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ÉIREANN
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SPORT
IRELAND
PARTICIPATION

Participation Plan 2025-2027





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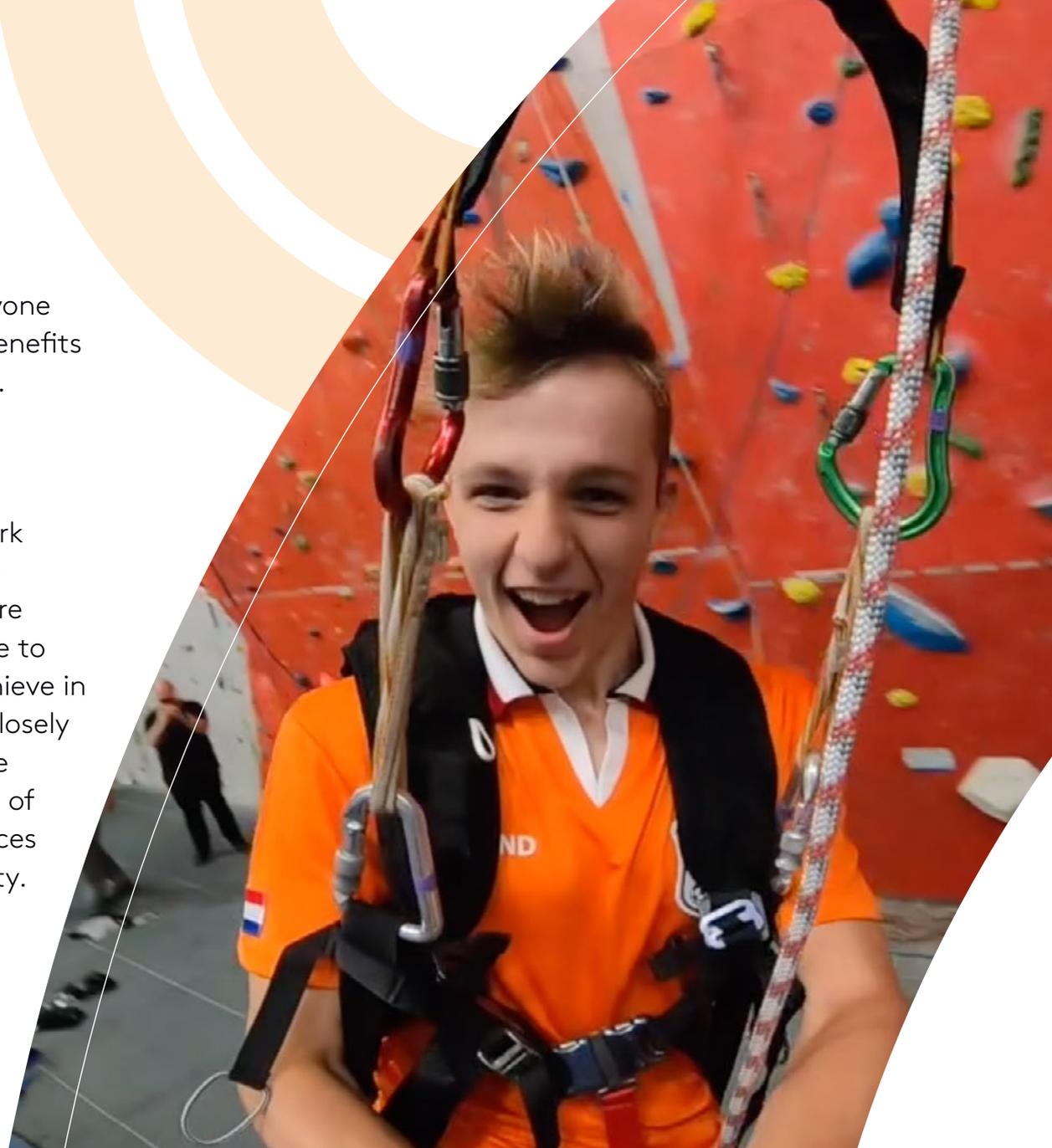
Background

Vision

An active Ireland where everyone can experience the lifelong benefits of sport and physical activity.

Mission

Sport Ireland will focus its work on ensuring that Ireland is an active nation where people are encouraged to start, continue to participate, progress and achieve in sport. Key to this is working closely with our partners, to optimise the effectiveness and impact of the agencies, people and places providing sporting opportunity.



Sport Ireland Core Values



Inclusion:

We are 'all-in' fostering an inclusive environment in everything we do, welcoming and valuing people from all backgrounds, seeking out diverse opinions.



Integrity:

We do what we say, we say what we do, pursuing our work in an honest and ethical manner.



Respect:

We value ourselves and others, acting with kindness and fairness in all that we do.



Excellence:

We deliver to the best of our ability and to the highest standards, developing world class systems and services, underpinned by continuous improvement.



Accountability:

Our decision-making is evidence based, and we are open and transparent in what and how we do things.

Sport Ireland's Participation Plan is firmly rooted in the priorities of the Sport Ireland Statement of Strategy (2023-2027), Sport Ireland Coaching Plan (2020-2025), Sport Ireland Research Strategy (2021-2027), Sport Ireland Diversity and Inclusion Policy, the Irish Government's National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, the Governance Code for Sport, and the Sports Action Plan (2024-2027).

Introduction

Every day, in communities across the country, Sport Ireland continues to help people get active by removing barriers to participation in sport and physical activity through our network of Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) and National Governing Bodies (NGBs). Sport Ireland's network of LSPs, NGBs and other funded bodies are key partners of Sport Ireland in fulfilling its mission ensuring that "Ireland is an active nation where people are encouraged to start, continue to participate, progress and achieve in sport" and share Sport Ireland's passion in getting Ireland physically active, involved in sport and ensuring everyone in the community has the chance to be included.

Sport plays a vital role in the health, well-being, and social fabric of Ireland. Recognising its profound benefits, the Irish Government, through the National Sports Policy 2018-2027, has set ambitious targets to increase participation in sport and physical activity across the population. Sport Ireland, as the statutory authority responsible for the development of sport, is committed to leading this endeavour.

This Participation Plan for 2025-2027 is a critical component in achieving these national objectives. It builds upon the foundational principles and strategic objectives outlined in the **Sport Ireland Statement of Strategy (2023-2027)**, which champions increased participation with a particular focus on diversity and inclusion.

It integrates the detailed guidance from the **Sport Ireland Coaching Plan (2020-2025)** and the principles for **sustainable officiating development**, recognising the pivotal role of quality coaching and officiating in fostering positive experiences and lifelong engagement.

Furthermore, it is underpinned by the rigorous, evidence-based approach of the **Sport Ireland Research Strategy (2021-2027)** and the commitment to equitable access and opportunity enshrined in the **Sport Ireland Diversity and Inclusion Policy**.

The Irish Government's **National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (Embracing Ireland's Outdoors 2023-2027)** is also a key informing document, highlighting the importance of accessible, inclusive, and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities.

The integrity and effectiveness of the sports sector are also ensured through adherence to the **Governance Code for Sport**.

Finally, this plan directly operationalises the specific initiatives and enhanced focus areas identified in the **Sports Action Plan 2024-2027**, ensuring a coordinated and impactful approach to sports development across the nation.



Review of Participation Plan 2021 - 2024

The first Sport Ireland Participation Plan was established in 2021 and ran until 2024. It was built on and guided by the National Sports Policy 2018-2027 (NSP) and the Sport Ireland Strategy 2018-2022. The Participation Plan also took into consideration Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025 and the National Physical Activity Plan. The plan also took account of global and national developments.

This plan, although guided by the above strategies, also included a number of actions that sat outside national policies and aimed to advocate for change within a number of government policies to increase participation levels in every age group.

It followed the principles of the World Health Organisation's Global Action Plan on Physical Activity whilst expanding the environment within which sport and physical activity happens across Ireland. The full plan is accessible at www.sportireland.ie/participation-plan

The plan was extensively monitored internally via progress reports presented to the Research & Participation sub-committee and Sport Ireland's Board twice per year.

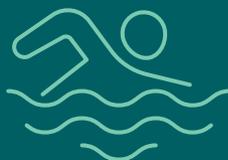
It is important to note the achievements of the 2021-2024 Plan. 49% of the population took part in sport on a weekly basis in 2024, up from 40% in 2021. This welcome recovery in participation rates following the impact of Covid-19 means that in 2024, 2.09 million people participated in sport on a regular basis.

The increase in sports participation is buoyed by the increasing number of teenagers and young adults in Ireland, who have the highest sports participation rates of all age groups. This is complemented by middle aged and older people who are sustaining their sports participation rates as they age. Despite the growth in population (9.8% since 2018) the latest figures remain on track with Sport Ireland projections. The expectation is that we should reach an adult active participation rate of 50% by 2027, which equates to an additional 200,000 people participating in sport. Levels of adult sedentarism also decreased over the life of the Plan from 18% in 2021 to 15% in 2024.

However, it is notable, and concerning that participation gradients remain for gender disability, age and socioeconomic status. The difference in active sports participation rates between the ABC1 and C2DE social classes is the same as 2023 and 2019 at 19 percentage points. The gradient in participation for those with disabilities increased from 20 percentage points in 2023 to 22 percentage points in 2024. In addition, the difference in active sports participation rates of those aged over 35 with those aged under 35 increased to 26 percentage points in 2024 up from 24 percentage points in 2023.

The 2021-2024 Plan was delivered throughout the height of the Covid-19 pandemic therefore a small number of actions that were delayed due to the limited resources available to deliver at the time.





49%

**PARTICIPATION
LEVEL IN 2024**

(UP FROM 40% IN 2021)



2.09m

**ACTIVE ADULTS
REGULARLY
PARTICIPATING**



15%

**SEDENTARY
LEVEL**

(DOWN FROM 18% IN 2021)



**YOUTH
LEADING**

HIGHEST ACTIVITY
LEVELS



**OLDER ADULTS
ACTIVE**

PARTICIPATION
SUSTAINED WITH AGE



**POPULATION
GROWTH**

INCREASE 9.8%
PARTICIPATION
KEPT PACE

Due to limited resources and the priorities that arose during Covid-19, the following outstanding actions from the 2021-2024 Plan will be added to the Participation Plan 2025 to 2027:

Outstanding actions:

- Support the sports sector in overcoming barriers in accessing school and community sports infrastructure including access to the necessary insurance cover.
- Identify and implement solutions to transport challenges that occur in accessing facilities after school.
- Develop initiatives and the necessary supports to motivate and incentivise private and public exercise facilities and services to focus on tackling the gradients in sports participation.
- Invest in NGBs and LSPs to collaborate with businesses, state agencies and organisations to co-create a culture of active workplaces.
- Identify and support innovative solutions to support sports participation in rural areas where distance and transport to facilities may present a barrier to regular sports participation.

Participation 2025 - 2027

Sport Ireland has committed to significantly increase participation levels across all demographics in Ireland by implementing evidence-based strategies, empowering quality coaching, and fostering collaborative partnerships, thereby contributing to the targets of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027.



This plan has been developed under the following guiding principles:

- **Inclusivity & Diversity:** Actively promote sport for all, focusing on removing barriers and increasing engagement among underrepresented groups.
- **Quality Coaching and Officiating:** Recognise and invest in coaching and officiating as a cornerstone of participation, ensuring accessible, high-quality, and participant-centred practices at all levels.
- **Evidence-Based Approach:** Utilise robust research, monitoring, and evaluation to inform decision-making, measure impact, and adapt strategies for maximum effectiveness.
- **Collaboration & Partnership:** Foster strong alliances with LSPs, NGBs, government departments, Local Authorities, Educational Institutes and other key national and local stakeholders to deliver integrated and impactful programmes.
- **Lifelong Engagement:** Support pathways that encourage individuals to participate in sport and physical activity from childhood through adulthood, promoting long-term commitment and enjoyment.
- **Sustainability:** Ensure the sports sector's capacity and infrastructure are sustainable and adaptable to future needs, including environmental considerations and responsible use of natural outdoor spaces.

The actions below aim to increase participation in sport and physical activity. Each action will target the above groups as a priority and addressing as many barriers as possible to support more people across all age groups getting active and sustaining participation.

Evidence from European Countries with higher participation rates show that the levels of outdoor sports and recreation are higher than in Ireland and given the post Covid-19 interest in the outdoors and society's drive for better mental health through nature connectedness, outdoor sports and outdoor recreation is given priority in this plan to capitalise on the public interest, along with ensuring the outdoor sector has a more aligned approach to participation.

The work of all LSPs and NGBs will remain central to the core delivery of participation.







Strategic Pillars and Key Actions

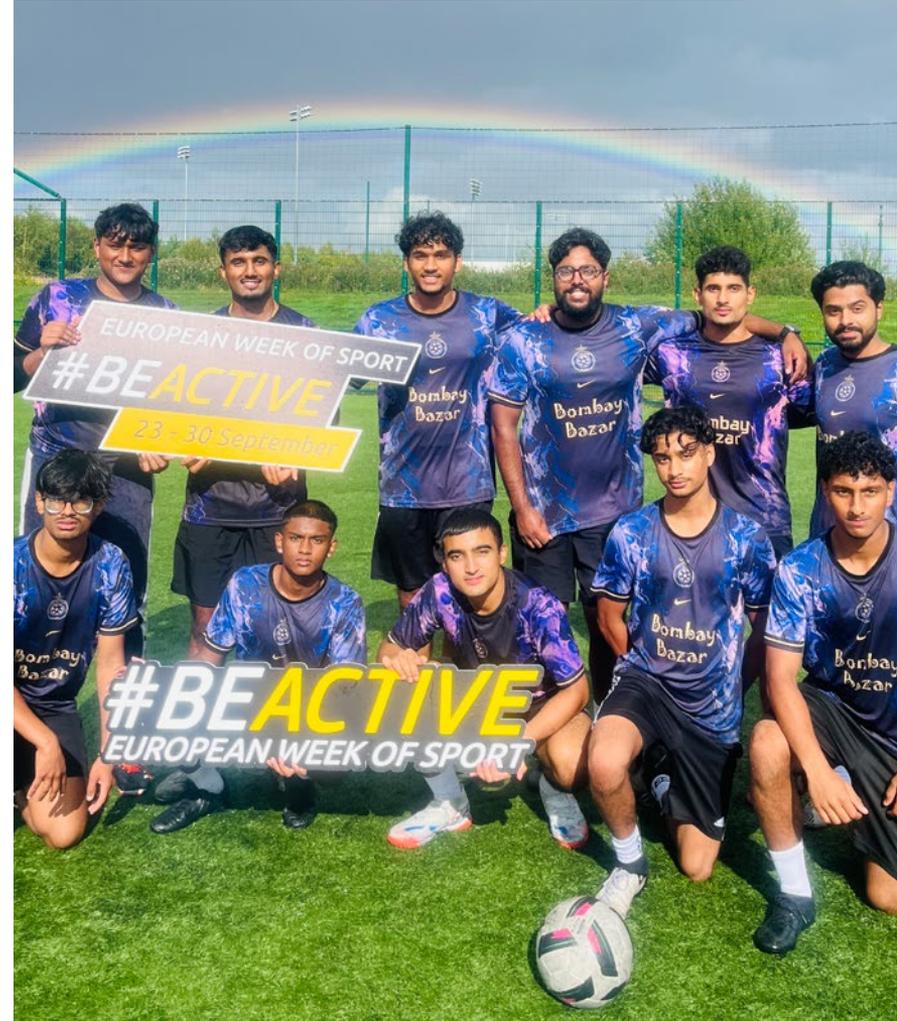
Pillar 1: Broadening Participation and Enhancing Access

Objective: Increase active participation in sport, physical activity and social participation, with a specific focus on closing participation gaps, outdoor recreation and advocating for better facility access.

Key Actions:

Targeted Programmes for Underrepresented Groups:

- Continue to develop and implement innovative programmes tailored to underrepresented groups, addressing specific barriers to participation and promoting gender equality in sport.
- Drive and coordinate initiatives, review disability sport funding, and enhance opportunities for people with disabilities through the work of Disability in Sport Lead at Sport Ireland, Active Disability Ireland, LSPs and NGBs.
- Design and roll out initiatives to increase participation among socially and economically disadvantaged communities which drive social change through programmes like Sport4Empowerment, Physical Activity for Health, Community Sport Development, Sport Inclusion.
- Promote inclusive practices within LSPs and NGBs, providing resources and training on diversity and inclusion.
- Work with NGBs which have schools' development officers in achieving our goals in schools.





Community and School Linkages:

- Support the comprehensive roll-out of Local Sports Plans in each Local Authority area, ensuring they align with national participation targets and local needs therefore underpinning the development of appropriate facilities (including active spaces) for disadvantaged communities to be more active.
- Support the development of post primary school specific sports sector collaborative programmes and initiatives with associated funding streams to increase the levels of participation in these age groups
- Strengthen the linkage between sporting bodies and schools whilst promoting participation from a young age through initiatives like the Active School Flag programme.
- Advocate for maximum community access to sports facilities in schools, making existing infrastructure more available for public use.

Outdoor Recreation Opportunities:

- Collaborate with relevant agencies and stakeholders to support the sustainable development and management of outdoor recreation facilities and services as outlined in the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy.
- Promote awareness and responsible engagement with outdoor opportunities, encouraging increased participation in activities such as walking, cycling, swimming and water sports.
- Support participation initiatives in Outdoor NGBs to drive engagement in outdoor sports.
- Support initiatives that improve access to the outdoors for all, especially young people and underrepresented groups.

Pillar 2: Elevating the Quality and Impact of Coaching and Officiating

Objective: Ensure trained, qualified, and inspiring coaches and officials for every participant, fostering positive experiences that encourage lifelong engagement.

Key Actions:

Coach and Official Education and Development:

- Implement and continuously review accessible education, training, and qualifications for all coaches and officials.
- Broaden the coaching and officiating bases to actively recruit and support more individuals from underrepresented groups into coaching and officiating roles.
- Promote the development of strong interpersonal skills in coaches and officials, particularly for those working with children and beginners, emphasising behaviour and attitudes over purely technical skills at entry level.

Coach and Officials' Recognition and Support:

- Raise the profile and recognition of coaches and officials across all levels of sport.
- Develop and implement appropriate and accessible support systems for both new and experienced coaches and officials, including mentoring and communities of practice.
- Ensure common national standards for coach education, training, and awards are upheld and promoted.
- Ensure the work of Respect the Officials working group is implemented, placing officials on equal footing as participants.



SPORTS IRELAND

REFEREE

Volleyball Ireland

FIVB

Senoh

REFEREE

Volleyball Ireland

Senoh

Pillar 3: Empowering Volunteers and Promoting Social Participation

Objective: Develop the volunteering in sport sector and increase social participation through club membership.

Key Actions:

Volunteer Development:

- Implement initiatives derived from Sport Ireland's Policy on Volunteering in Sport, supporting recruitment, training, and retention of volunteers.
- In collaboration with Volunteer Ireland, develop flexible and accessible training and development opportunities for volunteers, recognising changing engagement patterns.
- Raise awareness of the vital role of volunteers in sports delivery and participation at all levels.

Club and Event Engagement:

- Support LSPs and NGBs in creating social participation initiatives aimed at increasing club membership.
- Foster an environment where social involvement in sport (e.g., through club membership or volunteering) is recognised and valued.



Pillar 4: Fostering Collaboration and Integrated Approaches

Objective: To strengthen strategic partnerships and operational collaboration across the Irish sports sector, ensuring integrated planning and funding streams and efficient delivery of participation initiatives.

Key Actions:

- **Cross-departmental Working Groups:** Establish and support working groups to drive cross-sectoral initiatives. Support the delivery of cross-government priorities ensuring they align with national participation targets.
- **Joint Planning and Resource Sharing:** Promote and facilitate joint planning, co-funded projects between LSPs and NGBs, coordinate participation across the sector, shared resources from LSPs, NGBs, Higher Education Institutes, and other funded bodies to leverage expertise and optimise impact.
- Work with latest **technology and innovation** to improve access to support participation opportunities
- **Governance for Collaboration:** Strengthen governance structures and reporting mechanisms to create stronger systems for collaboration to thrive
- **Promote sustainable practices in sport development**, considering environmental impact and long-term viability. Connecting communities and local government to sustainable practices in facility development
- **Promoting Get Ireland Active** as the central point for providing essential participation information to the public as well as an analysis and planning tool for key stakeholders and government departments for better decision making and stronger targeted policies for participation.

Communications

An important element to achieve success in this plan will be to deliver an appropriate awareness and communication plan to support the plan. Working with Sport Ireland's Communications team and the LSP Network Communications Team, this plan will utilise effective and coordinated campaigns to support delivery of the priorities of the plan.

Key actions:

- Develop targeted communication campaigns for each underrepresented group, highlighting specific programme benefits and success stories.
- Create accessible and inclusive communication materials (e.g., easy-read formats, various languages, visual aids) for programmes targeting people with disabilities and disadvantaged communities.
- Launch public awareness campaigns about the importance of community and school sports facility access, leveraging local media and community channels.
- Develop a national campaign promoting outdoor recreation, featuring diverse activities and emphasising the health and well-being benefits as well as key messages regarding responsible behaviour in the outdoors.
- Promote Get Ireland Active as the place to access information about how to get active in Ireland.
- Create a communications strategy for the "Respect the Officials" initiative, utilising public service announcements, social media, and educational materials for clubs and spectators.
- Promote success stories of coaches and officials through Sport Ireland's channels and partner networks.
- Launch a national campaign to celebrate and recruit sports volunteers, showcasing the diverse roles and benefits of volunteering and working with the Federation of Irish Sport and other key stakeholders (including workplaces) to align priorities.

Measuring and Reporting

Progress against this Participation Plan will be continuously monitored using quantitative data from the Irish Sports Monitor and qualitative insights from programme evaluations. Working with Sport Ireland's Research and Evaluation team, this plan will utilise robust evidence to understand participation dynamics and barriers, evaluate programme effectiveness, and inform future policy and investment decisions.

Key actions:

Strategic Research and Monitoring:

- Lead and support research underpinned by behavioural science to understand motivations and barriers to sport and physical activity, informing effective behaviour change interventions.
- Actively share insights and findings from research with LSPs, NGBs and the wider sports sector to facilitate evidence-informed planning.
- Collaborate with the Office of the Planning Regulator on data development and to monitor and thereby reduce distances to sport and recreational facilities for communities with a particular focus on the needs of children, older adults and persons with disabilities.
- Under the leadership of the Department of Taoiseach, participate in the cross-government research initiative with key civil society partners to reduce the barriers to participation in sport for children living in poverty.

Rigorous Evaluation:

- Implement the Sport Ireland Research and Evaluation Policy, focusing on answering “what works, for whom, under what conditions” for all participation initiatives ensuring that evaluation informs our practice and that of our partners.
- Review participants’ experiences of Sport Ireland-funded services and programmes to gather qualitative insights into engagement and retention.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) by 2027

Key Performance Indicator	2024	2027
Adult participation rate	49%	50%*
Participation gradient between men and women	2.8%	0%
Adult social participation rate (volunteering, club membership, event attendance)	46%	55%
Participation among individuals with a long-term illness or disability	32%	40%
Develop an accurate baseline of engagement in outdoor recreation activities	To be established	+15%
Participation among the three lowest income groups	37%	40%
Number of qualified and active coaches and officials across all levels	250,000+ active coaches Officials number to be established	
Number of Local Sports Plans implemented and actively contributing to participation targets	7	31
Establish a baseline and increase the number of targeted programmes for underrepresented groups delivered and evaluated through initiatives like ESF+ programme	To be established	+15%
Number of public users for Get Ireland Active per month	1,500	10,000
Number of instances when Get Ireland Active is embedded in policy development and delivery at Government and Local Government levels	4	6

*The above percentage targets account for the estimated growth in population.
It is expected that Ireland's population will reach 5.55million in 2027 (CSO statistical release, 16 July 2024).*



This comprehensive Participation Plan will be underpinned by an extensive action plan with clear targets and timelines. It will be rigorously monitored internally and by the Board of Sport Ireland on a regular basis.

This Participation Plan will guide Sport Ireland and its partners in creating a truly active and inclusive sporting landscape across Ireland for the benefit of all based on appropriate investment and resources available to deliver.





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