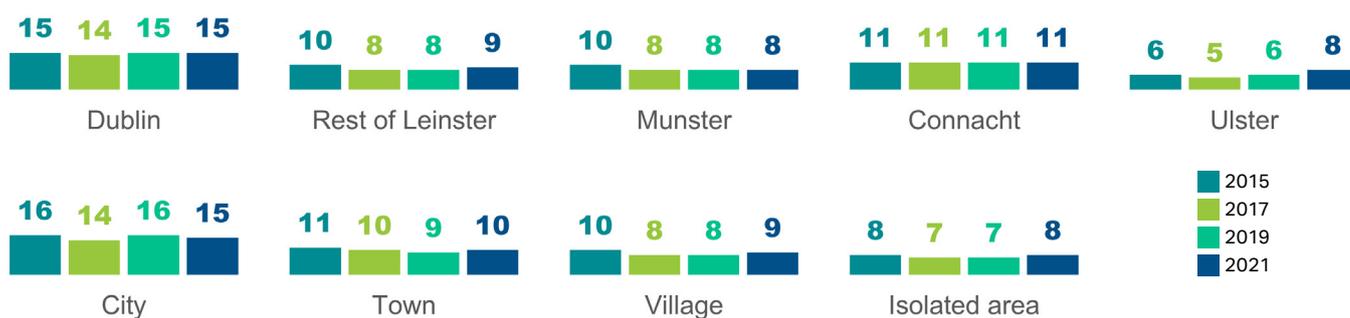


Figure 3.16 – Participation in cycling for transport by ethnic background 2019-2021 (all aged under 45) (%)



As with walking, those living in Dublin (15%) are more likely to cycle for transport than those living elsewhere (9%), with this activity also concentrated among those living in urban areas more generally.

Figure 3.17 – Participation in cycling for transport by location 2015-2021 (%)



Physical Activity Categories

By combining activity across participation in sport, recreational walking and active travel, it is possible to identify the proportion that achieves the National Physical Activity Guidelines. Throughout this research series, respondents have been classified as highly active, fairly active*, just active** or sedentary based on the extent, duration and intensity of their activity.

In this context, the two groups of most interest are those at either end of the spectrum. Those who are highly active are those who have participated in at least 30 minutes of physical activity on at least 5 of the last 7 days through a combination of sport and recreational walking.*** As such, those classified as highly active are those meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines. In contrast, those who are sedentary are those that have not participated in any sport, recreational walking or active travel in the past 7 days.

Policymaking in this area aims to both increase the proportion of the population that is highly active and reduce the proportion that is sedentary. The National Sports Policy 2018-2027 and the National Physical Activity Plan set specific targets in both respects. Given that the greatest benefits of increased physical activity have been shown to accrue to those who are inactive, helping those who are sedentary to increase their activity levels is of particular importance.

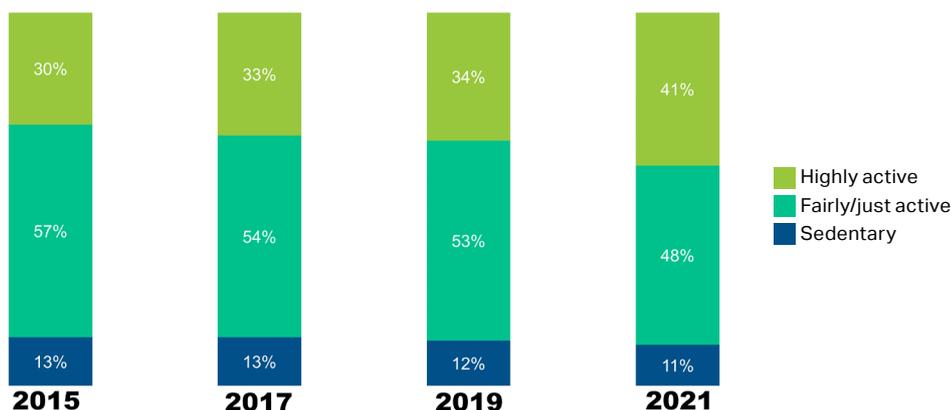
* Participated in 30 minutes of physical activity at least twice during the previous seven days

** Participated in a sporting activity or recreational walking for 20 minutes at least once during the previous seven days, or regularly walks/cycles for transport (at least once a week)

*** Within this analysis only participation in sport and recreational walking are used to categorise an individual as highly active. As such the proportion classified as highly active may not include those who undertake their activity through active travel/commuting.

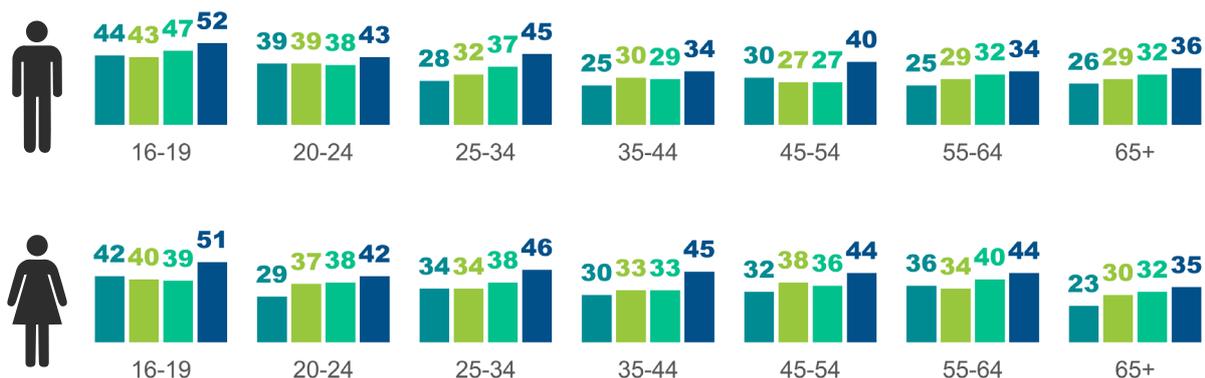
A major finding of this wave of the survey is the significant increase in the proportion of the population classified as highly active in 2021, at 41%. The proportion that are sedentary also continues to decline gradually, now standing at 11%. Almost all of the increase in the proportion who are highly active comes from those who were already active to some degree increasing their activity levels further; the proportion classed as fairly/just active has fallen from 53% in 2019 to 48% in 2021.

Figure 3.18 – Hierarchy of activity 2015-2021 (%)



Women (43%) remain more likely to be highly active than men (39%), with similar increases since 2019 in the proportions that are highly active across genders (7% and 6%, respectively). Overall, a similar pattern to the one observed across previous ISM waves is observed in terms of age and gender. Men tend to be most highly active at the youngest age groups, before significant drops during the 20-34 and 35+ age ranges. In contrast, activity levels among women remain largely steady across the life course, meaning that from age 35 to retirement age, women are consistently significantly more likely to be classed as highly active than men.

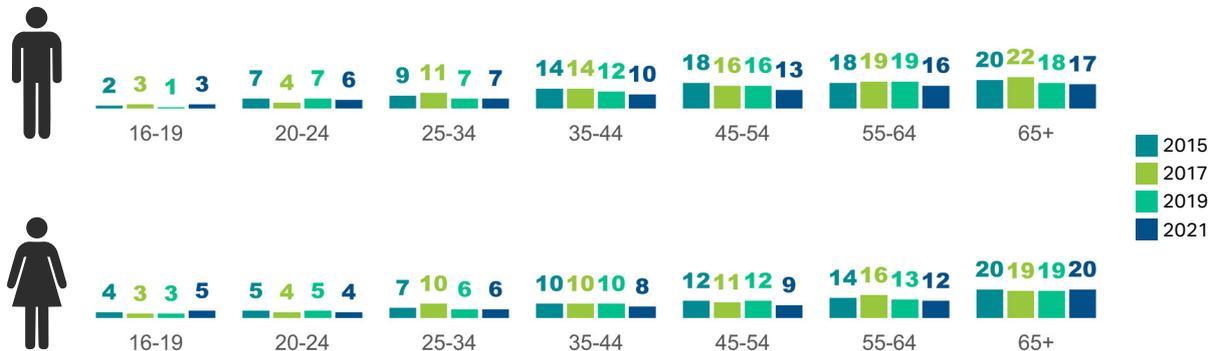
Figure 3.19 – Highly active by gender and age 2015-2021 (%)



In terms of age divides, those aged 16-19 remain significantly more likely to be classed as highly active, with a particularly strong increase in the proportion of highly active women in this age group, closing the gender gap which had opened up in 2019. Activity levels among those aged 65 and older also continue to rise steadily.

The increase in the proportions classed as highly active brings with it an accompanying decrease in sedentarism, although this varies across gender and age groups. The most significant declines in inactivity come among those aged 35-64, with the proportions in this age group who are sedentary falling among both genders. Sedentarism remains largely unchanged among those aged over 65 and under 35, although small increases are observed vs. 2019 among both men and women in the 16-19 age group.

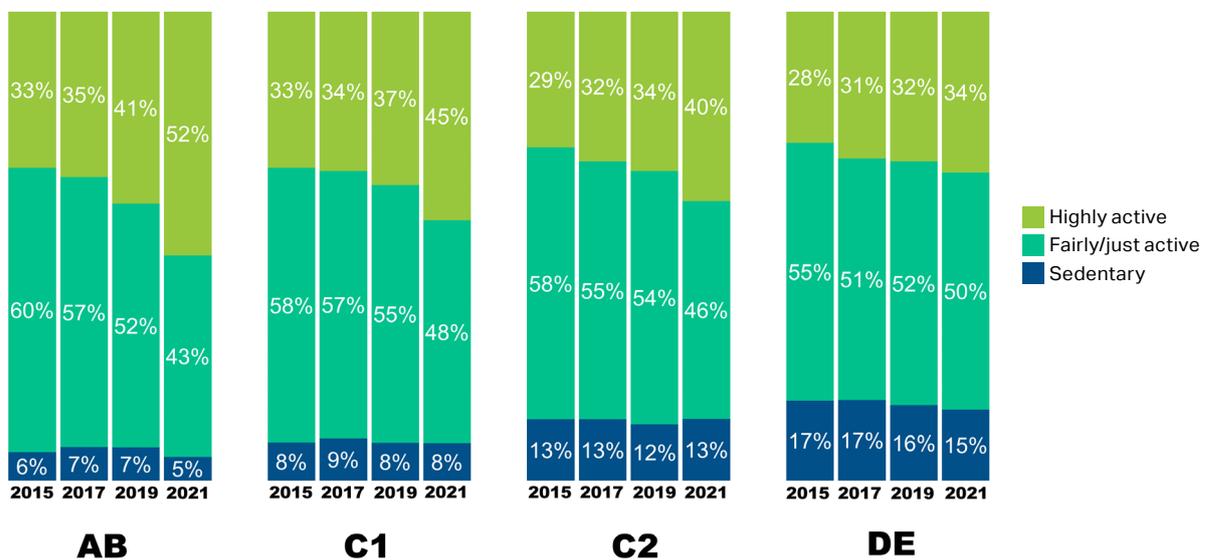
Figure 3.20 – Sedentary by gender and age (2015-2021) (%)



The social gradient in activity levels which began to emerge between the 2017 and 2019 ISM waves has significantly worsened in 2021. Further strong growth is reported in the proportion of those in social class AB being highly active, such that more than half (52%) of this group now meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines. This, combined with diminishing rates of growth moving along the socio-economic ladder has created a clear inverse correlation between class and likelihood of being highly active, which was not observable just four years ago.

Sedentarism has declined by 2 points among those in social class AB, remaining largely steady among all other groups.

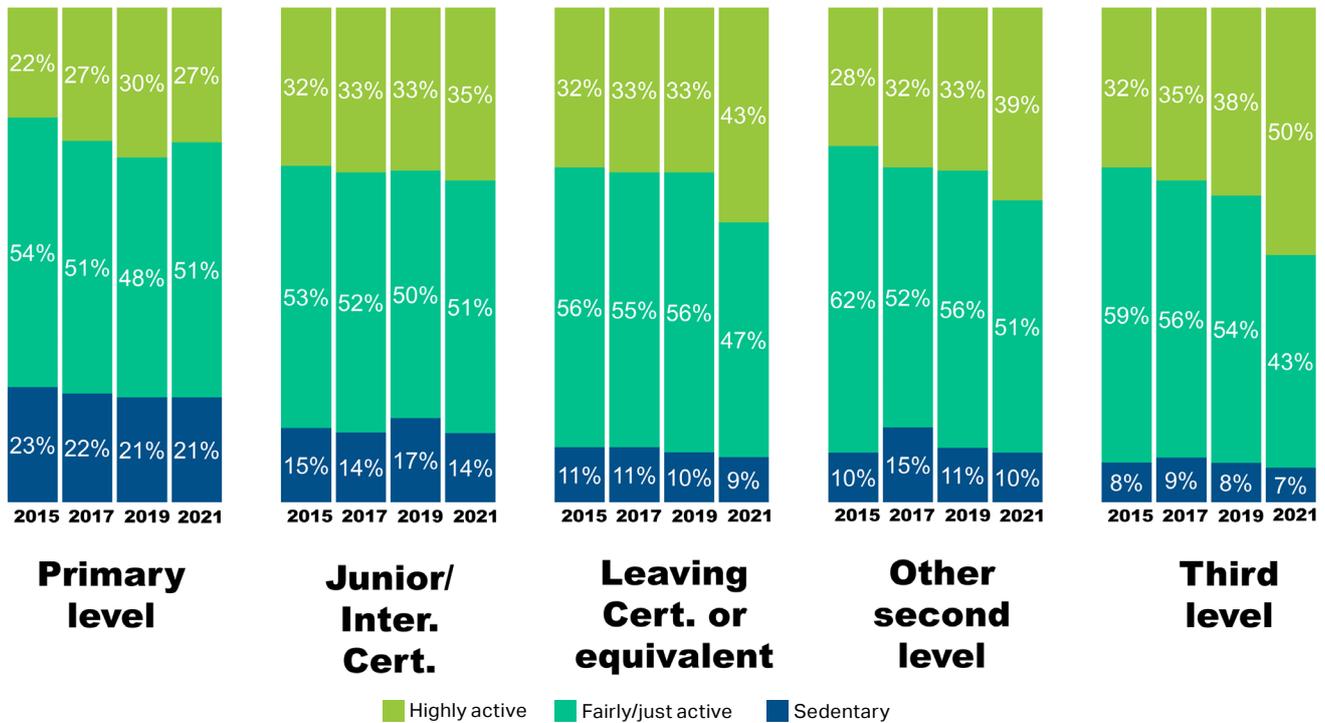
Figure 3.21 – Hierarchy of activity by socio-economic status 2015-2021 (%)



Similarly to class differences, the social gradient in education which had narrowed in previous years has opened up again. This is a result of significant increases in the proportions that are highly active among all groups with a Leaving Certificate education or higher, combined with relative stagnation among those without a Leaving Certificate education.

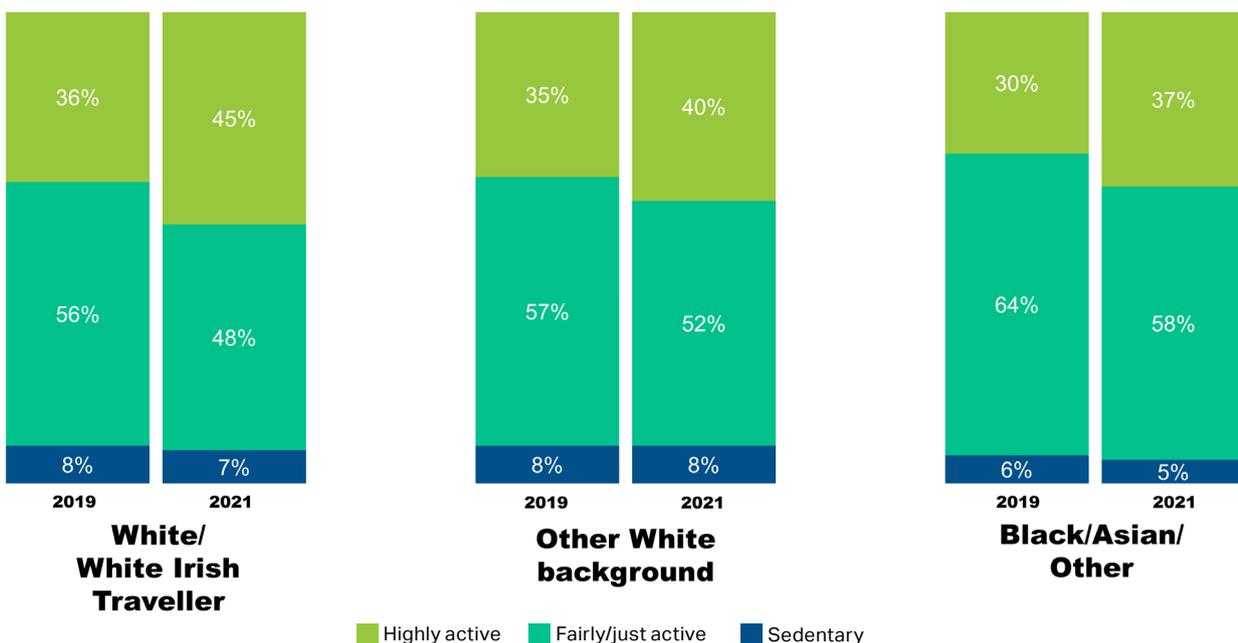
Those with a Third Level education remain most likely to be highly active and least likely to be sedentary. Following strong improvements across previous ISM waves, those who finished their schooling at Primary Level are the only group with a lower proportion who were highly active in 2021 compared to 2019.

Figure 3.22 – Hierarchy of activity by education 2015-2021 (%)



The proportion of those highly active has increased across all ethnic groups, with 45% of those identifying as White Irish in this category compared to 40% of those from other White backgrounds and 37% of those from Black, Asian or other backgrounds. However, non-White groups are no more likely to be sedentary (5%) than those from both White backgrounds (7%).

Figure 3.23 – Hierarchy of activity by ethnic background 2019-2021 (%)





SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

4. Social Participation in Sport



Social Participation In Sport

- Social participation in sport has fallen across all three areas surveyed during this ISM wave. Overall, 32% of the population regularly participate socially in sport, a decline from 47% in 2019.
- The numbers participating socially in sport have fallen by similar levels across all three aspects. Three in ten (30%) report being a member of a sports club (2019: 36%), 9% report attending a sporting event (2019: 19%) and 7% report volunteering at sport (2019: 12%).
- Across all three activities, some of the largest declines in social participation have come in key age groups. These include 20-34 year old club members (2021: 35%; 2019: 45%), attendance at events among 35-54 year olds (2021: 12%; 2019: 25%) and volunteers in the 45-54 age group (2021: 11%; 2019: 20%).
- This wave has seen the gender gap in social participation narrow, although differences exist by activity type. The gap in volunteering and attendance at events now stands at 1 point for both activities (2019: 4 points and 6 points, respectively). Less progress has been observed in club membership, however, where the gender gap now stands at 13 points, compared to 14 points two years ago.
- The strong socio-economic gradient in social participation remains persistent, with those in employment, of higher socio-economic status and with higher levels of education significantly more likely to be involved socially across all three activity types. The greatest shift observed here has been a widening of the gap between those in social class AB and all other groups.
- A larger decline in active sports participation among club members than non-club members means that, for the first time in the ISM series, more than half of the population who actively participate in sport are not members of a sports club (51%).
- Just over four in five (81%) of those who regularly volunteered before the pandemic say they plan to return to doing so post-Covid-19. Similarly, 89% of club members plan to renew their membership the next time it's due, while 53% plan to regularly attend a sporting event. Encouraging social participation in sport among both new and former participants should be a priority for policymakers post-pandemic, especially in volunteering.

Introduction

In addition to analysing sports participation in a physical sense, the ISM also tracks levels of social participation in sport. This is measured in three contexts – volunteering, club membership and attendance at sporting events.

Social participation plays a crucial role to the functioning of sport in Ireland at all levels. Volunteers enable sporting infrastructure to function by giving up their free time to provide coaching, financial and administrative support. Sports clubs are a focal point of many communities, providing an environment for sport to be played and developed, while attendance at sporting events forms an important part of the social and financial capital that sport creates.

By its nature, participating socially in sport usually requires contact with others, with these activities therefore heavily impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Levels of social participation in sport, in particular volunteering and attendance at events, therefore fluctuated significantly during the fieldwork period, being lowest at the beginning of 2021 before rising sharply throughout the latter half of the year. It should therefore be noted that the figures reported in this paragraph reflect average social participation rates for 2021 as a whole.

Overall Social Participation in Sport

Just under a third (32%) have a regular social involvement in sport, either through volunteering, being a member of a sports club or attending sporting events. This is a significant decline from nearly half (47%) being socially involved in sport in 2019, and largely attributable to Covid-19 restrictions on organised sport. As described below, social participation in sport has fallen across the board during the 2021 ISM wave: with drops of 10 percentage points in attendance at events, 6 points in club membership and 5 points in volunteering.

Figure 4.1 - Social Participation in sport 2015-2021 (%)



As has been identified in previous ISM waves, there is a significant portion of the population who participate socially in sport despite not playing any sports themselves. This remains the case, with 37% of those who participate socially in sport not having played any sport during the previous seven days. Non-participation is highest among those attending events (44%), while 37% of those volunteering at sport and 36% of club members do not play sport regularly.

Despite the decline in sports participation observed during this ISM wave, both socially and through active participation, sport has retained an important role in Irish society during the pandemic era. Overall, 54% of the population aged 16 and older (approx. 2.1 million people) participate regularly in sport, either socially or actively. This is a decline from 63% in 2019, a result of the 15 point drop in social participation and 6 point drop in active participation, equivalent to approximately 400,000 less people being involved actively or socially in sport in 2021.

Club membership

Three in ten (30%) of those aged 16 and older in Ireland are members of a sports club, a decline from 36% in 2019. This tracks closely with the decrease in sports participation among club members during this time (2019: 72%, 2021: 64%), exemplifying a close link between club membership and active participation for those who are members of clubs.

For the first time in the ISM series, more than half (51%) of active sports participants in Ireland are not club members, due to a smaller decline in active sports participation among non-club members since the previous ISM wave (2019: 32%, 2021: 30%). These findings suggest that club members had greater difficulty keeping up their sports participation during the pandemic restrictions than those who primarily take part in sport outside of the club environment.

Figure 4.2 - Club membership 2015-2021 (%)



A decline in the proportion reporting that they are a member of a gym (10%) means that they are now level with GAA clubs (10%) as the most common type of club to be a member of. Membership rates in golf, soccer, swimming and rugby clubs remain largely constant since 2019.

Figure 4.3 - Type of club membership 2015-2021 (%)

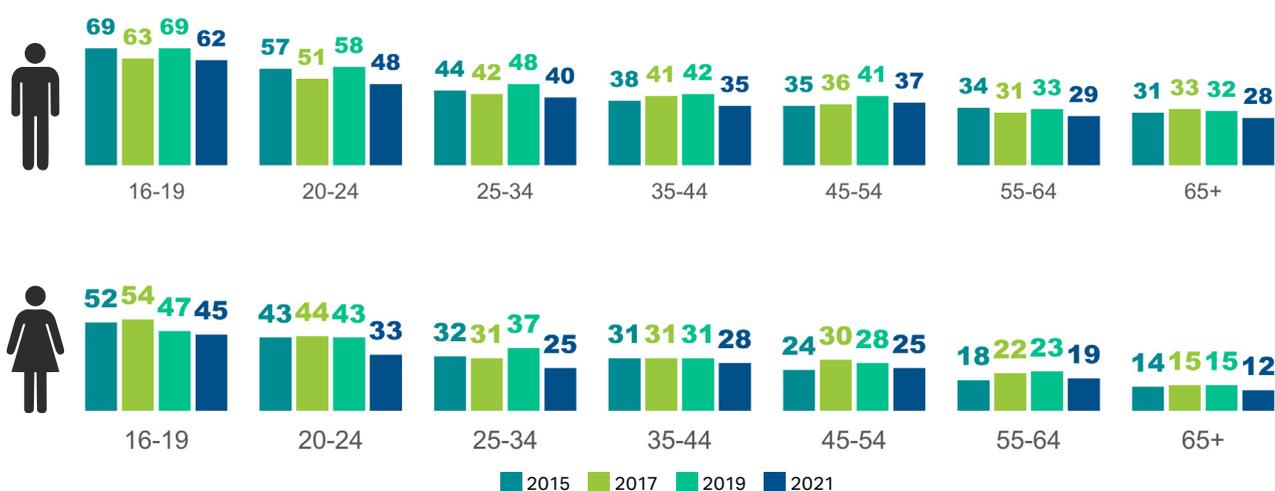


As mentioned above, this wave has seen increase in the proportion of those playing sport but not a member of a club, such that this group now makes up slightly over half of those actively playing sport. This remains the case across most forms of sporting activity, with GAA (93%), golf (68%) and rugby (59%) the only sports where a majority of participants are members of a club related to that sport. Slightly more than a third (35%) of those participating in personal exercise are members of a gym, while fewer than one in ten participants in swimming, running and cycling are members of a club for that activity.

The gender gap in club membership has narrowed slightly in this ISM wave, with 37% of men and 24% of women reporting that they are a member of a sports club. This compares to 43% and 29% respectively in 2019. Declines in club membership by age are largest among those aged 20-34, with a 10 point drop in membership reported among this group, to 33%. Shifts in membership levels are smaller among those aged 35 and older, at 4%. Higher overall levels of club membership among younger people likely account for some of this disparity, however.

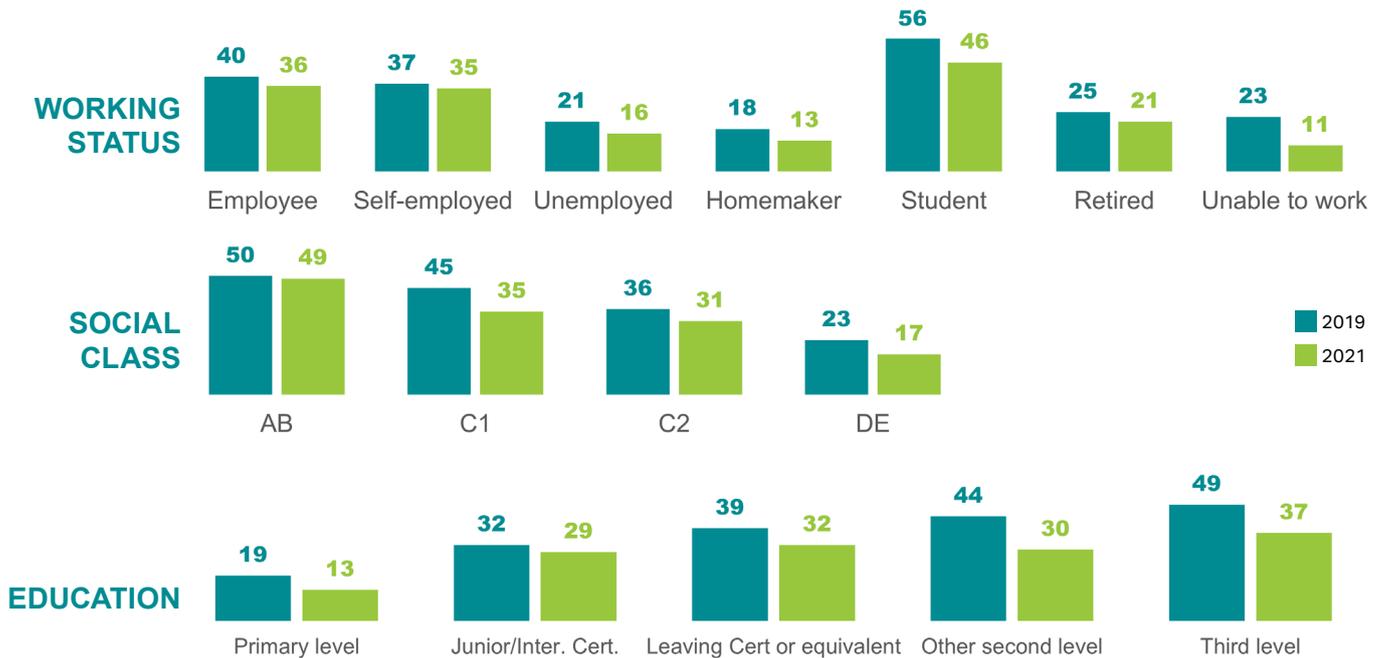
Similar patterns in club membership by age are observed among men and women. The gender gap remains across all age groups, however, with the youngest and oldest age groups continuing to exhibit the greatest disparities between men and women.

Figure 4.4 - Club membership by gender and age 2015-2021 (%)



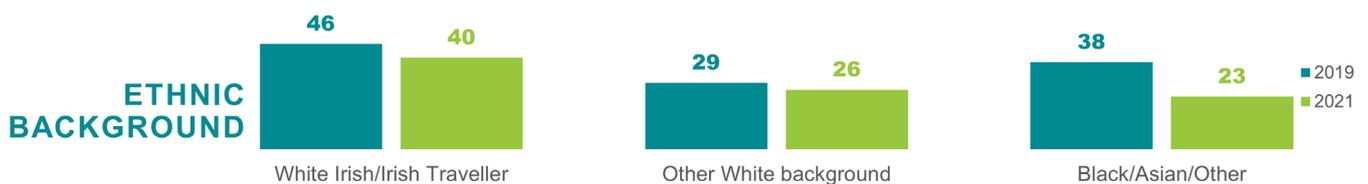
Social gradients in club membership remain largely unchanged compared to previous waves, with those who are working, have higher levels of education and are in higher social classes more likely to be members of a sports club. A larger gap has opened up between those in social class AB and all others, however, as a result of greater declines in membership among all other socio-economic groups.

Figure 4.5 – Club membership by working status, socio-economic status and education (%)



Analysis by ethnic background identifies that club membership remains highest among those identifying as White Irish, with four in ten (40%) of this group aged 16-44 reporting that they are a member of a sports club. Membership rates are much lower among those from non-Irish White backgrounds (26%), while a large decline in membership among those from Black, Asian and Other backgrounds meaning that this group are now least likely to be members of a sports club (23%).

Figure 4.6 – Club membership by ethnic background 2019-2021 (all aged under 45) (%)



Attendance at Sporting Events

Just under one in ten (9%) of all adults attended a sports event in the previous seven days. This includes a wide variety of sports events, including both adult and children's events at both elite and amateur levels. This is less than half the proportion who reported having done so previous ISM waves (19%).

Figure 4.7 - Attendance at sporting events 2015-2021 (%)



As in previous waves, team sports are the most popular attendance sports, with 8% having attended a team sporting event compared to 1% for individual sports. Gaelic football, soccer and hurling/camogie the three most popular sports in this respect. Attendance at these events has roughly halved since 2019 however, in line with overall trends in sporting event attendance.

Figure 4.8 - Type of event attended 2015-2021 (%)*

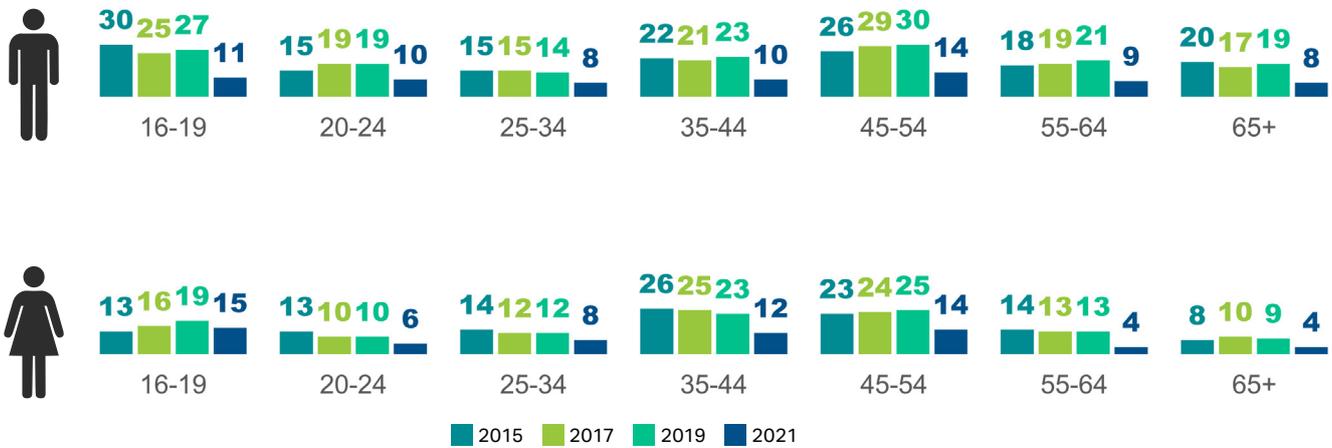


The decline in attendance at sporting events has coincided with a narrowing of the gender gap here, with men (10%) only marginally more likely than women (9%) to report having attended an event. This may be because larger sporting events, where attendees are disproportionately men, were cancelled during the pandemic.

Likelihood of having attended a sporting event differs by age between the genders. Men of all ages are roughly equally likely to report having attended an event during this wave, apart from a small peak among those aged 45-54 (14%). In contrast, attendance is highest among women of student age (16-19: 15%) as well as those in the 35-44 (12%) and 45-54 (14%) age groups, when they are most likely to have children participating in sport.

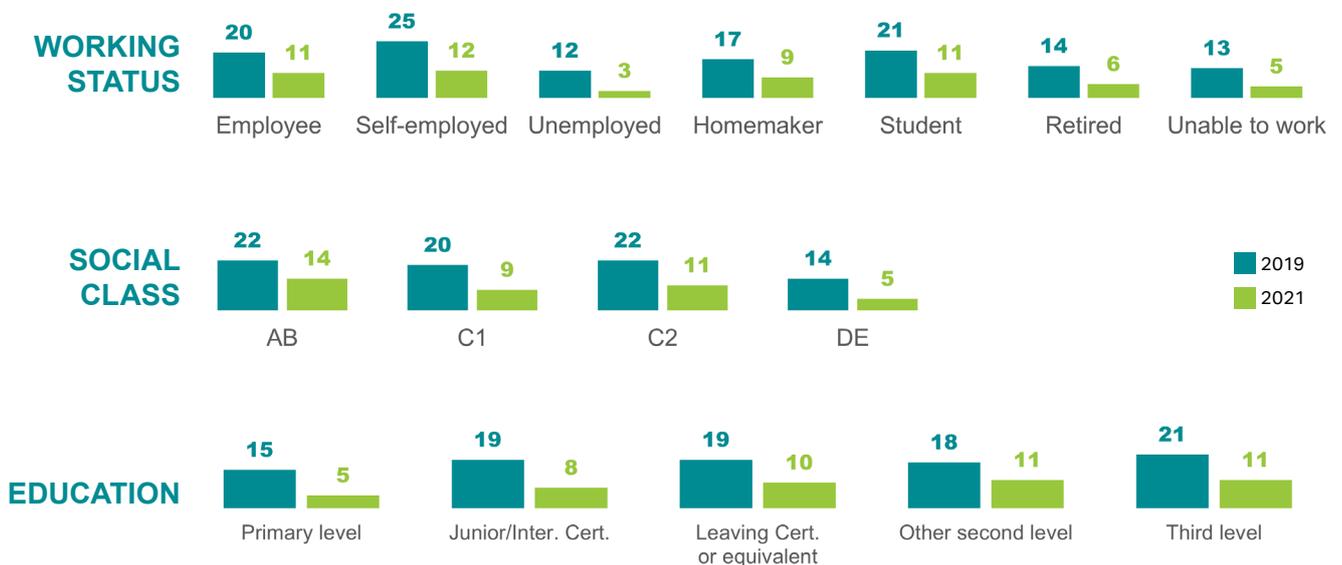
*The 2019 ISM report also included horse riding and running among the most popular attendance sports. However, less than 1% of respondents reported attending these event types in 2021

Figure 4.9 – Attendance at sporting events by gender and age 2015-2021 (%)



The social gradient in attendance is weaker than other forms of sports participation, although some trends are observable. Those in employment and students (both 11%) remain most likely to attend sports events. The decline in attendance among those in social class DE means that among this group, only 1 in 20 have attended a sporting event in the past week, compared to 1 in 10 of those in all other social class categories. With the exception of those with primary level education, little difference in attendance rates is found by education level.

Figure 4.10 – Attendance at sporting events by working status, socio-economic status and education (%)



As with club membership, attendance at events by ethnicity tends to be skewed towards those who are White Irish (12%), who are significantly more likely than those from Other White backgrounds (5%) and Black/Asian/Other backgrounds (3%) to have attended a sporting event during 2021.

Figure 4.11 – Attendance at sporting events by ethnic background 2019-2021 (all aged under 45) (%)



Volunteering for Sport

Volunteers play a vital role in all areas of sport in Ireland. The National Sports Policy recognises the importance of increased investment in volunteer training, development and recognition, with the goal of building a stronger and more diverse volunteering base. The ISM aims to measure the wide variety of types of assistance that volunteers provide in the sporting environment, from coaching to fundraising to providing transport.

This wave of the study identifies that 7% regularly volunteer for sport, meaning that the number volunteering at sport has almost halved compared to previous waves.

Figure 4.12 - Volunteering for sport



The ISM includes questions designed to measure both the types of sports respondents volunteer at, as well as the types of volunteering services provided. While the numbers volunteering for each sport has dropped across the board, Gaelic Games and soccer remain the most common sports for volunteering, with 2% and 1% of the total population volunteering at these sports, respectively.

Figure 4.13 Volunteering by sport 2015-2021 (%)



Coaching remains by far the most common role played by volunteers, with 36% of those volunteering reporting that they are a coach or manager. As noted in the previous ISM report, there is a persistent gender gap in sports coaching, although it is an encouraging sign that this has continued to close during this wave – 38% of coaches are women in 2021, compared to 32% in 2019.

Other common forms of volunteering include providing transport (21%), being a club official (13%) and organising sporting activities (13%). The numbers performing these roles remains largely stable compared to 2019, although slightly fewer report organising activities, likely a result of pandemic restrictions here. Previous ISM reports have noted the large gender difference that exist in terms of those volunteering as club officials, with the 2019 report finding an increase in the proportion of women who perceive sports administration as too male-dominated. Among those volunteering in 2021, 9% of women report having a club official role, compared to 16% of men. This gender gap is largely unchanged from that reported in 2019 (men: 17%; women: 11%).

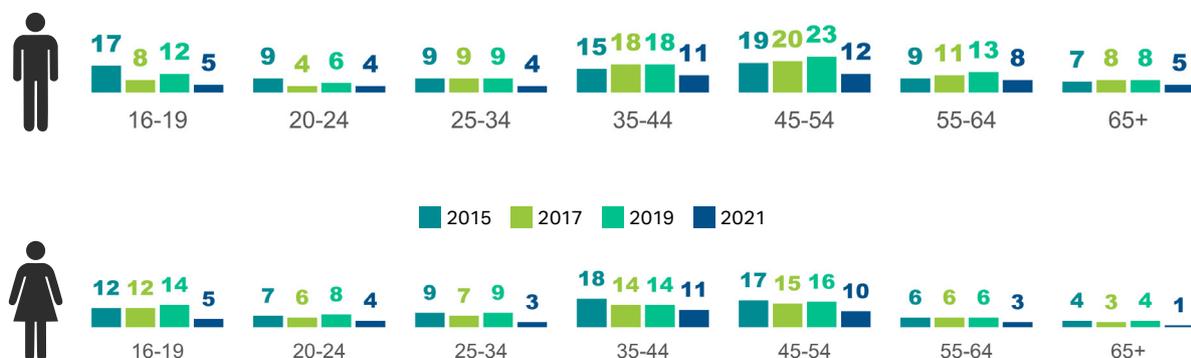
Figure 4.14 - Type of volunteering role 2015-2021 (% of all volunteers) (%)



Previous waves of the ISM have also identified a gender gap in favour of men in terms of the numbers volunteering at sport overall. This gap has narrowed from 4 points to just 1 point during the 2021 ISM wave, mirroring a pattern seen in other forms of sports participation. Women are now roughly as likely to volunteer at sport at all age groups from 16-54, although a moderate gender gap remains in favour of men among those aged 55 and older.

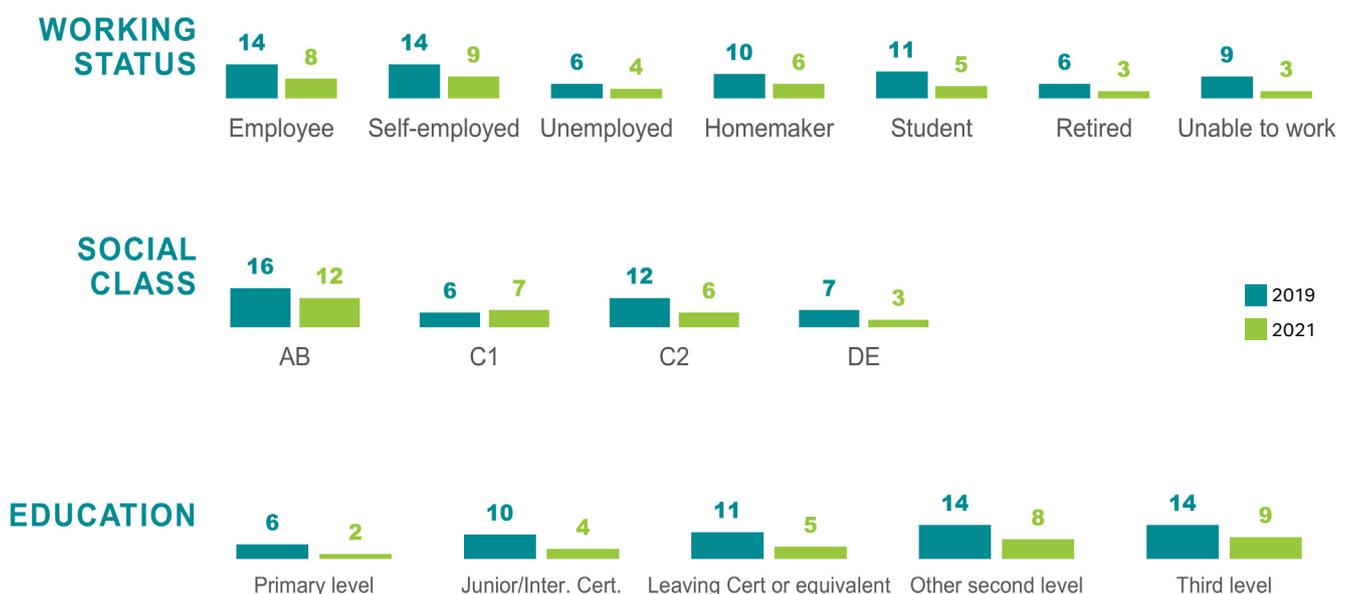
Volunteering remains highest among those aged 35-54, again coinciding with the age at which people are most likely to have children playing sport. This group also reports some of the largest decreases in volunteering since 2019, however, with falls among men in this age group in particular largely responsible for the narrowing of the volunteering gender gap in 2021. This age cohort forms a particularly important part of the volunteering infrastructure in Ireland, and encouraging this group to return to volunteering as we emerge from the pandemic is therefore a key priority in this area.

Figure 4.15 - Volunteering by gender and age 2015-2021 (%)



The social gradient in volunteering follows a similar pattern to other forms of social participation in sport, with those who are working, of higher socio-economic status and higher education level most likely to do so. While trends remain largely consistent with previous waves, the social class gap has widened, with rates of volunteering among those in social class AB now well above all others.

Figure 4.16 - Volunteering by working status, socio-economic status and education (%)



As with other forms of social participation, volunteering tends to be heavily concentrated by those identifying as White Irish, 8% of whom report having volunteered at sport in 2021. The corresponding figure for those in Other White backgrounds and Black/Asian/Other backgrounds is just 2%.

Figure 4.17 Volunteering by ethnic background 2019-2021 (all aged under 45) (%)



Social participation in sport and Covid-19

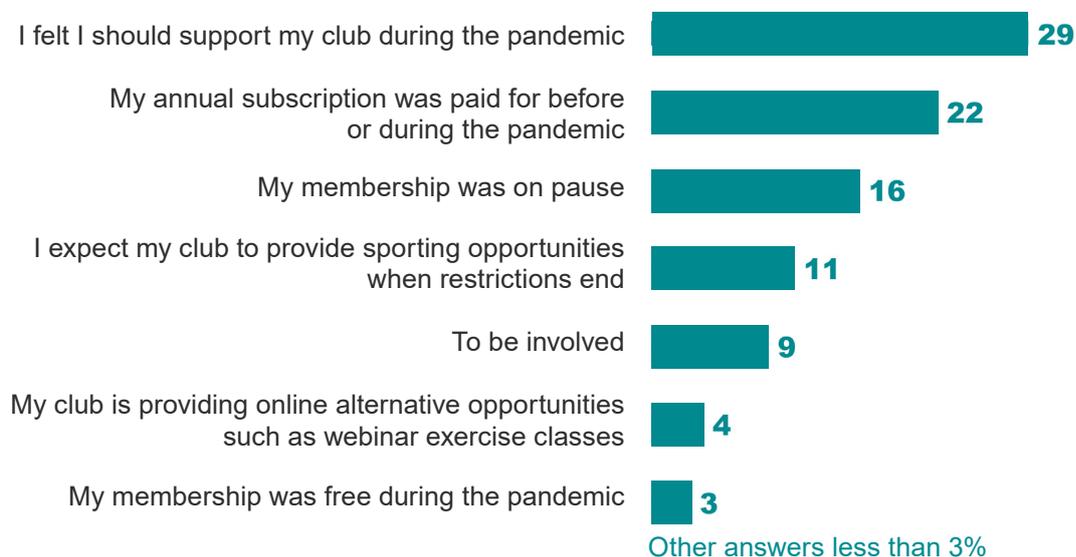
As outlined above, this wave of the ISM has been characterised by a substantial decline in social participation in sport of all types and across demographic groups. The need for restrictions on social contacts during the Covid-19 pandemic, and its impact on the ability of organised sport to take place, is undoubtedly at the heart of this. In order to examine this further, this wave of the ISM included a number of questions analysing the impact of Covid-19 on the different ways in which people are involved socially in sport.

Among members of sports clubs, a strong majority (84%) reported maintaining their membership throughout the period of the Covid-19 restrictions. This is an indication of the important role that sports clubs play in the lives of their members, as well as the feeling of attachment that many have to their clubs.

Those who maintained their membership were asked about their reasons for doing so. A desire to support their club during the pandemic was the top reason given, with around three in ten (29%) providing this response. Similarly, a total of one in five respondents cited wanting to continue to be involved with their club, either during or after the pandemic. However, a large portion of respondents (around four in ten) also stated that the main reason for maintaining their membership was that it had already been paid, was on pause or was free during the pandemic.

While club membership has noticeably declined during the pandemic, there is reason for optimism in the finding that 89% of all club members plan to renew their membership the next time it comes up for renewal.

Figure 4.18 - Main reason for maintaining club membership during Covid-19 pandemic (% of all club members who maintained their membership) (%)



Attendance at events has perhaps been the activity most heavily curtailed in the sporting context during the pandemic, with large gatherings of people among the last restrictions to be lifted. Respondents were therefore asked whether they plan to regularly attend any sports events as a spectator or supporter once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

Overall, slightly more than half (53%) report that they plan to attend a sporting event post-Covid-19 restrictions. Intention to attend a sporting event is highest among men (60%), those aged under 55 (58%) and those in higher social classes (AB: 69%). This tracks closely with demographic trends in sporting event attendance across previous ISM waves.

Figure 4.19 - Intentions to attend a sporting event once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted by age & gender (%)

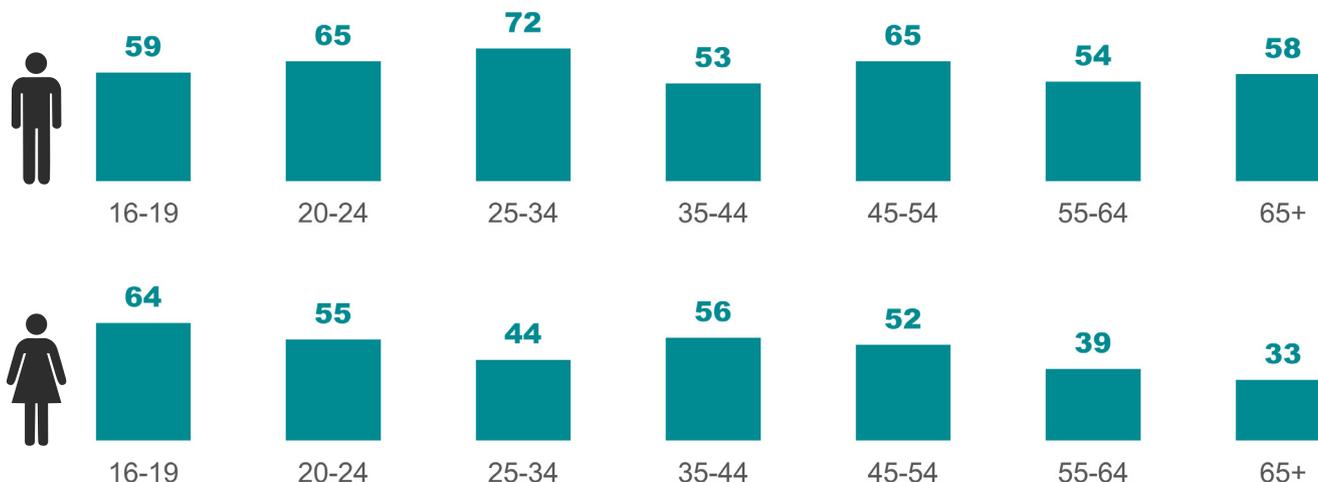
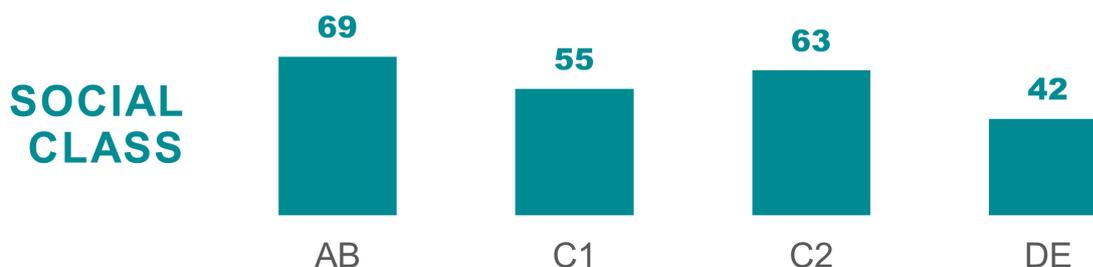


Figure 4.20 - Intentions to attend a sporting event once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted by socio-economic status (%)



As expected, the sports which people plan to attend align closely with those which were most popular pre-pandemic. More than half of this group (57%) say they will attend a Gaelic Football event, followed by soccer (30%), rugby (18%) and hurling (15%).

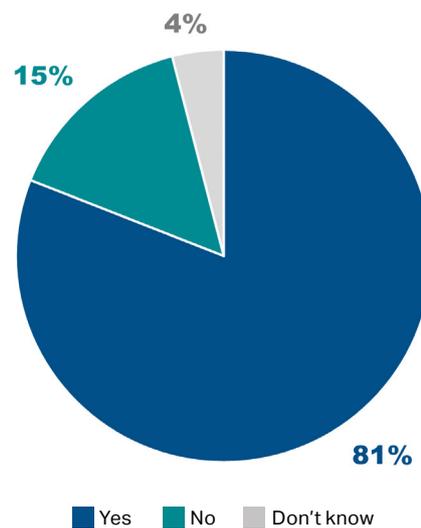
Figure 4.21 - Intentions to attend a sporting event once Covid-19 restrictions by event type (% of those who intend to attend a sporting event once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted) (%)



Finally, respondents who reported regularly volunteering at sport before the Covid-19 restrictions were asked about their intentions to return to doing so post-pandemic. The time commitment involved in volunteering means that it may be more difficult to get people to return to this activity than for club membership or attending events if they have given it up. The sharp decline in sports volunteering observed during this ISM wave also means that rebuilding the volunteer pool is therefore likely to be a priority area in the sporting environment in the coming months.

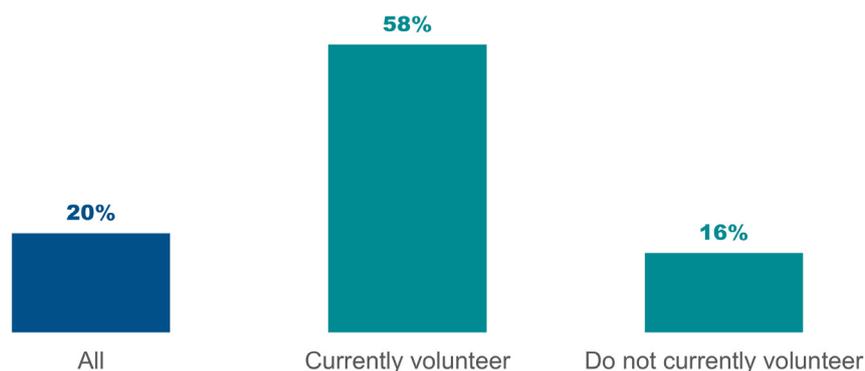
Just over four in five (81%) of those who had previously volunteered at sport report that they expect to return or continue to do so following the lifting of pandemic restrictions, with little difference across demographic groups.

Figure 4.22 - Intentions to volunteer at sport once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted by event type (% of those who had regularly volunteered at sport previously) (%)



While it is encouraging that a large proportion of those who have volunteered in the past expect to do so in the coming months, renewed focus will also be needed to attract new volunteers to the sporting environment. As results from a separate module included on this year's ISM show, around one in six (16%) of those who do not currently volunteer at sport report that they had felt motivated to do so during the past month, equivalent to approximately 15% of the population*. Providing this group with information and opportunities to get involved with sports volunteering has the potential to form a key strategic pillar in boosting sports volunteering post-pandemic.

Figure 4.23 - Motivation to volunteer at sport in the past month (%)



*This module took place during November and December of 2021.

5. Wearable Technology



Wearable Technology

- More than half of the population (54%) currently use technology to measure the amount or nature of physical activity they undertake, with 66% having done so at some point in the past. Use of wearables has almost doubled since it was last measured in the 2017 ISM wave, when the respective proportions were 28% and 43%*.
- Among those who use the tools measured by this module, nearly half (48%) are highly active. This compares to 32% of those who do not currently use any of these tools.
- Use of at least one technology for exercise is also concentrated among those aged under 35 (70%), women (58%) and those in higher social classes (ABC1: 61%), with particularly strong growth in technology use identified among women since 2017.
- Three in ten (31%) technology users say that it has a “major influence” on their physical activity. Analysis indicates that increased activity as a result of technology use remains concentrated among those who were already highly active.
- The ways that exercise technologies are used differs by gender. Women are more motivated by the targets and encouragement they provide before and during exercise, while men tend to be more receptive to the ability to track their performance and progress post-physical activity.
- The decision to stop using technology continues to be tied to personal factors, such as lack of motivation from the user or changes in exercise patterns, as opposed to issues related to the technology itself.
- Across the five technologies surveyed, between 63% and 76% of those who had stopped using the tool did so within six months.
- Between 18% and 22% of those who have never used a given tool say they are likely to start doing so within the next year. As was the case in 2017, those most likely to intend to take up a technology tend to be those who are already physically active.
- Nearly one in four (24%) took part in online exercise classes during the Covid-19 pandemic, though only around a quarter of this group are still taking part in these classes. Participation is again concentrated among the most physically active groups, as well as women.

Introduction

New technologies continue to expand into more and more aspects of our daily lives, with sport and exercise being no exception. The growth in the use of wearable technology in physical activity was first explored in the 2017 wave of the Irish Sports Monitor and has continued at a rapid pace since.

This module asked a series of questions aimed at understanding what types of technologies people use when exercising, how they use them and what influence it has on their participation in sport and physical activity. An analysis of how and why respondents use technology in exercise, including variations between different demographic groups, offers the potential to further our understanding of the motivating factors behind sport and physical activity in the population.

* Note that in the 2017 ISM wave, respondents could choose from up to four technologies, while in the 2021 ISM wave there were five technologies mentioned, with the addition of ‘tools for finding the location of a sports facility, park or walking/hiking trail’. Results in terms of overall usage are therefore not directly comparable between the two waves. However, the relatively low incidence of usage of this technology in 2021 (17%) means that it is unlikely to have a significant impact on aggregate figures.

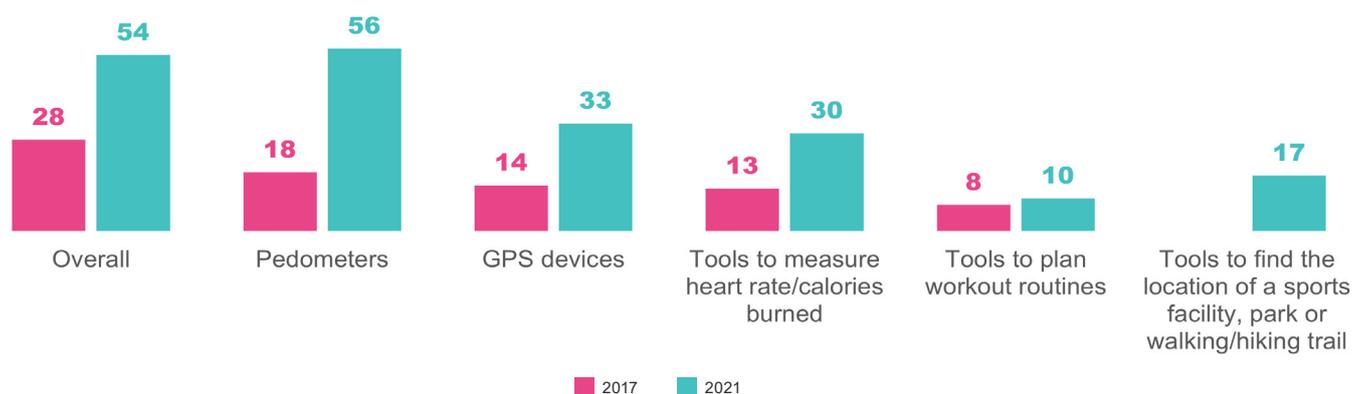
Use of Wearable Technology

This module asked respondents about their use of five different tools designed to measure the amount and nature of physical activity undertaken, including tools designed to:

- Count the number of steps you take in a day ('pedometers')
- Measure the distance or speed you have covered ('GPS-type devices')
- Measure your heart rate or calories burned
- Plan your workout routine such as Couch-to-5k or Fitstar
- Find the location of a sports facility, parks or hiking/walking trail*

More than half of respondents (54%) currently use at least one of the five technologies measured by this module during physical activity. Use of wearables has almost doubled since the 2017 ISM wave, when 28% reported using them. Counting steps continues to be the most popular function, with 56% using a wearable with a pedometer feature. This is followed by tools for measuring distance or speed (33%) and heart rate or calories burned (30%). These three technologies in particular have seen the strongest growth since 2017. Comparatively fewer respondents report using tools to find the location of sports facilities/parks/hiking trails (17%) or to plan workout routines (10%).

Figure 5.1 Current usage of wearable technology 2017-2021 (%)



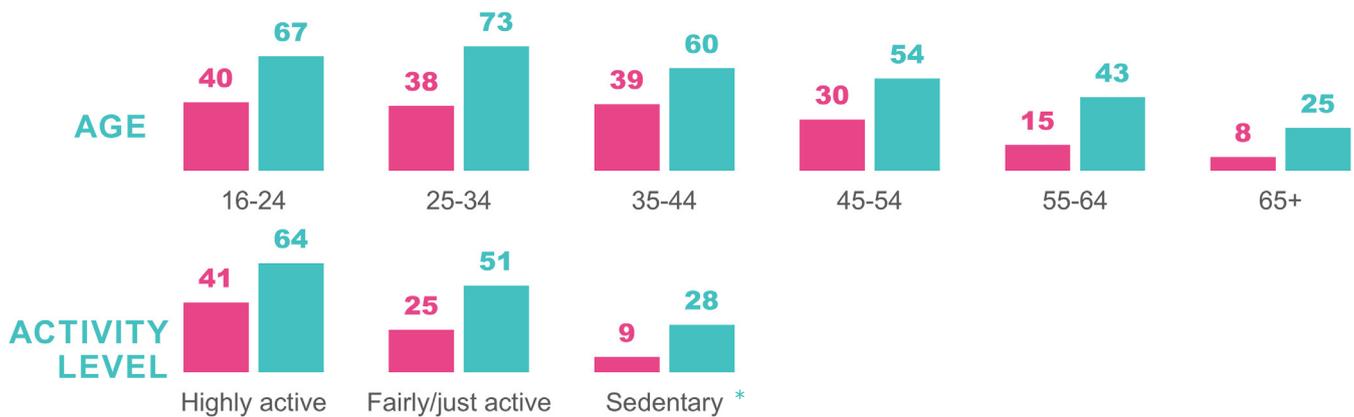
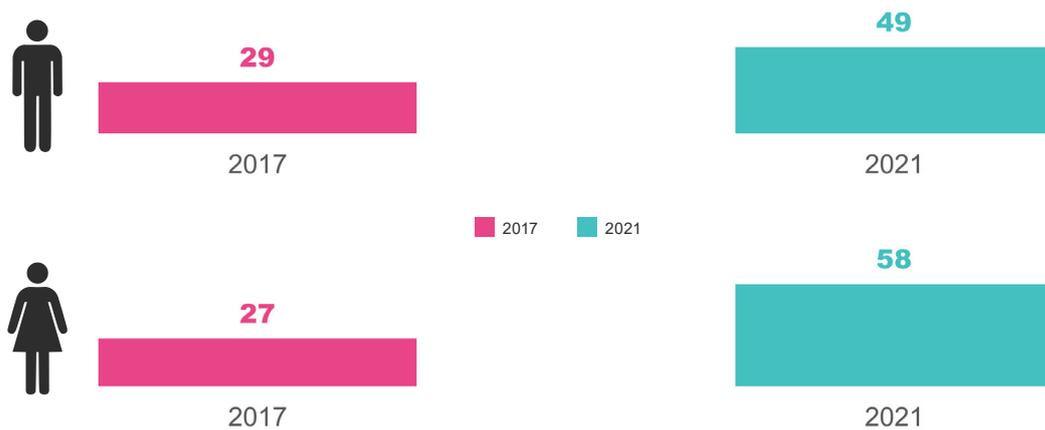
Differences exist with regards to the types of wearables used across demographic groups. Women (61%) are now significantly more likely than men (52%) to use a pedometer, a difference not observed in 2017. The ability to count steps is a particularly popular function among younger women; 78% of women aged under 35 report that they currently use a tool for this.

Using GPS-type devices is most popular among younger people, with those aged under 35 (48%) nearly twice as likely as those aged 35 and older (27%) to use them. GPS devices are also more popular among those classed as highly active (46%) than those who are not (24%). Similar trends are observed for heart rate/calorie monitoring tools as for GPS devices. These more complex technologies require the user to be more highly engaged in and knowledgeable about physical activity in order to understand and make use of the information they provide, which may help to explain this finding.

* This technology is a new addition to this module for the 2021 ISM wave, and was not offered to respondents as a response option in the 2017 wave.

Tools for planning workout routines are also most popular among those aged under 35 (18%), although the age gradient is steeper here, with just 2% of those aged 55 and older using them. Of the five tools listed, those used for finding the location of a sports facility, park or walking/hiking trail is the only one more popular among men (19%) than women (15%).

Figure 5.2 Current usage of at least one technology by gender, age and activity level 2017-2021 (%)



* Note: Small sample size among those classed as 'Sedentary' (2021: n = 59; 2017: n = 55)

Figure 5.3 Current usage of different types of tools for measuring physical activity by gender, age and activity level (%)

	Pedometers	GPS devices	Tools to measure heart rate/calories burned	Tools to plan workout routines	Tools to find the location of a sports facility, park or walking/hiking trail
Men	52%	31%	26%	8%	19%
Women	61%	36%	33%	12%	15%
16-24	66%	43%	39%	18%	25%
25-34	77%	52%	52%	18%	27%
35-44	60%	36%	35%	11%	23%
45-54	61%	35%	25%	9%	13%
55-64	47%	24%	18%	2%	9%
65+	29%	13%	11%	2%	6%
Highly Active	65%	46%	41%	14%	17%
Fairly/Just Active	53%	28%	24%	8%	19%
Sedentary	38%	8%	13%	1%	6%

The use of technology in exercise has grown across almost all demographic groups, though some have grown at a faster rate than others. Perhaps the most notable change in this module since 2017 is the substantial increase in the proportion of women using technology for exercise, meaning that a gender gap has opened up that did not exist four years ago – 58% of women currently use at least one of the technologies mentioned, compared to 49% of men. Particularly strong growth is observed in the proportion of women using pedometers and tools for measuring heart rate/calories burned, and exceeds the rate of growth among men for all tools except GPS devices.

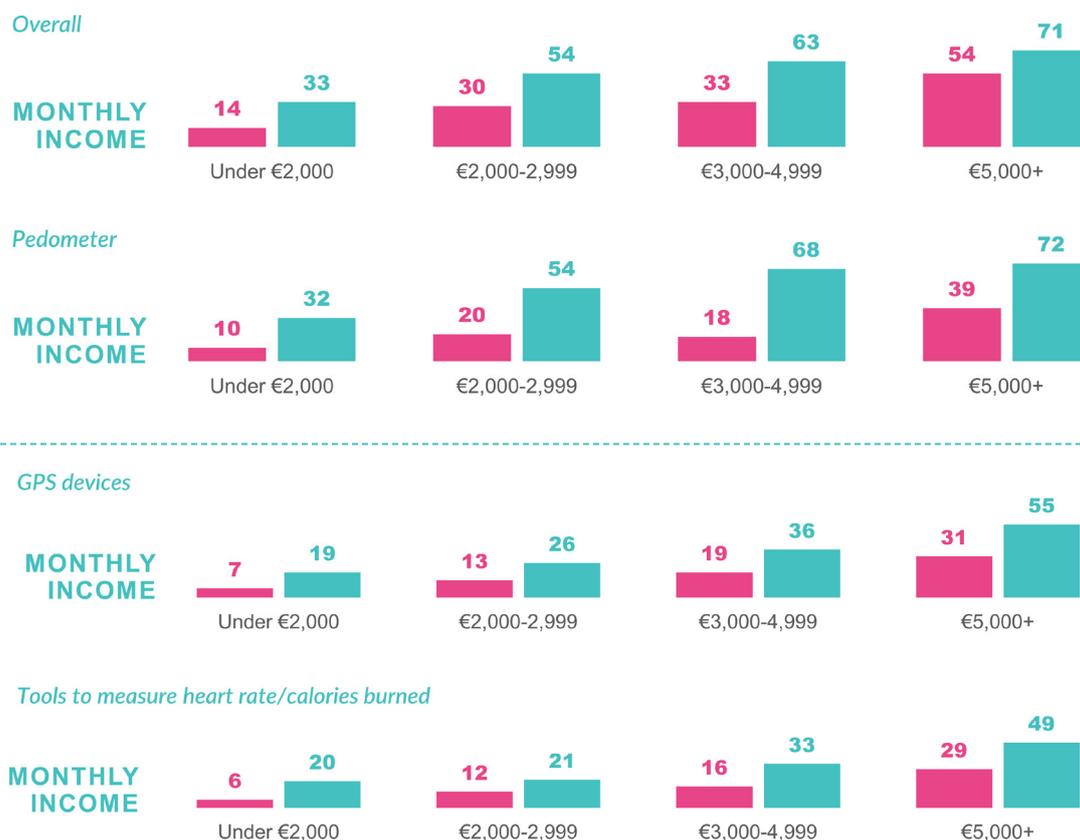
A clearer age gradient has also developed, with those aged under 35 (70%) most likely to use at least one technology and older respondents comparatively less likely. Younger people are more likely to participate in sport and physical activity, and also tend to have higher levels of technology literacy, two highly important underlying factors predicting who is most likely to use these types of exercise technologies.

It is interesting to note that technology use is growing at similar rates among those who are highly active (+24 points since 2017) and those who are not (+25 points since 2017), although among this latter group those who were already fairly/just active show faster rates of growth (+25 points since 2017) than those who are sedentary (+19 points since 2017). Differences again exist by type of tool, however, with use of GPS devices and tools to measure heart rate/calories burned growing faster among those who are highly active. This indicates that while growth in the use of one technology since 2017 exhibits no difference by activity level, those who are highly active are more likely to have taken up multiple tools during this time.

Socio-economic factors also have an impact on usage of technology in exercise. Well over half (61%) of those in social class ABC1 use at least one of the technologies mentioned, compared to 41% of C2DEs. Similar trends are seen based on respondents' income, with households earning a net monthly income of €2,000 or more nearly twice as likely to use a technology (63%) as households making less than this (33%). While higher levels of physical activity and sports participation among higher earners is likely to explain some proportion of this difference, these findings indicate that affordability is a key driver of technology use. For example, 34% of individuals from households earning less than €2,000 a month are classed as highly active, compared to 45% of those in households earning more than this, yet the latter group are around twice as likely to say they use one of these tools.

There is some indication that the affordability gap is closing, however. As Figure 5.4 below shows, use of at least one exercise technology has increased most in terms of proportion among those with household earnings of less than €2,000 since 2017. As exercise technology becomes more accessible and less expensive, the social gradient in their use may continue to reduce in the coming years.

Figure 5.4 Current usage of at least one technology by monthly net household income 2017-2021 (%)



Tools to plan workout routines



Tools to find the location of a sports facility, park or walking/hiking trail



Users also report having used exercise technology for longer periods of time than in 2017. Just 8% of those who report using a pedometer, for example, started using it less than 3 months ago (compared to 20% reporting the same in 2017). It should be noted that part of the reason for this increase in usage length is simply that the technologies have been around for longer than they had been in 2017.

GPS devices, as well as heart rate/calorie monitors, continue to be the tools that are used over longer periods, with more than half (56%) of those who use GPS for physical activity having done so for more than 2 years. As mentioned previously, this may reflect the fact that a greater proportion of those who use these technologies are heavily engaged in sport and physical activity than the other types of wearables, and users of these devices are likely to have been ahead of the curve in terms of using technology for exercise. Tools for finding the location of sports facilities, parks or walking/hiking trails are those that have been used longest overall: 71% of those using these tools have done so for more than 2 years.

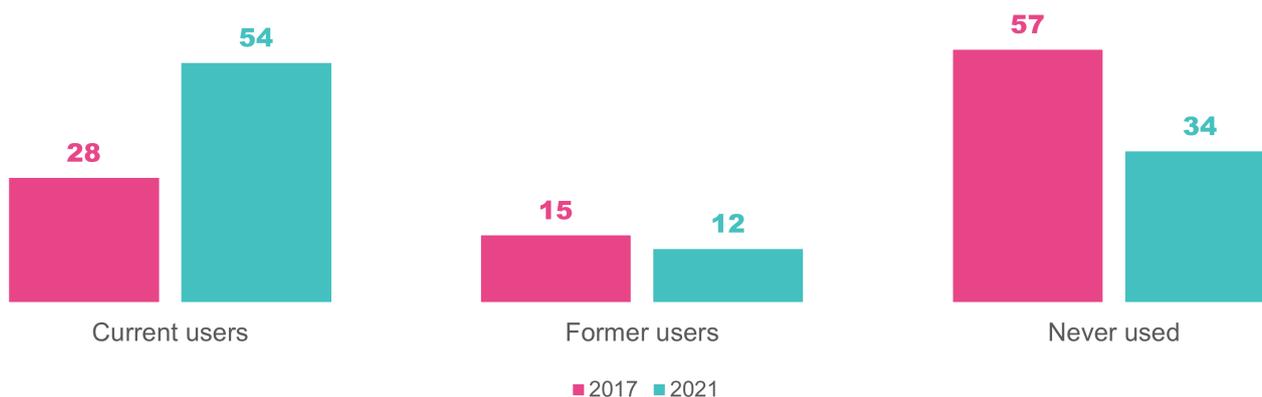
Figure 5.5 Length of time since starting using each type of technology (%)

	Pedometers	GPS devices	Tools to measure heart rate/calories burned	Tools to plan workout routines	Tools to find the location of a sports facility, park or walking/hiking trail
Up to 3 months	8%	3%	5%	9%	5%
More than 3 months, up to 6 months	5%	5%	8%	8%	3%
More than 6 months, up to 1 year	15%	12%	16%	14%	8%
More than 1 year, up to 2 years	21%	23%	21%	34%	10%
More than 2 years	49%	56%	50%	36%	71%

Past usage of technology

As well as exploring current usage of technology in exercise, this module also measures past usage levels, among both current users and non-users. Two-thirds (66%) have used at least one of these technologies at some point, an increase from 43% as reported in ISM 2017. Four in five (81%) of this group currently use at least one technology, with 19% no longer using any tools. As such, 54% of the population currently use technology for physical activity, 12% are former users and 34% have never used any of these tools.

Figure 5.6 - Past usage of technology 2017-2021 (%)



The profile of former users differs slightly from current users, with men (15%) more likely to have given up using technology in exercise than women (10%). No significant trends are reported by age, income or activity level, indicating that the decision to quit using a technology remains largely based around personal preferences, as was the case for this module in 2017.

Those who previously used a technology, but had given up, were asked about their reasons for doing so. As in 2017, the main reasons cited tend to be related to the user, such as being bored with the tool, not having sufficient motivation to use it, the tool being 'too much hassle' to use or changes in the respondent's physical activity patterns. A minority of respondents give reasons related to the tool itself, such as breakages or issues with battery life or comfort.

Figure 5.7 Reasons for stopping using technology (% of those who gave up using a technology) (%)

	Pedometers <small>(12% of all respondents have used this tool but stopped)</small>	GPS devices <small>(13% of all respondents have used this tool but stopped)</small>	Tools to measure heart rate/calories burned <small>(10% of all respondents have used this tool but stopped)</small>	Tools to plan workout routines <small>(8% of all respondents have used this tool but stopped)</small>	Tools to find the location of a sports facility, park or walking/hiking trail <small>(6% of all respondents have used this tool but stopped)</small>
I got bored with it	16% <small>(2017: 17%)</small>	12% <small>(2017: 13%)</small>	17% <small>(2017: 9%)</small>	18% <small>(2017: 14%)</small>	5%
It broke and I didn't replace it	15% <small>(2017: 8%)</small>	7% <small>(2017: 3%)</small>	11% <small>(2017: 9%)</small>	2% <small>(2017: 1%)</small>	1%
Health reasons/not able to exercise/injury	11% <small>(2017: 8%)</small>	11% <small>(2017: 10%)</small>	4% <small>(2017: 10%)</small>	7% <small>(2017: 15%)</small>	1%
Not exercising as much/too busy	6% <small>(2017: 9%)</small>	19% <small>(2017: 30%)</small>	11% <small>(2017: 16%)</small>	21% <small>(2017: 17%)</small>	7%
Too much hassle	5% <small>(2017: 7%)</small>	6% <small>(2017: 6%)</small>	4% <small>(2017: 5%)</small>	6% <small>(2017: 5%)</small>	6%
It wasn't having a sufficiently positive impact on my activity levels*	5% <small>(2017: 5%)</small>	6% <small>(2017: 4%)</small>	8% <small>(2017: 7%)</small>	3% <small>(2017: 2%)</small>	1%
I was only using it temporarily**	3% <small>(2017: 4%)</small>	6% <small>(2017: 1%)</small>	8% <small>(2017: 0%)</small>	3% <small>(2017: 1%)</small>	12%

Respondents were also asked how long they had used the tool before stopping. This group tend to use these tools for a relatively short period of time, with around half using them for less than 6 months before they stopped, varying slightly based on the tool. Across all five tools, significant majorities (between 63% and

*Note: Small sample size (n = 96)

**Note: Small sample size (n = 83)

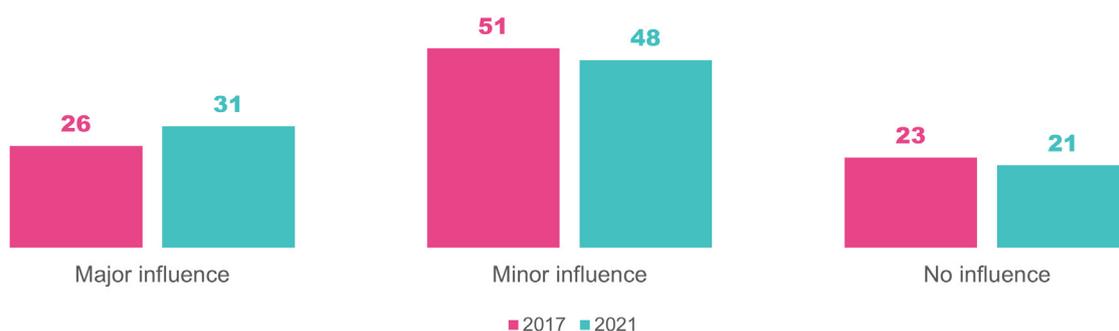
Figure 5.8 Length of time using technology before stopping (% of those who stopped using tools) (%)

	Pedometers	GPS devices	Tools to measure heart rate/calories burned	Tools to plan workout routines	Tools to find the location of a sports facility, park or walking/hiking trail
Up to 3 months	35%	23%	26%	35%	47%
More than 3 months up to 6 months	21%	23%	23%	23%	11%
More than 6 months up to 1 year	20%	17%	21%	16%	8%
More than 1 year up to 2 years	10%	17%	14%	9%	3%
More than 2 years	14%	15%	12%	10%	20%

Perceived impact of technology on activity levels

Those who currently use technology were also asked about the extent to which it has an influence on their activity levels. Nearly four in five (79%) claim that the tool(s) they use have an impact on their physical activity, including three in ten (31%) saying they have a major influence. The proportion claiming technology has a major influence on their exercise has increased slightly since 2017, indicating greater levels of reliance in these types of technologies overall among those who use them.

Figure 5.9 - Influence of technology on activity levels 2017-2021 (% of those who currently use tools) (%)

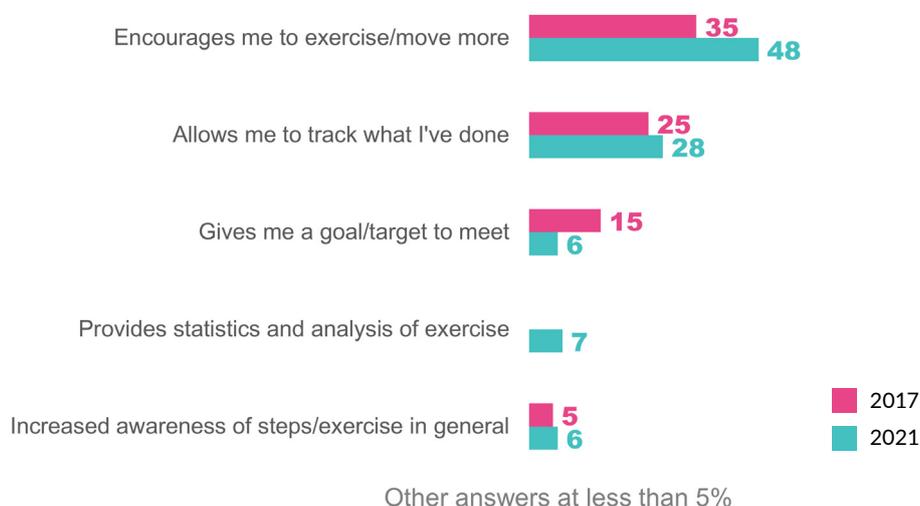


Claimed influence is higher among women who use these technologies (85%) than men (71%), while more of those aged under 35 (86%) report that technology influences their physical activity than those aged 35 and older (74%). There is little difference between those who are highly active (81%) and those who are not (76%), indicating that a higher level of physical activity does not necessarily lead to increased reliance on technology among those who use them.

Those claiming that technology has an influence on their physical activity were asked about the specific ways it does so. Providing encouragement to exercise more, alongside the ability to track your physical activity levels, remain the two most common ways in which technology influences people's physical activity, with 48% and 28% identifying these factors, respectively.

Women (59%) are substantially more likely than men (32%) to report that using technology encourages them to exercise more, while the impact for men (38%) tends to come from the ability to track physical activity levels (women: 22%). This suggests that the underlying ways in which technology is used by and motivates the genders to be physically active differs. Women are motivated by the targets and encouragement that these types of technology provide before and during exercise, while men are more receptive to the ability to track their performance and progress post-physical activity, which in turn encourages them to maintain their commitment to exercising. This theory is supported by the finding that women are more likely than men to say technology encourages them to work harder when exercising (12% and 8%, respectively), while men are doubly likely to mention the ability to see statistics and analysis of their activity as a way that wearables influence them (10% and 5%, respectively).

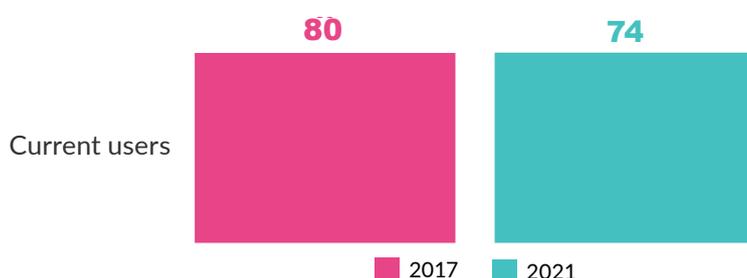
Figure 5.10 Reasons for using technology 2017-2021 (% of those who say technology influences their physical activity) (%)



As was noted in this module in the 2017 ISM report, while a strong majority perceive technology to influence their activity levels, the actual level of influence these tools have on physical activity is likely to be lower, and largely concentrated among those who were already active. In other words, most of the positive effect of technology on physical activity is likely to be a result of those who are already active picking up a new technology, and subsequently increasing their activity levels further, than one where sedentary people become active as a result of picking up one of these tools.

The finding that just under three quarters (74%) of those who currently use these technologies say they were active in sport or other physical activity before they started using them illustrates this. This compares to four-in-five (80%) reporting the were already active beforehand in 2017, indicating a small shift in the activity profile of new exercise technology users towards those who are less active. Further, among the 26% who were not active before picking up these tools, only a third (34%) are now classed as highly active, compared to more than half (54%) of those who had been physically active beforehand.

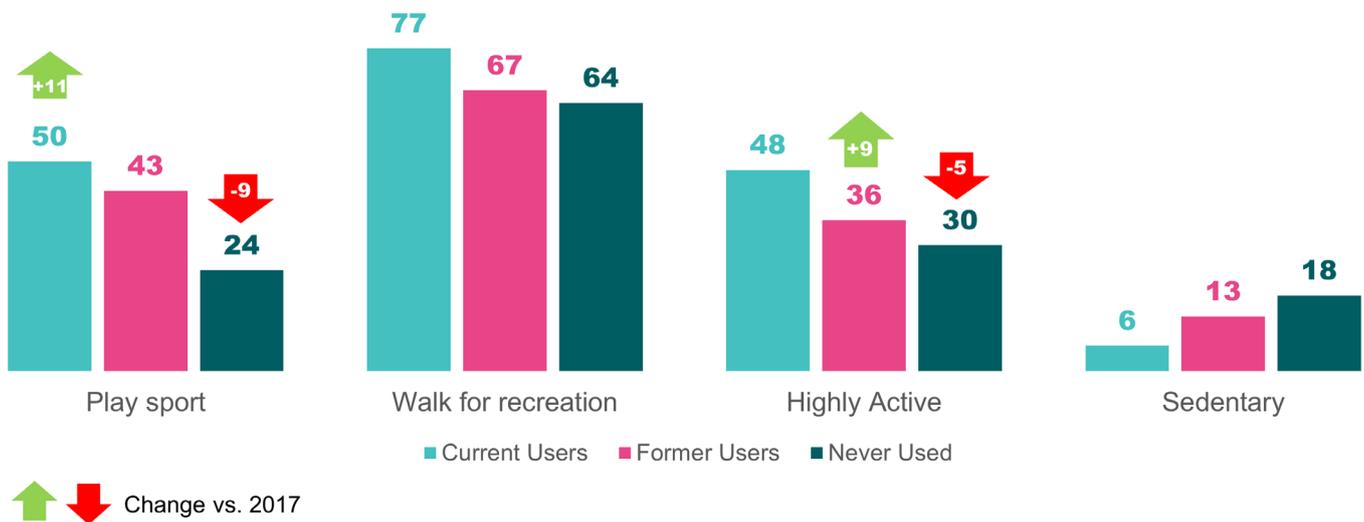
Figure 5.11 Proportion who were already active in sport/physical activity before taking up a tool 2017-2021 (%)



Analysis indicates that those who use tools are more active than those who do not, meaning that technology is likely to have some positive effect on exercise levels. Just under half (48%) of current technology users are categorised as highly active, compared to 36% of former users and 30% of those who have never used technology. These are similar levels to those reported in 2017, meaning that although the total number of people using these tools has increased, the profile of those picking up these tools in the last four years has not changed significantly in terms of overall activity levels.

Half (50%) of current users are regular sports participants, compared to 43% of former users and 24% of those who have never used technology. Those who play sport and use technology also tend to play more sports on average than those who do not use technology, with 16% of technology users playing multiple sports, compared to 14% of former users and 5% of those who have never used technology.

Figure 5.12 Physical activity by technology users and non-users (%)*

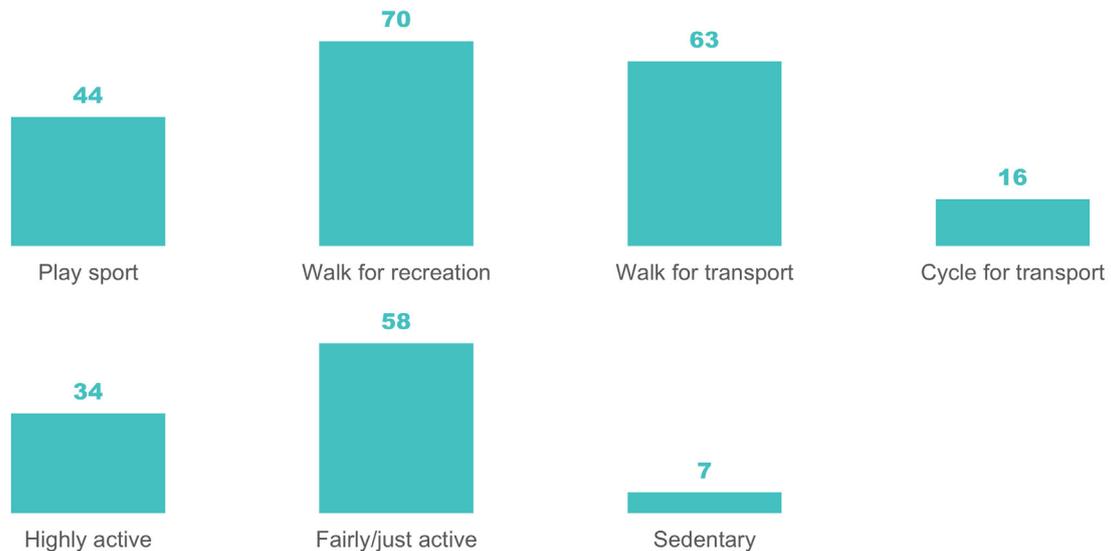


Future usage of technology

Those who have never used a given technology were asked how likely they would be to start using it in the next 12 months. Intention to start using these technologies is broadly similar across the five tools mentioned, ranging from 18% to 22%, slightly above the 14% to 17% identified in 2017. Unlike current users, there is a much weaker correlation between activity levels and intention to take up at least one of these tools in the next 12 months. 44% of those who plan to take up a new tool play sport, while 70% walk for recreation, figures which are approximately in line with the population average for these activities. Moreover, potential users of technology are less likely to be highly active (34%) and more likely to be sedentary (7%) than the population overall.

*Note: Significant differences marked by arrows

Figure 5.13 – Current activity levels among potential users of technology (% of those saying they are likely to take up at least one technology in the next 12 months) (%)



While these findings indicate the potential for a small shift in technology use towards those who are less active, it should be noted that stated intentions to begin using technology may not align with those who actually take up these tools.

Figure 5.14 Current activity levels among potential users of technology (%)

	Pedometers	GPS devices	Tools to measure heart rate/calories burned	Tools to plan workout routines	Tools to find the location of a sports facility, park or walking/hiking trail
Play sport	36% (2017: 38%)	35% (2017: 48%)	44% (2017: 36%)	44% (2017: 42%)	42%
Walk for recreation	62% (2017: 62%)	68% (2017: 66%)	69% (2017: 66%)	66% (2017: 66%)	69%
Walk for transport	66% (2017: 55%)	65% (2017: 57%)	61% (2017: 58%)	64% (2017: 58%)	66%
Cycle for transport	8% (2017: 7%)	14% (2017: 11%)	12% (2017: 8%)	16% (2017: 8%)	17%
Highly active	32% (2017: 28%)	27% (2017: 30%)	29% (2017: 28%)	34% (2017: 30%)	35%
Fairly/Just Active	57%	67%	65%	58%	57%
Sedentary	12% (2017: 13%)	6% (2017: 9%)	7% (2017: 3%)	7% (2017: 12%)	8%

The demographic profile of those planning on starting to use these tools is similar to that of current users. Across all five tools, more women than men say they are likely to start using them in the next year, while those aged under 35 are significantly more likely than those aged 35 and older to say the same, indicating that technology use in physical activity is likely to skew further towards women and younger people in years to come.

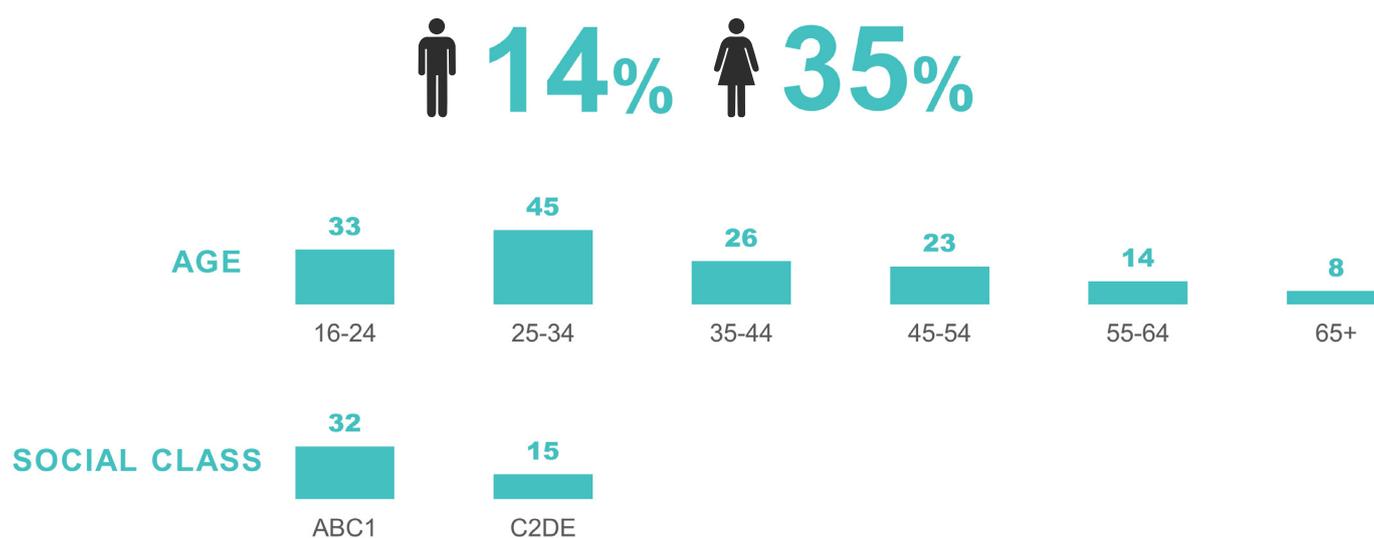
Virtual exercise classes during Covid-19

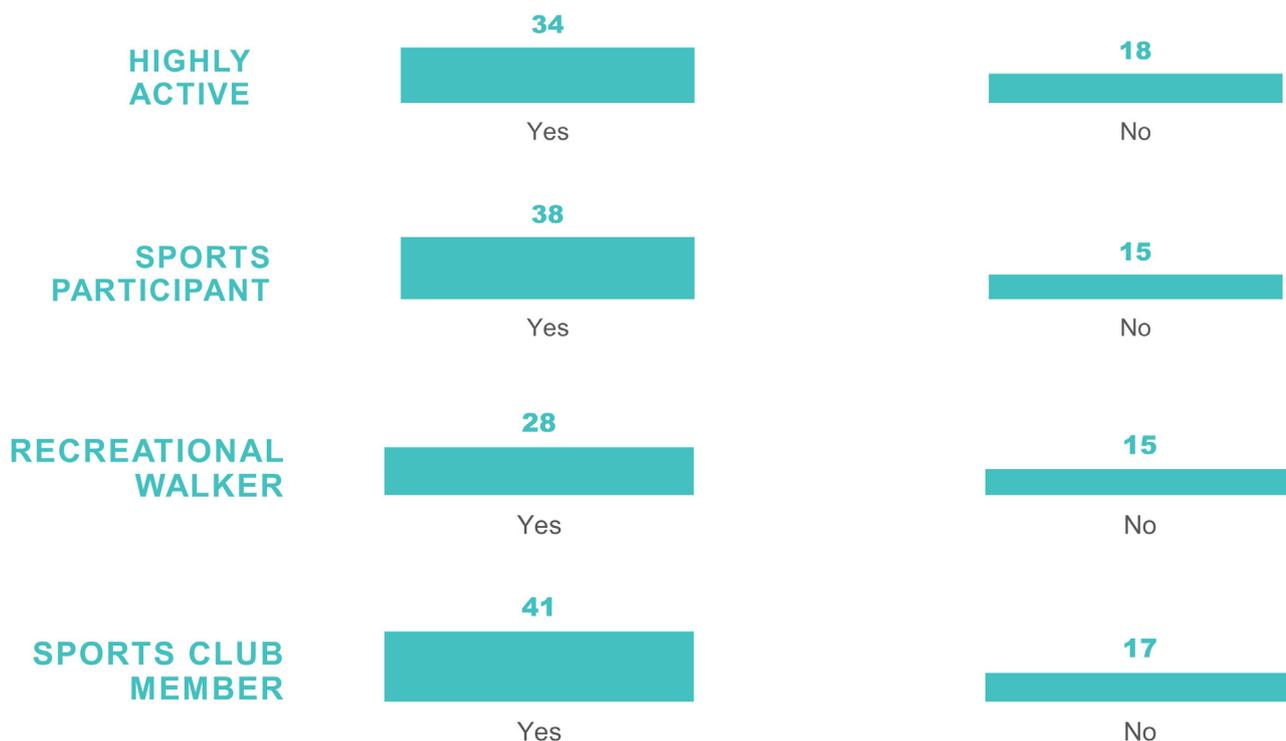
This year's module also included a number of questions related specifically to the use of technology in exercise during the Covid-19 pandemic. Respondents were asked whether they had done any sport or physical activity classes online (either live or recorded) during the pandemic. The recent integration of live video across social media platforms and provision by many gyms and sports clubs of online classes during this time meant that these classes were widely accessible to anyone with an internet connection.

Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents said they had taken part in one of these classes during the pandemic, although this varies significantly across different demographic groups. Online classes skewed heavily female, with more than one in three women (35%) taking part in one, compared to around one in seven men (14%). They also skewed younger, with 39% of those aged under 35 taking part in one, compared to 18% of those older than this. The 25-34 age group were particularly likely to do so, with 45% of this age group having taken part in an online class, including 64% of women in this age group.

Other groups more likely to take part in online exercise classes during Covid-19 include those in higher social classes (ABC1s: 32%, C2DEs: 15%) and those more physically active (Highly Active: 34%, Not Highly Active: 18%), as well as those who walk recreationally (28%), sports participants (38%) and members of sports clubs (41%). These trends align consistently with use of other types of technology in exercise, as levels of physical activity and/or technology literacy are generally much higher among these groups.

Figure 5.15 Participation in physical activity classes online during the Covid-19 pandemic (%)





However, the majority of those taking part in online classes during the pandemic have already given them up as society reopens. Seven in ten (72%) report that they were something done for a short period, while only two in ten (21%) say it is something they are currently doing. A small minority (7%) say that they are doing both, having given up some of the classes they took up during the pandemic while continuing to do others. Those most likely to have kept them up include women (24%), those aged 35 and older (26%) and those who are highly active (25%). The fact that those classed as highly active are more likely to continue with classes they took up is further indication that the availability of exercise technologies during the pandemic likely widened the gap between those who were already active prior to 2020 and those who were not.

Finally, respondents were also asked whether these online classes were replacing in-person classes done prior to the pandemic, or if they were a new activity. There was a narrow split here, with 48% reporting it was a new activity they took up and 43% saying they replaced in-person classes they were doing prior to the pandemic (10% said it was a mix of both). There was little difference across demographic categories in this respect.



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6. Diversity and Inclusion



Diversity and Inclusion

- Strong majorities believe that most Irish sports clubs ‘actively welcome’ those from diverse ethnic backgrounds (70%) and members of the LGBTI+ community (59%). Perceptions of inclusion of members of the Irish Traveller & Roma communities (32%) are significantly more pessimistic.
- Belief that clubs practice active inclusion is generally higher among those aged under 25, with young men in this age group holding the most positive perceptions of sports clubs in this respect. However, younger people are also more likely to report their club needs to do more to reach out to members of minority communities.
- Sports club members generally hold significantly more positive views of the levels of inclusion practiced by clubs, although variations exist depending on the minority group in question.
- Having members or volunteers from minority groups is the most common way of those mentioned in which Irish sports clubs practice inclusion and diversity. More conscious actions, such as inclusive days for minority communities and gender-neutral toilets, are less common.
- A strong majority of club members (85%) agree that ‘Everyone knows they are welcome’ in their club. Support for measures by clubs to promote inclusion are somewhat less strong, however, with 50% supporting and 25% opposing such actions.
- Around a third (34%) of club members report that their club tries to reach out to minority communities currently. Support for these measures is highest among younger people and women.

Introduction

Since the first wave of the Irish Sports Monitor was published in 2007, Ireland has experienced significant social change. Perhaps the most notable example of this is the 2015 Marriage Equality referendum, in which 62% of the population voted to extend the right to marriage to same-sex couples, which indicated a significant liberalisation of social attitudes in the country. At the same time, the ethnic makeup of the population has also changed, with the proportion of the population identifying as non-White ethnic background (2011: 5%, 2021: 9%) and non-Irish nationality (2011: 5%, 2021: 12%) both increasing.

In this context, the 2021 wave of the Irish Sports Monitor included a module aimed at analysing perceptions and experiences of inclusion of minority groups in sport in Ireland, including people from minority ethnic backgrounds, those who identify as LGBTI+ and members of the Irish Traveller and Roma communities. It included a particular focus on inclusivity within sports clubs, including what steps, if any, Irish sports clubs have taken to ensure a welcoming environment for members of these groups.

Members of the LGBTI+ community are less likely (21%) to be a member of a sports club than heterosexual people (32%), despite being equally likely (both 41%) to play a sport. The same is true for those of non-Irish nationalities resident in the country, who are also less likely to be members of a club (Irish: 32%, non-Irish: 20%), despite being comparatively more likely to report participating in sport (Irish: 39%, non-Irish: 44%). This module seeks to ascertain what effect levels of inclusivity within sports clubs and the wider sporting environment may be having here.

Figure 6.1 Participation in sport and club membership by sexual orientation, nationality and ethnicity (%)

	Participate in sport	Member of a sports club	Gap
Heterosexual	41%	32%	-9
LGBTI+	41%	21%	-20
Irish	39%	32%	-7
Non-Irish	44%	20%	-24
White	40%	32%	-8
Non-white	49%	23%	-26

Perceptions of inclusivity

This module began with a number of questions aimed at measuring the degree to which Irish sports clubs 'actively welcome' members of the three minority groups mentioned previously.

Figure 6.2 Perceptions of inclusivity in sports clubs among different minority groups (%)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	NET AGREE	NET DISAGREE
Most sport clubs actively welcome those from diverse ethnic backgrounds	3%	4%	16%	28%	42%	7%	70%	7%
Most sport clubs actively welcome those from Traveller and Roma communities	13%	16%	27%	15%	17%	12%	32%	29%
Most sport clubs actively welcome those from the LGBTI+ community	4%	5%	20%	24%	35%	12%	59%	9%

As figure 6.2 shows, perceptions of active inclusion by sports clubs vary significantly across minority groups. While strong majorities agree that sports clubs actively welcome those from diverse ethnic backgrounds and members of the LGBTI+ community, levels of perceived acceptance are much lower for members of the Traveller and Roma communities; while 32% agree that they are actively welcomed by sports clubs, a similar proportion (29%) disagree.

Lower levels of perceived inclusion in clubs for the Traveller & Roma community may derive from lower levels of acceptance among society more generally. An array of research in recent years has revealed significantly higher levels of negative sentiment and discrimination towards the Irish Traveller & Roma communities compared to other minority groups. The above findings indicate that negative attitudes towards these groups extend to the sporting environment, and may help to explain diminished expectations of active inclusion of this group by sports clubs.

Those aged under 25 hold the most positive views on 'active welcoming' of minority groups by sports clubs, being more likely to agree that most clubs actively include people from different ethnic backgrounds and Traveller/Roma in particular. Perceptions of inclusion are consistently higher among men aged under 25 in particular, the group most likely to be members of a sports club. There is little divergence along class or gender lines, although those in social class C2DE are significantly more likely to agree that clubs welcome those from Irish Traveller & Roma backgrounds.

Figure 6.3 Proportion agreeing that most sports clubs actively welcome those from different minority backgrounds by gender, age and socio-economic status (%)

	Diverse ethnic backgrounds	Irish Traveller and Roma	LGBTI+
Men	69%	33%	56%
Women	71%	31%	62%
16-24	80%	47%	60%
25-34	68%	30%	59%
35-44	70%	34%	57%
45-54	73%	32%	63%
55-64	65%	28%	55%
65+	66%	23%	60%
ABC1	73%	26%	58%
C2DE	70%	38%	63%

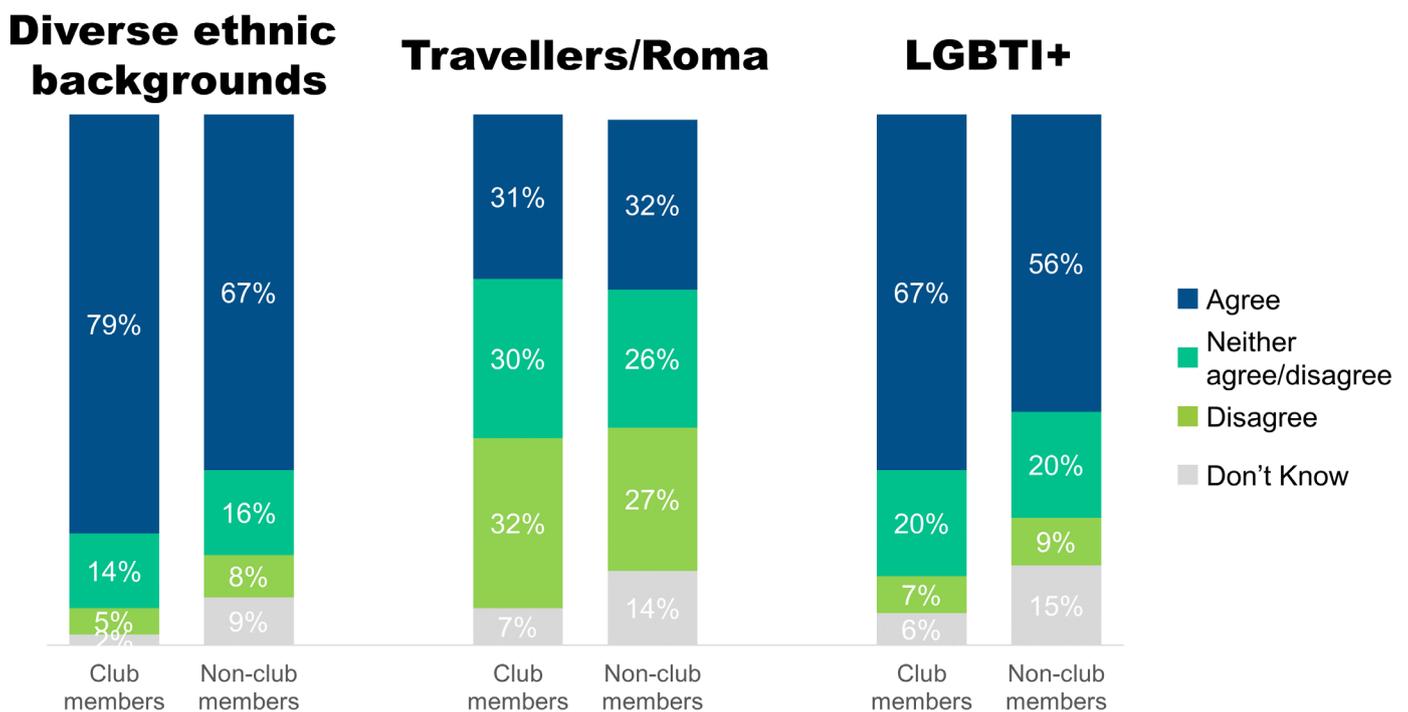
Perceptions of inclusivity among sports club members follow a similar pattern to the wider population. Gaining insight on beliefs about inclusivity from club members is particularly important, as they are most likely to have knowledge of the steps (or lack thereof) that their clubs are taking to actively welcome minority communities, and also have the greatest ability to influence levels of integration within clubs.

As figure 6.4 below shows, in terms of inclusion of those from diverse ethnic backgrounds and LGBTI+, a strong majority of club members agree that sports clubs actively welcome these groups, with less than 10% disagreeing in both cases.

However, club members are split on whether sports clubs actively welcome members of the Travelling/Roma communities, with 31% agreeing they do and 32% disagreeing.

The finding that club members generally hold more positive perceptions on levels of inclusion within sports clubs raises an important question for further investigation. On the one hand, club members have first-hand experience of the efforts that clubs take to promote integration, meaning that they should have better knowledge about inclusivity within clubs in general. At the same time, the personal connection that members hold with their club may bias them towards a more positive view of inclusivity within clubs.

Figure 6.4 Proportion agreeing that sports clubs actively welcome those from different minority backgrounds, by club membership (%)



Respondents were also asked to what extent they would be fearful of saying something wrong and causing offence when engaging with people from minority communities in a sport setting. Just under a quarter (24%) agree that this is something they would be fearful of, while 53% say they would not.

Figure 6.5 Reported fear of causing offense when engaging with minority communities in a sport setting (%)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	NET AGREE	NET DISAGREE
In a sport setting, I would be fearful that I may say something wrong and cause offense engaging with people from minority communities	36%	17%	18%	13%	11%	3%	24%	53%

Those aged 45 and older (30%), including 37% of those aged 65 and older, are more likely to report that they would be fearful of this. This compares to 17% of those aged under 35. This generational divide indicates that apprehension about engaging with minority communities in a sport setting may be linked to lack of experience engaging with these communities, with older people having grown up in a less diverse society, and sporting environment, than the one that exists now.

Indeed, 62% of club members who report that club has members or volunteers from 'minority ethnic communities, including Travellers', as well as 62% of those whose club has LGBTI+ members/volunteers, say they are not fearful of causing offence when engaging with these groups. This compared to 53% and 42%, respectively, of club members whose club does not have members/volunteers from these groups. This may partly be due to their opportunity to interact and build relationships with members of minority groups through sport.

Perceptions of inclusivity among club members

The second half of this module included a number of questions aimed specifically at those who report that they are a member of a sports club, in order to gauge what measures their club takes to promote inclusion of minority groups, as well as to further probe club members' perceptions of diversity and inclusion in their club.

The first set of questions asked club members about diversity and inclusion in their club.

Figure 6.6 Diversity and inclusion in sports clubs (% of club members)

Q: From your knowledge, does your club have any of the following?	Yes	No	Don't know
Club members/volunteers from the LGBTI+ community	44%	21%	35%
Club members/volunteers from minority ethnic communities, including Travellers	40%	47%	14%
Inclusive days for people from diverse ethnic backgrounds to try out the club activities	32%	51%	16%
Gender neutral changing facilities	18%	69%	13%

Nearly half (44%) of club members report that their club has members or volunteers from the LGBTI+ community. This is closely followed by having members or volunteers from minority ethnic communities (40%).

Beyond simply having members of these groups involved at their club as members or volunteers, steps requiring more conscious action to promote diversity by clubs are less common. A third (32%) of members say their club holds inclusive days for people from diverse ethnic backgrounds to try out club activities, while less than one in five say their club offers gender neutral changing facilities.

The final part of this module asked club members a number of further questions on their beliefs about diversity and inclusion within their club. The results are presented in figure 6.7 below.

A large proportion of club members (85%) agree that 'Everyone knows they are welcome' in the club, including more than 6 in 10 strongly agreeing with this statement. It is clear that, for most club members, there is no sense that their club is an unfriendly environment for any particular group, as only 6% disagree here. In contrast, only a third (34%) say that their club tries to reach out to people from minority communities. One in four respondents (25%) say that their club 'does not need to reach out to people from minority communities', although twice this number (50%) disagree here.

It is interesting to note the connection between these results and those discussed above. It is clear that while most believe that sports clubs are open, friendly environments for members of minority communities, welcoming of these communities by clubs comes mostly in the form of having members or volunteers from these groups, for example, rather than specific initiatives to promote inclusion. This is illustrated, for example, in the contrast between the 34% of respondents saying that 'their club tries to reach out to people from minority communities' with the proportions saying that most sports clubs 'actively welcome' those from diverse ethnic groups and the LGBTI+ community (70% and 59%, respectively).

Figure 6.7 Beliefs about inclusivity in sports clubs among members (% of club members) (%)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	NET AGREE	NET DISAGREE
Everyone knows they are welcome in the club	2%	4%	8%	23%	62%	*	85%	6%
The club tries to reach out to people from minority communities	12%	15%	31%	14%	20%	6%	34%	27%
The club does not need to reach out to people from minority communities	28%	22%	23%	11%	13%	1%	25%	50%

An examination of demographic trends here provides some intriguing insights. Those most likely to agree that ‘Everyone knows they are welcome in the club’ include those aged 55 and older and those in social class C2DE. These groups are also comparatively more likely to agree that their club ‘does not need to reach out to people from minority communities’. In turn, the inverse is also true – those less likely to agree that ‘Everyone knows they are welcome’ (younger people and those in social class ABC1) are also more likely to support greater outreach efforts.

A potential explanation for this may be that those groups who tend to report relatively higher levels of favourability towards supporting minority groups (such as younger people and those in higher social classes) have higher standards for what they perceive as ‘inclusion’ by their club. They may be more sensitive to issues that prevent minority groups from feeling truly welcome at sports clubs. In turn, these demographic groups are also more likely to say that their club needs to reach out to people from minority communities, and less likely to agree that it does so currently.

In contrast, older people and those in social class C2DE are more likely to agree that ‘everyone feels welcome in the club’ and to say that their club ‘tries to reach out to people from minority communities’, but less likely to say that it needs to do so. This may indicate that while these groups are generally accepting of diversity at their club, they are less likely to perceive barriers to minority groups participating with their club, and/or to see it as a priority for the club to remove these barriers. In other words, opposition to clubs actively promoting inclusion of those from minority communities may come, in part, from a belief that inclusivity is already practiced at their club.

Figure 6.8 Beliefs about inclusivity in sports clubs among members – proportion agreeing (% of club members) (%)

	Everyone knows they are welcome in the club	The club tries to reach out to people from minority communities	The club does not need to reach out to people from minority communities
Men	86%	34%	29%
Women	83%	34%	17%
16-34	86%	29%	18%
35-54	78%	38%	24%
55+	93%	37%	36%
ABC1	81%	30%	24%
C2DE	91%	41%	27%

Figure 6.9 Beliefs about inclusivity in sports clubs (% of club members) (%)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	NET AGREE	NET DISAGREE
The club has the skills and knowledge to reach out to people in minority communities	7%	10%	22%	27%	30%	3%	57%	16%
The club needs more help and support to reach out to people from minority communities	10%	14%	22%	23%	26%	4%	49%	24%

A significant majority (57%) believe that their club has the skills and knowledge to reach out to minority communities, with only one in six (16%) reporting that they do not. At the same time, around half (49%) of club members believe that their club needs more help and support to reach out to minority communities, with one in four (24%) disagreeing here.

Older people (55 and older: 66%) and C2DEs (69%) are those most likely to say that their club has the necessary resources to reach out to minority communities, while those living in a rural areas are more likely to say their club needs more help and support to do so.



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7. Olympic and Paralympic Games



Olympic and Paralympic Games

- This module examines public perceptions of sport in Ireland in the context of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, which took place in July-September of 2021. Fieldwork took place before and after the Games.
- A majority (59%) report having been interested in the 2020 Olympic Games. There is little variance in overall levels of interest before, during and after the Games. A similar proportion (60%) express interest in the Paralympics.
- Certain events, such as athletics, boxing, swimming and rowing, tend to receive significantly higher levels of reported interest than others. Engagement with some events in the 2020 Games such as boxing and rowing also differs over time, due to the success of Irish athletes in these events.
- Interest in the Olympics and Paralympics is concentrated among those already engaged in sport, such as those who play sport, those classed as highly active and sports clubs members.
- The main reported impact of these events on public sentiment is one of increased national pride and togetherness. Nearly 9 in 10 (87%) agree that Irish Olympic athletes 'set a positive example for others to follow', while two-thirds (67%) say the Olympics 'bring the country together'.
- Less than 3 in 10 agree that the Olympics motivates them to participate in sport, while this figure is 4 in 10 for the Paralympic Games. This suggests limited capacity of these events to influence adult sports participation. However, nearly 8 in 10 agree that the Olympics 'inspire tomorrow's generation to participate in sport', indicating that more research on the impact of the Olympic Games on youth sports participation may be warranted.
- TV remains by far the most common method of following the Olympics, with over three-quarters saying it was their main method of following the Games. One in five mainly followed the Games online.

Introduction

The Olympic Games are among the most-watched sporting events in the world, with a total of 2.6 million TV viewers in Ireland watching this year's Olympics across mainstream free-to-air platforms alone*. This wave of the ISM included modules on the Olympic and Paralympic Games, providing the opportunity to measure levels of public interest in these large sporting events, as well as their impact on sports participation. Moreover, the Olympic Games module was repeated in three different periods: before, during and after the Games, in order to measure any changes in sentiment over time**.

Public interest the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games

Overall, around 3 in 5 (59%) reported being interested in the 2020 Olympic Games, although only 1 in 5 (19%) said they were 'Very interested'. In contrast, 41% said they were not interested. Reported levels of interest in the Olympics did not change significantly depending on whether respondents were asked before, during or after the Games. Levels of interest ranged from 56% pre-Olympics, to 61% during the Olympics, to 59% post-Olympics, indicating that while there is broad interest in large sporting events, these events may have limited potential to attract enthusiasm from those not already interested in sport.

*<https://sportforbusiness.com/rte-reveal-olympic-viewing-figures/>

**The Paralympic Games module took place once, during the Games

Figure 7.1 Level of interest in Olympic Games before, during and after the Games (%)

	Not at all interested	Not very interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested	NET interested	NET not interested
Pre-Olympics	23%	22%	38%	17%	56%	44%
During Olympics	21%	18%	44%	17%	61%	39%
Post-Olympics	23%	17%	38%	21%	59%	40%

Interest in sporting events such as the Olympics, as might be expected, tends to be higher among those groups who are already engaged in sport. Those who report that they play sport (66%), as well as members of sports clubs (68%), those who are highly active (65%) and ABC1s (62%) are comparatively significantly more likely to report having been interested in the 2020 Olympic Games. It is worth noting however that as there are more people who do not play sport, are not members of sports club, are not highly active and are from C2DE, there are actually similar numbers of people interested in the games from these other cohorts.

Figure 7.2 Proportion interested in Olympic Games by engagement in sport, activity level and social class (%)

	Play sport		Member of sports club		Highly active		Social class	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	ABC1	C2DE
NET Interested	66%	53%	68%	55%	65%	54%	62%	56%

Overall levels of interest in the Paralympic Games are highly similar to that for the Olympic Games, with three in five (60%) also reporting being interested.

Figure 7.3 Level of interest in Paralympic Games (%)

	Not at all interested	Not very interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested	NET interested	NET not interested
During Paralympics	19%	20%	45%	14%	60%	39%

The demographic groups which are most engaged with the Paralympics also track closely with those expressing an interest in the Olympic Games. Those who play sport (65%), are members of a sports club (66%) and are in social class ABC1 (63%) express somewhat higher levels of interest here, although highly active individuals (57%) are less interested in the Paralympic Games.

Figure 7.4 Proportion interested in Paralympic Games by engagement in sport, activity level and social class (%)

	Play sport		Member of sports club		Highly active		Social class	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	ABC1	C2DE
NET Interested	65%	56%	66%	57%	57%	62%	63%	57%

Among those expressing an interest in the Olympic Games, the event gaining the highest level of interest was athletics (43%), followed by boxing (27%), swimming (26%) and gymnastics (18%). It is striking to note that boxing's popularity rose from 14% in the pre-Olympic wave to 43% in the post-Olympic wave, following the gold medal won by Kellie Harrington in the Women's lightweight event. The success of Ireland's rowers also saw its popularity rise, from 7% before the Olympics to 18% afterwards.

In terms of the Paralympic events, the greatest levels of interest were in Para Swimming (55%), Para Athletics (34%) and Para Cycling (14%).

Figure 7.5 Proportion interested in Olympic Games by event (% of those interested) (%)

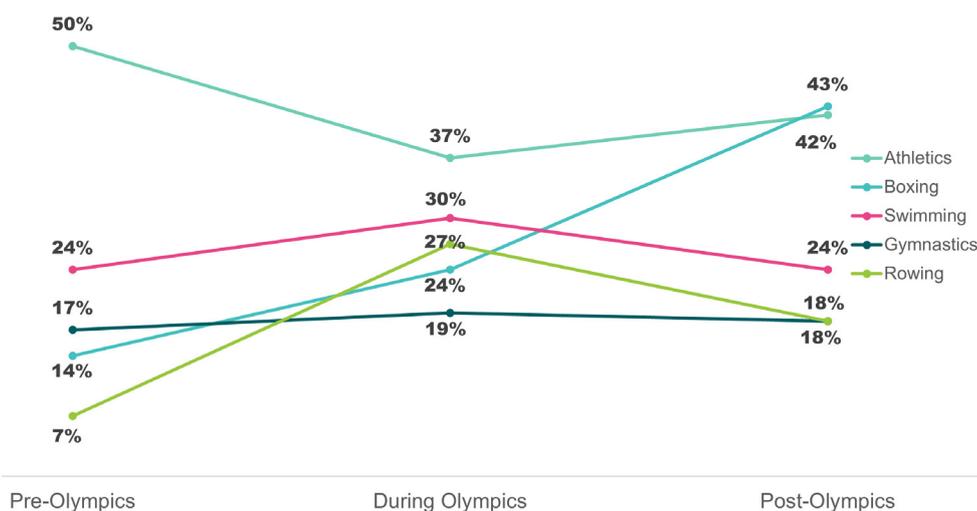
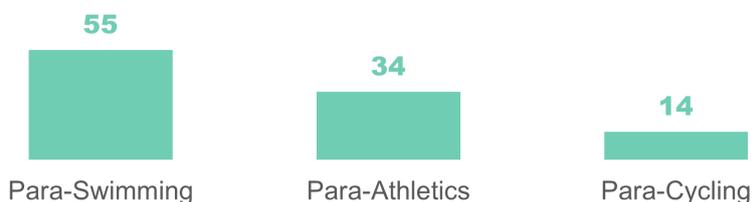


Figure 7.6 Proportion interested in Paralympic Games by event (% of those interested) (%)



Public sentiment on the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games

This module also included a number of questions designed to test public sentiment towards the Olympics and Paralympics, based on their level of agreement with five different statements about the Games.

The key sentiment that individuals seem to have towards the Olympics is one of elevated national pride and social togetherness. When asked what impact the Olympics had on them, 87% agree that 'Irish athletes set a positive example for others to follow', 84% report that it makes them feel 'proud to be Irish' and two-thirds (67%) agree that it 'brings the country together'.

This suggests that the public tend to perceive large sporting events, especially those where athletes are representing Ireland, as times of collective togetherness and support of a common entity. In terms of their impact on sports participation, however, far fewer people report that events such as the Olympics spur them to actually get involved in sport. While 76% do agree that the Olympics 'inspire tomorrow's generation to participate in sport', far fewer (28%) agree that the Olympics motivates them personally to participate in sport.

Figure 7.7 Reported impact of Olympic Games on public sentiment towards sport (%)

	NET agree	NET disagree
Irish Olympic athletes set a positive example for others to follow	87%	4%
Seeing Ireland compete at the Olympics makes me proud to be Irish	84%	6%
The Olympics brings the country together	67%	11%
The Olympics motivates me to participate in sport	28%	50%
The Olympics inspire tomorrow's generation to participate in sport	76%	7%

Perceptions of the Olympics appear to differ along demographic lines. Women (87%), those aged 35 and older (88%) and those in social class DE (89%) are among those most likely to say the Olympics 'makes me proud to be Irish', while similar social class and gender trends are seen among those agreeing the Olympics 'brings the country together'. In contrast, among those reporting that the Olympics 'motivates me to participate in sport', there is little difference across demographic groups, nor by activity level or sports participation (although those in social class DE are more likely to agree with this statement also). This further compounds the evidence that although major sporting events are of great interest to the public they likely have little significant effect on levels of sports participation among the adult population. There does however appear to be a public perception that major sporting events influence the behaviours of children, which may warrant further investigation.

Figure 7.8 Reported impact of Olympic Games on public sentiment towards sport, by gender, age and social class (%)

	Gender		Age		Social class	
	Male	Female	16-34	35+	ABC1C2	DE
Irish Olympic athletes set a positive example for others to follow	84%	90%	84%	88%	86%	92%
Seeing Ireland compete at the Olympics makes me proud to be Irish	80%	87%	74%	88%	81%	89%
The Olympics inspire tomorrow's generation to participate in sport	73%	79%	71%	78%	74%	79%
The Olympics brings the country together	61%	72%	69%	66%	61%	79%
The Olympics motivates me to participate in sport	28%	28%	29%	27%	24%	36%

As previously, perceptions of the Paralympic Games are closely aligned with those expressed for the Olympic Games. The strongest sentiments expressed are those of national pride and togetherness, with limited potential for motivating people to participate in sport. Overall, levels of positive sentiment towards the Paralympic Games are slightly higher than that for the Olympic Games.

Figure 7.9 Reported impact of Paralympic Games on public sentiment towards sport (%)

	NET Agree	NET Disagree
Irish Paralympic athletes set a positive example for others to follow	92%	2%
Seeing Ireland compete at the Paralympics makes me proud to be Irish	84%	3%
The Paralympics inspire tomorrow's generation to participate in sport	81%	5%
The Paralympics brings the country together	67%	9%
The Paralympics motivates me to participate in sport	38%	38%

Methods of following the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games

Finally, respondents were asked about the main way in which they would follow the Olympic and Paralympic Games. TV remains by far the most popular method of following these types of large sporting events, with 76% and 65% reporting that they would follow the Olympic and Paralympic Games on TV, respectively. This is followed by Online, used by 1 in 5 (20%) for following the Olympics and nearly 1 in 4 (24%) to follow the Paralympics. Radio and Newspaper receive a small minority of viewership for both sets of Games.

Figure 7.10 Main ways of following the Olympic and Paralympic Games (% of those interested in the Games) (%)

	Olympics	Paralympics
TV	76%	65%
Online	20%	24%
Radio	3%	7%
Newspaper	1%	4%



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8. Policy Implications



Maintaining the return to sport as life returns to normal following the Covid-19 pandemic

The most significant challenge for sport as Ireland emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic exists in increasing the numbers that play sport on a regular basis. Taking 2021 as a whole, 40% of the adult population participated in sport, well behind the 60% target that was set to be achieved by 2027.

While some encouragement can be taken from the increases in participation over the course of 2021, the number of regular participants during Q4 2021 is far short of the 2027 target. Based on current population projections this will require an additional 1 million people regularly participating in sport in order to achieve this target.

For many the post-pandemic world provides greater opportunities for them to participate in sport. The larger number of people working from home have more free time than before, and potentially more flexibility in their lives to get involved in sport both actively and socially. This extends beyond the individual to other family members, for example through more equal sharing of household and childminding responsibilities. However, this benefit may be unequally spread, with more affluent cohorts (for whom working from home is more common) more likely than others to experience this benefit.

Efforts made to increase the numbers playing sport need to consider the changing nature of sports participation. This is clearly evident through the types of sports that individuals are playing, as well as the ways in which they participate in them.

While many returned to team sports as restrictions were lifted, participation levels in the most popular activities – personal exercise and swimming – have not recovered in the same way. It may be the case that many individuals who previously participated in these activities have switched to other sports (cycling and running, for example), although it is clear that others have dropped out of sport entirely. Encouraging them back into sport will be challenging, in particular balancing any additional expenditure to access gyms and swimming pools against the current environment of rising costs of living.

Another consideration is the shift from sports being a social activity with most participating with other people to one which is now more commonly participated alone. Part of this relates to the increases in sports such as cycling and running which for many are solitary activities, however it is also likely as a result of changing behaviours from the periods of pandemic restrictions when socialising with others was not possible.

Achieving the 2027 target appears more difficult now than ever before, however the uplift in sports participation at various points during the pandemic is a clear indication of the appetite that many people have for sports when provided with the opportunity to participate.

Encouraging higher levels of sport as a social activity through active and other forms of participation

In addition to the physical and mental health benefits gained through participating in sport, it also provides a range of social benefits. This comes not only through socialising while participating in sport, but also through club membership, volunteering and attending sport events.

Activity in each of these three areas was severely curtailed during the pandemic restrictions, with the lack of organised sports meaning that there were no events to attend and there was a much more limited need for active volunteering.

Over the same time, club membership remained more stable suggesting that club members remained loyal to their club and continued with their membership over the pandemic period despite being unable to make use of the facilities for long periods of time. The decline in club membership that occurred was mainly due to reduced levels of gym-based activity meaning that may have allowed memberships to lapse.

There is much to be encouraged about in the return to social participation in sport during 2021. Although by the fourth quarter of 2021 all three forms of social participation had almost returned to pre-pandemic levels, the one or two percentage point drops represent significant reductions in numbers of people on the ground. It is important to continue to grow social participation in sport which through clubs and volunteers in particular provide the foundations for thriving sports communities.

The trend towards sports as a solitary activity rather than one that is participated in the company of others is somewhat concerning in this respect. However, this also provides an opportunity for greater social participation through new cyclists and runners being encouraged to get involved in structured sport. This can be through club membership and participating in organised events, either actively participating or by volunteering.

A key challenge exists in this respect in that these two sports in particular are more likely than others to see participation taking place away from the club environment. Identifying ways to increase and promote the appeal of club membership for new participants in sport will ensure a long-lasting benefit from the changing sports behaviours during the pandemic.

Getting back on course to the elimination of the gender gap

A key policy consideration emerging from previous waves of the ISM has been on the continued progress towards eliminating the gender gap in sports participation. This progress appeared to be on a steady trajectory towards equal numbers of women and men playing sports.

In this respect the widening gender gap during 2021 is somewhat disappointing, however there are a number of aspects to take encouragement from.

At one point in 2020 the ambition to achieve the gender gap was achieved, and this was repeated again in the early part of 2021 – a clear demonstration that equal levels of participation among both genders is possible. While part of it was due to a decline in male participation, there was also a strong increase in female participation during the middle part of 2020 – albeit during highly unusual circumstances.

Further encouragement can be taken from the 35 to 54 age group where the gender gap has narrowed slightly, with an unchanged gap between mothers and fathers since 2019. Changing lifestyles and perhaps more equal sharing of household and childcare duties may be facilitating greater opportunity for sports participation among women in this age group.

While at an overall level the past two years have represented something of a setback in eliminating the gender gap, continued progress over the coming years could see it being achieved on a sustained basis.

Reversing the widening social gradient

The previous annual report noted the persistent social gradients in sports. At that time sports participation was increasing steadily, although activity levels were lower among lower socio-economic groups and those with a disability. The gradient was consistent over time suggesting the need to take additional steps to encourage certain groups to engage with sports.

The pandemic period has created a widening social gradient in many respects. The socio-economic and educational gap in sports participation has grown further, with a persistent disability gap evident. While the gap in terms of employment status has narrowed, this is likely a factor of changes in employment status during the pandemic period.

Clearly this is a very concerning development and one that will need to be addressed quickly in order to avoid any longer-term implications.

A key factor in this could be due to the changes in lifestyles that are becoming established following the pandemic. For example, some workers now spend much of their time working from home which can provide them with additional free time due to no longer having to commute, as well as potentially greater flexibility in their daily schedules. This provides greater opportunity for sport.

However, the benefits that arise from this are unequally spread, as those in higher socio-economic groups are more likely to work in roles that facilitate working from home, whereas many in the lower socio-economic groups will work in roles that require their presence in the workplace.

Another factor in this is that those sports that have become more popular over the past two years – cycling and running in particular – have a stronger social gradient than many others. Furthermore, this gradient has widened recently. This is somewhat counter-intuitive as these two sports have lower barriers to entry than many others, not requiring specific facilities and can be done at a very low financial cost.

In order to eliminate the social gradient in sports at an overall level, further research may be required to better understand what drives social gradients in individual sports in Ireland and the steps that can be taken to mitigate these.

Ensuring that club membership reflects the increasingly diverse nature of the Irish population

This wave of the ISM highlights a key issue of certain minority communities less likely to be members of a sports club despite being as likely to play sport. This is a clear indication that further work is necessary to ensure that sports clubs encompass the broadest representation of those participating in that sport and are a fair reflection of the communities that they are located within.

While the majority feel that most Irish sports clubs actively welcome those from diverse ethnic backgrounds and members of the LGBTI+ community, there is a stronger degree of pessimism in terms of whether or not members of the Irish Traveller & Roma communities are welcomed.

Encouragingly, most club members believe that their club is welcoming to all members suggesting perhaps that an open and progressive attitude exists within sports clubs. However, more needs to be done to encourage active recruitment of those from minority groups and address the deficit that exists. Club members are less convinced of the need for such action and encouraging them to drive this action will be key in redressing the imbalance that exists.

This is a particularly important consideration in the current environment with many people arriving into Ireland from troubled parts of the world. Sports clubs provide the ideal opportunity to enable them to integrate into Irish society and their new communities.

Can the broad level of interest in flagship sports events be harnessed to promote sports participation?

The results of this year's module on the Olympic and Paralympic Games is a clear demonstration of the wide public interest in flagship sporting events. They are instrumental in encouraging national pride and togetherness, providing hope and optimism during the difficult times in the lead-up to the most recent Games.

The success of Irish athletes is key within this, both in terms of generating interest in specific sports as well as developing these individuals as positive role models setting an example for others to follow.

However, the extent to which these events motivate people to take up new sports is limited. While only a basic measurement was conducted on the ISM on this occasion, a relatively low proportion reported that they were motivated by the games to participate in sport. However, it is encouraging that the majority of those indicating that they were motivated were not current sports participants.

Perhaps the greater potential lies in motivating the next generation of sports participants, and a strong majority agree that this is the case. Further research is perhaps necessary on the potential impact on children and how the legacy of such events can influence sports participation in young people.

Wider adoption of technology provides greater opportunity for engagement with participants

This wave of the ISM identifies the strong growth in the usage of technology to monitor activity levels. Wearable technologies such as pedometers to count steps or GPS devices to measure speed and distance of activity are now part of the mainstream – not just among active sports participants but within the population as a whole.

While this survey measurement cannot fully explore the real impact that this technology has on activity levels, the results show that a large majority perceive that their usage of the technology has an impact on the amount of activity that they do. Furthermore, the perceived impact is unchanged over the past 5 years indicating that for many it may be delivering longer-term benefits.

Technology is now at the heart of activity for many people. A significant number of those participating in popular activities such as running, cycling and swimming could not imagine undertaking that activity without measuring it using a device. Similarly, many walkers use pedometers to monitor progress towards a target number of steps each day.

This presents a significant opportunity for participants to engage with their activity in new ways. Technology users can share their activities through virtual communities and have access to a vast array of performance statistics that may previously have only been accessible to elite athletes. This provides new channels and data-driven insights to enable individuals and coaches to guide development and ability.

Additionally, the online sharing of data generated through activity enables communities of sports participants to develop in ways that are not restricted by geography, lifestyle or schedules, but simply through a mutual interest in a particular sport.



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

Appendices



IRISH SPORT MONITOR 2021 CORE QUESTIONNAIRE – FINAL

SECTION 1 – INTRO AND SCREENING

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is _____ and I am calling on behalf of Ipsos MRBI, Ireland's leading opinion polling and survey research company. We are carrying out an important lifestyle study and your opinions may help to shape local services in the future. Would you spare some time to answer some questions. It may take approximately 7-8 minutes depending on your answers.

Before we go to the first question I just need to reassure you that all of your answers are completely confidential and your rights under the Data Protection Act will be fully observed, including not answering and choosing to end the interview. For quality control and training purposes this interview may be monitored or recorded.

GENDER

RECORD SEX OF RESPONDENT

Male
Female

AGE

To ensure we interview a wide cross section of the public, could I first ask what age group you fall into?

Under 16
16-19
20-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+

AGE 2

And, may I ask what is your actual age?
15 to 99



WORK

Which of these best describes your current employment situation? **READ OUT. SINGLE CODE**

- Working as an employee
- Self-employed
- Unemployed/seeking work
- Retired.....
- Full-time home maker / looking after family
- Student.....
- Not working due long term sickness or disability

SECTION 2 – SPORTS PARTICIPATION

Now I would like to ask you a few questions on recreation, exercise and sport. These questions are being asked on behalf of Sport Ireland, but they relate to a broad range of physical activities as well as traditional sports, including walking, cycling, other outdoor pursuits, water sports, and non-competitive or recreational exercise.

A1. First, I would like to ask you about any recreational walking you did in the last 7 days.
 DO NOT include walks for transport, such as walking to work or to the shops, but DO include walks undertaken for exercise, recreation or leisure. In the last 7 days, did you take such a walk?

In the last 7 days, did you take such a walk?

Yes **A5**

No..... → **GO TO**

A2. How many walks for exercise, recreation or leisure did you take?

A3. If only one walk at A2
For how long did you walk? _____ minutes

If more than one walk at A2
For how long did you usually walk? _____ minutes



A4a. How would you describe your usual walking pace during this(these) walk(s)? **TICK ONE ONLY**

- Slow
- Steady, average
- Fairly Brisk
- Fast
- Don't know

A4b. Where do you usually walk? **READ OUT. TICK ONE ONLY**

- Around local roads
- Local footpaths.....
- Parks
- Forests or other trails
- Beach or seafront.....
- Local sports club
- Somewhere else (specify: _____)
- Don't know

A5. I would now like to ask you about any OTHER physical activities you undertook in the past 7 days for exercise, recreation or sport. Please DO NOT include physical activity for work, transport, or domestic work like gardening or DIY. Please DO include personal exercise, such as swimming, dancing or jogging, as well as all forms of sporting activity, indoor or outdoor, whether undertaken in an organised setting or casually with family or friends. So, in the past 7 days, did you participate in any such activities?

Yes **A22**

No..... → **GO TO**

A6. Please list up to 3 sports or activities, in the order in which you participated the most:

A6a.
A6b.
A6c.

I'd like to ask you a short series of questions about each activity, starting with the first...

INT: PROMPT ACTIVITY A6A

A7. On how many of the last 7 days did you take part? _____

A8. For how long did you take part?
Consider a usual session if you took part more than once. _____ minutes

A9. Was the effort enough to raise your breathing rate?
Yes
No.....

A10. Was the effort enough for you to be out of breath or sweat?
Yes
No.....

A11a. In what context did the activity take place?
Organised training/coaching/lesson (IN PERSON)
Organised training/coaching/lesson (ONLINE/REMOTE)
Organised competition
Casually with family or friends
On own
Other

A11b. Where did this activity take place?
Public road
Public footpath
Public green
In a Park.....
Sports club
Community hall
Gym/sports centre.....
School/college/university



At home
 Somewhere else (specify: _____)

I'd like to ask you the same series of questions about the second activity... **[PROMPT
 ACTIVITY A6B]**

A12. On how many of the last 7 days did you take part? _____

A13. For how long did you take part?
 Consider a usual session if you took part more than once. _____ minutes

A14. Was the effort enough to raise your breathing rate?
 Yes
 No.....

A15. Was the effort enough for you to be out of breath or sweat?
 Yes
 No.....

A16a. In what context did the activity take place?
 Organised training/coaching/lesson (IN PERSON)
 Organised training/coaching/lesson (ONLINE/REMOTE)
 Organised competition
 Casually with family or friends
 On own
 Other

A16b. Where did this activity take place?
 Public road
 Public footpath
 Public green
 In a Park.....
 Sports club
 Community hall
 Gym/sports centre.....
 School/college/university
 At home
 Somewhere else (specify: _____)

I'd like to ask you the same series of questions about the third activity... **[PROMPT
 ACTIVITY A6C]**

A17. On how many of the last 7 days did you take part? _____

A18. For how long did you take part?
 Consider a usual session if you took part more than once. _____ minutes

A19. Was the effort enough to raise your breathing rate?
 Yes



No.....

A20. Was the effort enough for you to be out of breath or sweat?

Yes

No.....

A21a. In what context did the activity take place?

Organised training/coaching/lesson (IN PERSON)

Organised training/coaching/lesson (ONLINE/REMOTE)

Organised competition

Casually with family or friends

On own

Other

A21b. Where did this activity take place?

Public road

Public footpath

Public green

In a Park.....

Sports club

Community hall

Gym/sports centre.....

School/college/university

At home.....

Somewhere else (specify: _____)



A22. I would now like to ask you about any voluntary activity associated with sport and exercise activities that you undertook in the past 7 days. Voluntary activity means any role you may have fulfilled in support of sport or recreational physical activity, for adults or children. It includes helping to run events, providing or maintaining transport, food, equipment or kit, or acting in any kind of official capacity in relation to an event, team or organisation that provides opportunities to engage in physical activities for recreation, exercise or sport.

So, in the past 7 days, were you involved in any volunteering of this type?

Yes

No.....

→GO

TO A28

A23. What were the sports or physical activities concerned (up to a maximum of 2 you were most involved in)?

A23a. _____

A23b. _____

A24. For sport ... [prompt activity A23a], what voluntary involvement did you have?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Providing Transport.....
- Coach
- Club Official
- Activity Organiser
- Kit Maintenance
- Selector
- Mentor
- Referee
- Covid-19 Officer
- Child Protection Officer
- Other (please specify)

A25. How much time during the past 7 days did you devote to volunteering for this activity?



_____ hours

A26. For sport ... [prompt activity A23b], what voluntary involvement did you have?
TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Providing Transport.....
- Coach
- Club Official
- Activity Organiser
- Kit Maintenance
- Selector
- Mentor
- Referee
- Covid-19 Officer
- Child Protection Officer
- Other (please specify)

A27. How much time during the past 7 days did you devote to volunteering for this activity?

_____ hours

A28. Are you a member of any kind of sports club? Include clubs for traditional sports, but also walking, cycling or swimming clubs, fitness centres, gyms or other organisations that provide opportunities to engage in physical activity for recreation, exercise or sport?

Yes

No.....

→GO

TO A31

A29. How many are you a member of? _____

A30. What are the sports or physical activities concerned (up to a maximum of 3 you are most involved in)?

A30a. _____

A30b. _____

A30c. _____

A31. Given the broad definition of sporting activities we have been using, have you attended any fixtures or events in the past 7 days, either children's or adult events, as a spectator or supporter, rather than as an active participant?

Yes

No.....

→GO

TO A34

A32. How many events did you attend? _____

A33. What were the sports or physical activities concerned (up to a maximum of 3 most recent events)?

A33a. _____



A33b. _____

A33c. _____

A34. Apart from during PE lessons, did you play regular sport at school?

Yes

No.....

A35. When you were at school, did your parents play any kind of sport regularly? **TICK ONE ONLY**

Yes, both

Yes, father only

Yes, mother only

No.....

Don't Know

A36. Do you undertake any regular walks of over 15 minutes for transport, such as walking to work, walking children to school etc.? By regular I mean at least once-a-week.

Yes

No.....

A37. Do you cycle regularly as a form of transport? By regular I again mean once-a-week.

Yes

No.....

A38. In the past week, on how many days have you done a total of 30 minutes or more of physical activity which was enough to raise your breathing rate? This may include sport, exercise, and brisk walking or cycling for recreation or to get to and from places, but should not include housework or physical activity that may be part of your job.

Record number of days (0 to 7)

Don't know

Refused



SECTION 5 – DEMOGRAPHICS

I would now like to ask you a few more background questions.

C1. Do you have any long-term illness, health problem or disability that limits your daily activities or work?

- Yes
- No..... GO TO C3.
- Refused GO TO C3.

C2. Does this prevent you from taking part in sport and exercise?

- Yes
- No.....
- Refused.....

C3. Do you have any children aged under 18?

- Yes
- No.....

C4. How many children do you have? _____

C5. What age is your youngest child? _____

C5c. Are you?

- Married
- Living as married.....
- Single
- Widowed/Divorced/Separated

C7. Which of the following best describes where you live? **TICK ONE ONLY**

- In a city
- In a town
- In a village
- Isolated location
- Don't know

C8. Which county do you live in? **PRECODE LIST OF COUNTIES**

[IF DUBLIN]

C9. Which of the following is your local authority?

- Dublin City.....
- Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown
- Fingal
- South Dublin.....



C10. What nationality are you? If joint nationality, please state both nationalities
PRECODE LIST OF NATIONALITIES

SOCIO-ECONOMIC QUESTIONS

C11. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- Primary level or lower
- Group, Inter, Junior Certificate
- Leaving Certificate
- Other Second Level
- Third Level
- Don't know
- Refused.....

C12. Could I ask about the approximate level of net household income? This means the total income, after tax, PRSI and other statutory deductions, of all members of the household.

<i>Amount per week</i>	<i>Amount per month</i>	<i>Amount per year</i>
under €300	under €1200	under €15500
€300 - €399	€1200 - €1599	€15500 - €19999
€400 - €499	€1600 - €1999	€20000 - €25999
€500 - €749	€2000 - €2999	€26000 - €38999
€750 - €899	€3000 - €3599	€39000 - €46999
€900 - €1249	€3600 - €4999	€47000 - €64999
over €1249	over €4999	over €64999

The next two questions are voluntary and you don't have to answer if you don't want to, however the results will assist Sport Ireland in making sport as inclusive as possible for everyone in Ireland.

C13. To which of the following groups do you consider you belong?

- White Irish
- White Irish Traveller
- White Roma
- Any other white background (specify: _____).....
- Black or Black Irish (specify: _____).....
- Asian or Asian Irish (specify: _____)
- Other background (specify: _____)
- Don't know
- Refused.....

C14. Which one of the following best describes how you think of yourself? When you hear the option that you most identify with please say YES



- Heterosexual/straight (attracted to people of the opposite sex)
- Bisexual (attracted to people of both sexes).....
- Gay/Lesbian (attracted to people of the same sex)
- Asexual (not attracted to other people).....
- Other (specify: _____)
- Don't know
- Refused.....



**Irish Sports Monitor 2021
Flexible Module - Wearable Technology**

Now moving on, I'd like to ask you a few questions about technology in sport and physical activity.

ASK ALL

Q.1 There are a number of tools that can be used to measure the amount and nature of physical activity undertaken. Have you ever used any tools such as a Fitbit, Pedometer, an app on your mobile phone or a GPS watch to:

READ OUT ANSWERS SELECTED AT Q.1. MULTI CODE.

- Count the number of steps you take in a day 1
- Measure the distance or speed you have covered 2
- Measure your heart rate or calories burned..... 3
- Plan your workout routine such as Couch to 5k or Fitstar 4
- Find the location of a sports facility, parks or walking/hiking trail 5

- None of these 6
- Don't know..... 7

ASK ALL SELECTED AT Q.1

Q.2 And do you currently use a tool to...?

READ OUT ANSWERS SELECTED AT Q.1. MULTI CODE.

- Count the number of steps you take in a day 1
- Measure the distance or speed you have covered 2
- Measure your heart rate or calories burned..... 3
- Plan your workout routine such as Couch to 5k or Fitstar 4
- Find the location of a sports facility, parks or walking/hiking trail 5

- None of these 6
- Don't know..... 7

ASK Q.3 AND Q.4 IN ROTATION FOR EACH TOOL SELECTED AT Q.2

Q.3 For how long have you used a tool to _____ ?

SINGLE CODE

- Up to 3 months 1
- More than 3, up to 6 months 2
- More than 6 months, up to 1 year 3
- More than 1 year, up to 2 years 4
- More than 2 years 5
- Don't know..... 6

ASK Q.5 TO Q.7 TO ALL USING A FITNESS TOOL

Q.5 Were you already active in sport and other physical activity before you started using this tool / these tools?
SINGLE CODE

- Yes 1
- No 2
- Don't know 3

Q.6a In general, would you say that the tool(s) you use have a major influence, a minor influence or no influence at all on the physical activity that you do?
SINGLE CODE

- Major influence 1
- Minor influence 2
- No influence at all 3
- Don't know 4

ASK Q.6B TO ALL CODED 1 OR 2 AT Q.6A

Q.6b In what ways does it influence your physical activity?
RECORD VERBATIM RESPONSE

ASK Q.9 AND Q.10 TO ALL WHO HAVE USED A TOOL AT Q.1 BUT HAVE NOT USED ANY TOOL AT Q.2

Q.9 You said that you used to use a _____. What was the main reason you stopped using it?
PROBE TO PRECODE. SINGLE CODE.

- Wasn't comfortable to wear 1
- Too much hassle 2
- Wasn't having a sufficiently positive impact on my activity levels 3
- Friends/contacts stopped using it 4
- I got bored with it 5
- It broke and I didn't replace it 6
- It was inaccurate 7
- Other (specify: _____) 8
- Don't know 9



Q.10 For how long did you use it before you stopped using it?

SINGLE CODE

- Up to 3 months 1
- More than 3, up to 6 months 2
- More than 6 months, up to 1 year 3
- More than 1 year, up to 2 years 4
- More than 2 years 5
- Don't know..... 6

ASK ALL WHO HAVE NEVER USED A TOOL AT Q.1

Q.11 Over the next 12 months, would you say that you are likely or unlikely to start using a tool to do any of the following?

ANSWER LIKELY, UNLIKELY OR DON'T KNOW FOR EACH

- ...count the number of steps you take in a day 1
- ...measure the distance or speed you travel while running or cycling 2
- ...measure your heart rate or calories burned 3
- ...plan your workout routine 4
- None of these 5
- Don't know..... 6

ASK ALL

Q.12 During the Covid-19 pandemic, have you done any sport or physical activity classes online – either live or recorded?

SINGLE CODE

- Yes 1
- No..... 2
- Don't know..... 3

IF YES AT Q.12

Q.13 And are these classes something you did for a short period during the pandemic, or something you currently do?

SINGLE CODE

- Something done for a short period..... 1
- Something currently done 2
- Both (multiple classes - have stopped some, but still doing others). 3
- Don't know..... 4

IF YES AT Q.12

Q.14 Are these classes replacing in-person classes that you did prior to the pandemic, or are they a new activity?

SINGLE CODE

- Replacing in-person classes 1
- New activity 2
- Both (multiple classes - mixture of prior and new activity) 3
- Don't know..... 4

**20-101875 Irish Sports Monitor 2021: Flexible Module 2
Diversity & Inclusion**

ASK ALL

Moving on, I would now like to ask you some questions relating to other aspects of sport.

Q.1 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is strongly agree, can you please tell me the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about sports clubs in Ireland.

ROTATE ORDER

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Don't Know (DNRO)
Most sport clubs actively welcome those from diverse ethnic backgrounds	1	2	3	4	5	99
Most sport clubs actively welcome those from Traveller and Roma communities	1	2	3	4	5	99
Most sport clubs actively welcome those from the LGBTI+ community	1	2	3	4	5	99

Q.2 Using the same scale, can you please tell me the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Not applicable (DNRO)	Don't Know (DNRO)
In a sport setting, I would be fearful that I may say something wrong and cause offense engaging with people from minority communities	1	2	3	4	5	98	99

ASK ALL CLUB MEMBERS

ASK ABOUT FIRST CLUB IDENTIFIED, UNLESS RESPONDENT IS A MEMBER OF A GYM IN WHICH CASE ASK ABOUT OTHER CLUB IDENTIFIED. IF NO OTHER CLUB IDENTIFIED, ASK ABOUT GYM

Moving on, I would now like to ask you some questions relating to the club that you are a member of. Earlier you said that you are a member of a <<FIRST CLUB IDENTIFIED>> (club).

Q.3 From your knowledge, does your club have any of the following?

READ OUT. MULTICODE.
ROTATE START

	Yes	No	Not applicable	Don't know (DNRO)
Inclusive days for people from diverse ethnic backgrounds to try out the club activities	1	2	98	99
Gender neutral changing facilities	1	2	98	99
Club members/volunteers from minority ethnic communities, including Travellers	1	2	98	99
Club members/volunteers from the LGBTI+ community	1	2	98	99

Q.4 Thinking again of your <TYPE OF CLUB> club. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, to what extent do you agree or disagree that...

ROTATE ORDER

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Not applicable (DNRO)	Don't Know (DNRO)
Everyone knows they are welcome in the club	1	2	3	4	5	98	99
The club does not need to reach out to people from minority communities	1	2	3	4	5	98	99
The club tries to reach out to people from minority communities	1	2	3	4	5	98	99
The club has the skills and knowledge to reach out to people in minority communities	1	2	3	4	5	98	99
The club needs more help and support to reach out to people from minority communities	1	2	3	4	5	98	99



**Irish Sport Monitor 2021
Flexible Module - 2020 Olympic & Paralympic Games**

Note: Wording and tense changed in Olympic and Paralympic modules based on when modules took place. Olympic module took place at three different time periods – before, during and after the Games. Paralympic module took place once – during the Games.

I would now like to ask you a few questions in relation to this year’s Olympic Games being held in Tokyo.

ASK ALL

Q.1 How interested are/were you in this year’s Olympic/Paralympic Games? Would you say you are/were...

READ OUT. FLIP ORDER. SINGLE CODE

- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not very interested
- Not at all interested
- Don’t know
- Refused

IF VERY INTERESTED OR SOMEWHAT INTERESTED AT Q.1

Q.2 Which Olympic/Paralympic events are/were you most interested in following this year?

MULTICODE. PROBE TO PRECODES

Olympic Sports		Paralympic Sports
		Para Archery
Archery		Para Athletics
Gymnastics		Para Badminton
Artistic (synchronised) swimming		Boccia
Athletics		Para Canoe
Badminton		Para Cycling
Baseball/softball		Para Equestrian
Basketball		Football 5-a-side
Beach volleyball		Goalball
Boxing		Para Judo
Canoe slalom/sprint		Para Powerlifting
		Para Rowing
Cycling (BMX)		Shooting Para sport
		Sitting volleyball
Cycling (mountain bike)		Para Swimming
Cycling (road)		Para Table tennis
Cycling (track)		Para Taekwondo
Diving		Para Triathlon



Equestrian		Wheelchair basketball
Fencing		Wheelchair fencing
Football		Wheelchair rugby
Golf		Wheelchair tennis
Handball		
Hockey		
Judo		
Karate		
Modern pentathlon		
Rowing		
Rugby		
Sailing		
Shooting		
Skateboarding		
Sport climbing (rock climbing)		
Surfing		
Swimming		
Table tennis		
Taekwondo		
Tennis		
Trampoline		
Triathlon		
Volleyball		
Water polo		
Weightlifting		
Wrestling		

Other (specify: _____)

Don't know

Refused



ASK ALL

Q.3 Which athletes, if any, can you think of that are representing/represented Ireland in this year's Olympic/Paralympic games?

MULTI CODE. PROBE TO PRECODES

Athlete	Sport	Discipline/Event
Annalise Murphy	Sailing	Women's Laser
Ciara Mcgeean	Athletics	Women's 1500m
Fionnuala McCormack	Athletics	Women's Marathon
Kellie Harrington	Boxing	Women's Lightweight Double
Paul O'Donovan	Rowing	Men's Lightweight
Rhys McClenaghan	Gymnastics	Men's Pommel Horse
Aidan Walsh	Boxing	Men's Welterweight
Aifric Keogh	Rowing	Women's Four
Aileen Crowley	Rowing	Women's Pair
Alex Wright	Athletics	Men's 50km Race Walk
Aoife Casey	Rowing	Women's Lightweight Double
Aoife Cooke	Athletics	Women's Marathon
Aoife O'Rourke	Boxing	Women's Middleweight
Brendan Boyce	Athletics	Men's 50km Race Walk
Brendan Irvine	Boxing	Men's Flyweight
Chris O'Donnell,	Athletics	Mixed 4x400m Relay
Eimear Lambe	Rowing	Women's Four
Emily Hegarty	Rowing	Women's Four
Emily Kay	Cycling - Track	Women's Madison
Emmet Brennan	Boxing	Men's Light Heavyweight
Felix English	Cycling - Track	Men's Madison
Fintan McCarthy	Rowing	Men's Lightweight
Fiona Murtagh	Rowing	Women's Four
Jack Woolley	Taekwondo	Men's 58kg
Kevin Seaward	Athletics	Men's Marathon
Kurt Walker	Boxing	Men's Featherweight
Liam Jegou	Canoe Slalom	Men's C1
Margaret Cremen	Rowing	Women's Lightweight Double
Mark Downey	Cycling - Track	Men's Madison
Michaela Walsh	Boxing	Women's Featherweight
Michelle Finn	Athletics	Women's 3000m SC
Monika Dukarska	Rowing Modern	Women's Pair
Natalya Coyle	Pentathlon	Women's Event
Nhat Nguyen	Badminton	Men's Single
Paul Pollock	Athletics	Men's Marathon



Phil Healy	Athletics	Mixed 4x400m Relay
Philip Doyle	Rowing	Men's Double
Robert Dickson	Sailing	Men's 49ers
Ronan Byrne	Rowing	Men's Double
Sanita Puspure	Rowing	Women's Single
Sean Waddilove	Sailing	Men's 49ers
Shannon McCurley	Cycling - Track	Women's Madison
Sharlene Mawdsley	Athletics	Mixed 4x400m Relay
Stephen Scullion	Athletics	Men's Marathon
Thomas Barr	Athletics	Men's 400m Hurdles; Mixed 4x400m Relay
Other (specify: _____)		
Don't know		
Refused		

ASK ALL

Q.4 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is strongly agree, can you please tell me the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the Olympics/Paralympics.

ROTATE ORDER

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Don't Know (DNRO)
The Olympics inspire tomorrow's generation to participate in sport.	1	2	3	4	5	99
The Olympics motivates me to participate in sport.	1	2	3	4	5	99
Irish Olympic athletes set a positive example for others to follow.	1	2	3	4	5	99
Seeing Ireland compete at the Olympics makes me proud to be Irish.	1	2	3	4	5	99
The Olympics brings the country together.	1	2	3	4	5	99

Q.5. The Irish Olympic Team has a partnership or sponsorship with a number of commercial brands. Can you name any of these?

MULTI CODE. PROBE TO PRECODES

Olympic Federation of Ireland	Paralympics Ireland	Athlete/NGB Sponsors
FBD Insurance	Allianz	Softco
McKeever Sports	Circle K	Kinetica
Circle K	Flo Gas	Redbull
Indeed	Toyota	
	Citi Group	



Other (specify:)
Don't Know
Refused

Q.6. Irish Olympic athletes receive funding and support from a number of sports bodies. Can you name any of these?

MULTI CODE. PROBE TO PRECODES

Sport Ireland
Sport Ireland Institute (Institute of Sport)
Department of Sport
Sport Northern Ireland
Olympic Federation of Ireland
Paralympics Ireland
Athletics Ireland
Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA)
Rowing Ireland
Sailing Ireland
Cycling Ireland
Gymnastics Ireland
Canoeing Ireland
Badminton Ireland
Hockey Ireland
Irish Taekwondo Union
Other (specify: _____)
Don't Know
Refused

Q.7. How will/do/did you mainly follow the Olympics. Will it be/is it/was it through TV, radio, newspaper or online? **SINGLE CODE. PROBE TO PRECODES**

TV
Radio
Newspaper
Online - Digital Streaming Service
Online - Youtube
Online - Twitter
Online - Facebook
Online - Instagram
Other (specify: _____)
Don't know
Refused

Sports Definitions

Types of activity

- **Participation in Sport** is defined as having undertaken physical activity during the last seven days for exercise, recreation or sport. This includes both personal and team-based exercise, indoor or outdoor, in an organised or casual setting. It does not include physical activity for work, transport or domestic work, or recreational walking.
- **Recreational Walking** includes walks undertaken for exercise, recreation or leisure during the last seven days. It does not include walking for transport.
- **Walking for transport** is defined as taking walks at least once a week of over 15 minutes for transport.
- **Cycling for transport** is defined as cycling at least once a week for over 15 minutes for transport.

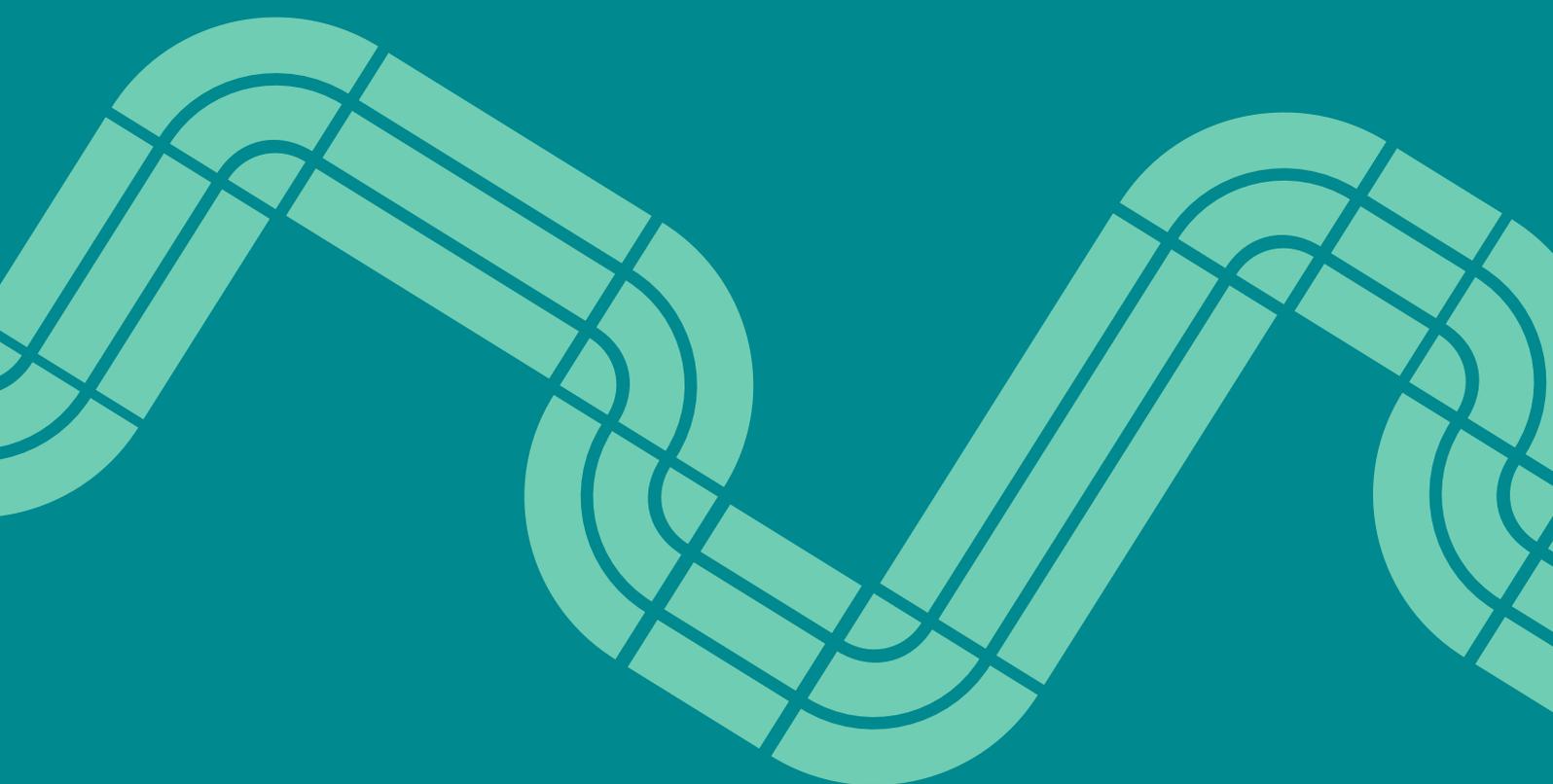
Hierarchy of activity

- **Highly Active** – Defined as participating in at least 30 minutes of physical activity on at least five out of the previous seven days through a combination of sport and recreational walking. Those classed as highly active are considered to be meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines. Note that walking/cycling for transport is not included here, meaning that the proportion classified as highly active may not include those who undertake their activity through active travel/commuting.
- **Fairly Active** – Participating in 30 minutes of physical activity at least twice during the previous seven days.
- **Just Active** – Participating in a sporting activity or recreational walking for 20 minutes at least once during the previous seven days, or regularly walks/cycles for transport (at least once a week).
- **Sedentary** – Did not participate in any activity during the past 7 days.

NRS Social Grade System

The NRS Social Grade System is used to classify a respondent's socio-economic status, based on the occupation of the Chief Income Earner in their household.

- **A** – Higher managerial, administrative and professional
- **B** – Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional
- **C1** – Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional
- **C2** – Skilled manual workers
- **D** – Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
- **E** – State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only



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