



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

IRISH SPORTS MONITOR 2025

SUMMARY RESEARCH REPORT





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Introduction

This report outlines the key findings from the **Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) 2025**.

The ISM is a nationally representative population survey conducted to track changes in sport, exercise and physical activity in Ireland. Key measures monitored by the ISM include active sport participation, club membership, volunteering and event attendance as well as overall physical activity levels. The ISM also assesses recreational walking, and walking or cycling as modes of transportation.

Fieldwork for ISM 2025 took place throughout the year and included interviews with **8,529 participants** aged 16 and older.



1. Progress Towards Targets

Progress towards 2027 targets remains on track across most of the metrics. Eliminating the gender gap is a particular challenge, evidenced by the slight deterioration in this measure over the past year.

These indicators track progress against participation targets of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027. While the absolute number of people who actively and socially participate in sport continues to trend upwards, the percentage of the population participating in sport shows no significant change due to population growth. The gender participation gap remains the most resistant indicator, reinforcing the need for targeted actions under the Sports Action Plan 2024-2027 to support sustained and increased participation for females.

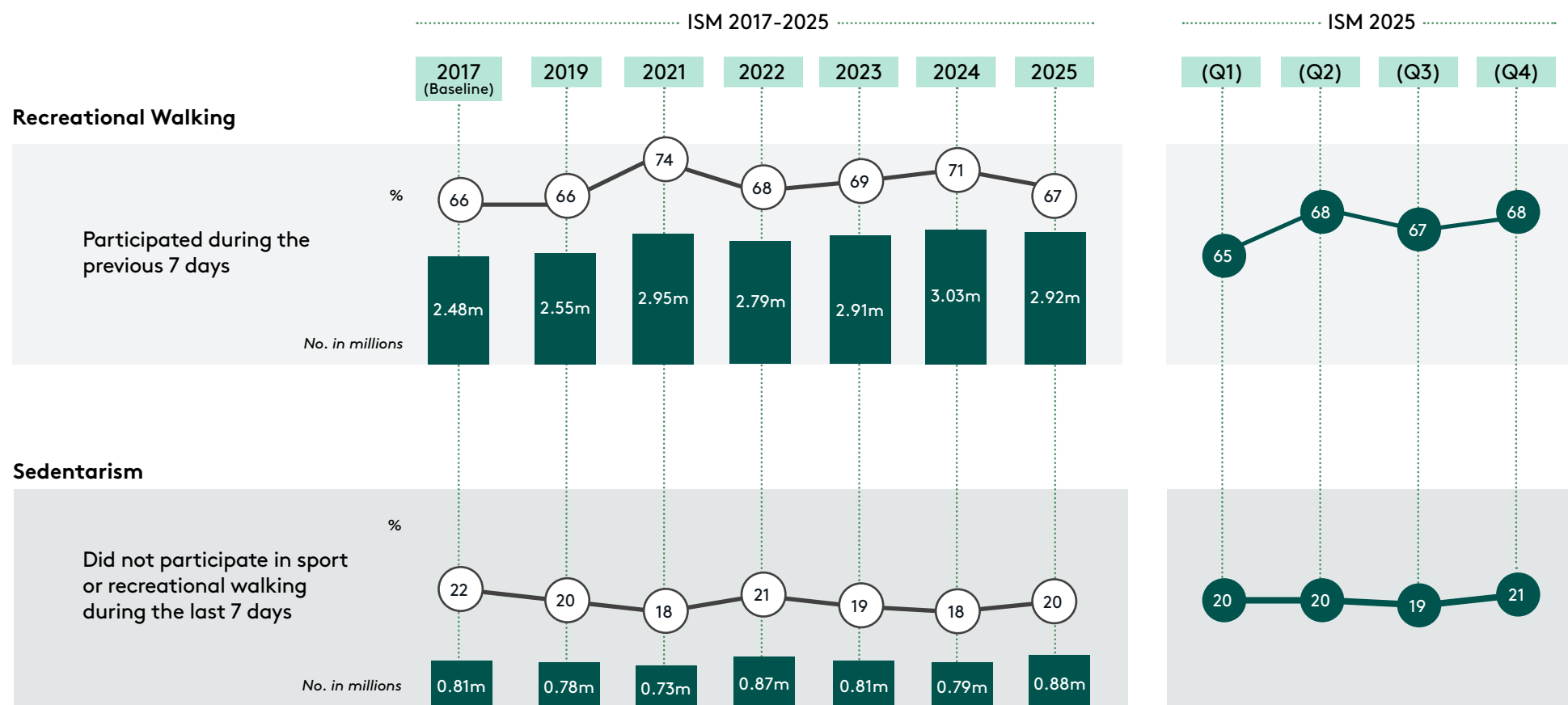


2. Recreational Walking and Adult Sedentarism

Weekly sports participation rates show no statistically significant difference to 2024 and remain ahead of pre-pandemic levels, however weekly recreational walking rates have declined significantly by 4 percentage points compared to 2024, returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Recreational walking is a key contributor to overall physical activity levels and an important indicator of population health. The 2025 decline in weekly walking, alongside increases in sedentarism, highlights a risk to participation momentum and underscores the strategic importance of locally delivered programmes and activation through Local Sports Plans to avoid any further decline in recreational walking rates. Sport policy makers and programme development managers should consider the demographics of the Irish population to address these challenges, with a particular focus on young people who have shown the greatest decline in walking rates.

Percentage No. of people (in millions)



3. Most Popular Sports and Physical Activities

No significant change in participation rates across most sports, with the exception of personal exercise which continues to grow in popularity with 1 in 5 people now participating on a weekly basis.

This page shows the activities most commonly undertaken in the past seven days, capturing how adults choose to be active. Continued growth in personal exercise reflects demand for flexible, individualised activity options, reflecting a growth in popularity with 1 in 5 people now participating in personal exercise on a weekly basis. This has implications for provision of sports facilities, programmes and lifelong participation. Otherwise, there has been no significant change in participation rates across most other forms of sport which continue to grow participation numbers in line with participation growth.

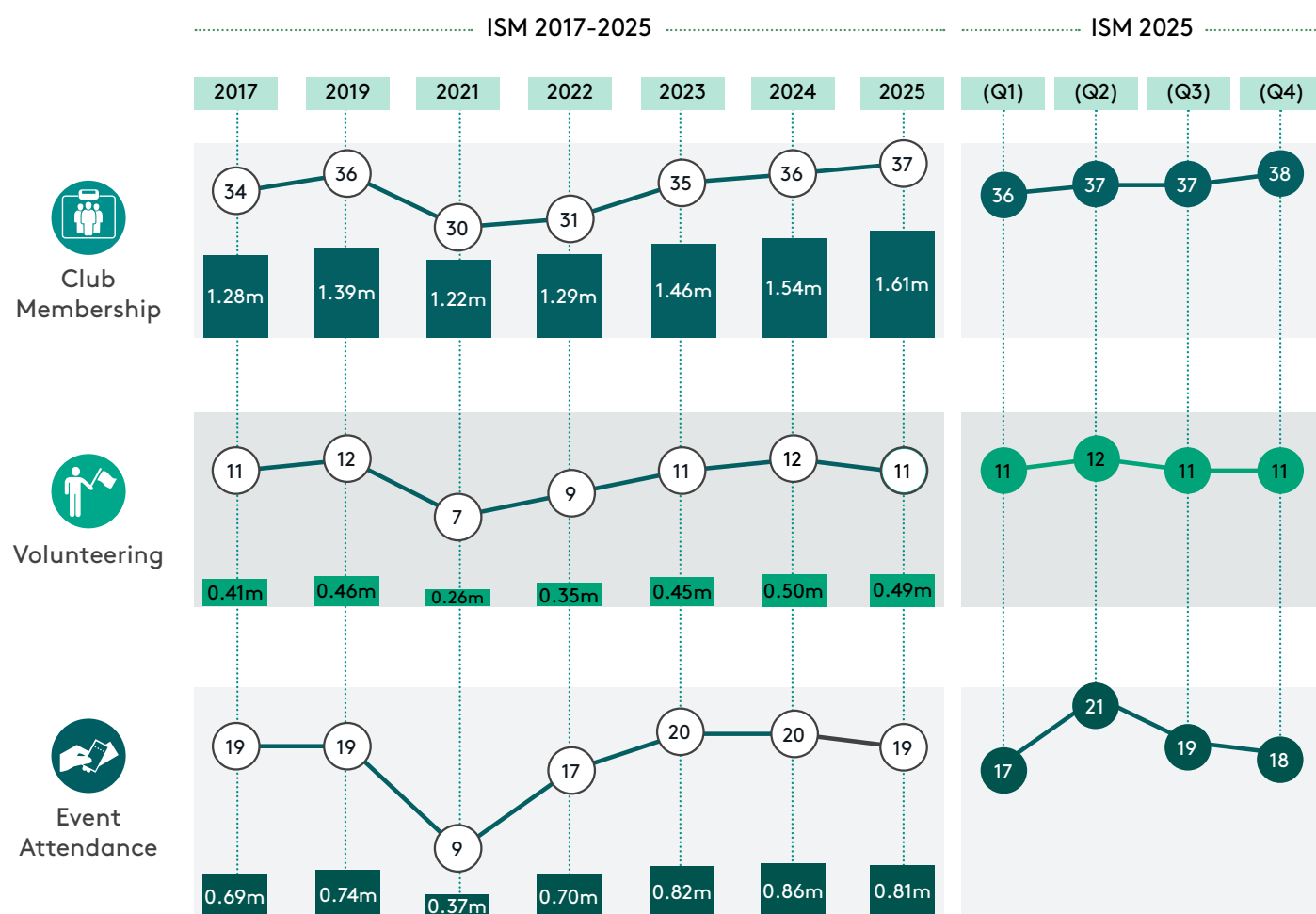
Weekly Prevalence (%) by Types of Sport and Physical Activities Participated



4. Social Participation in Sport

The levels of social participation have grown consistently over the past 4 years and in all cases are aligned with pre-pandemic levels.

Social participation in sport captures broader engagement with sport through club membership, volunteering and event attendance. The levels of social participation have grown consistently over the past 4 years and in all cases are equivalent to or higher than pre-pandemic levels. Rising social participation supports the ambition of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027 to strengthen the role of sport in communities, while also aligning with Sports Action Plan 2024-2027 priorities on volunteering and system capacity.

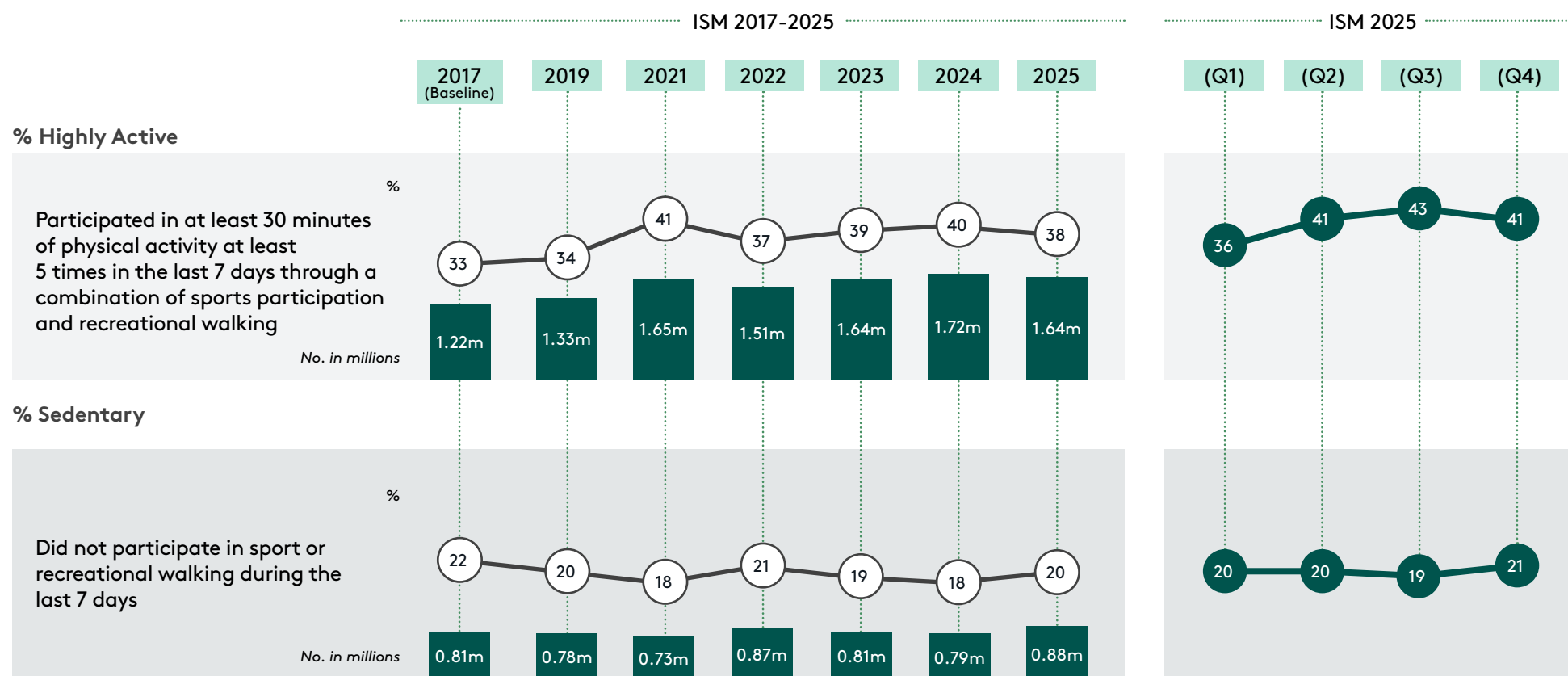


5. Overall Activity Levels

Two out of every five people are considered to be highly active through sport and recreational walking. The decline in percentage of highly active people and the increase in percentage of sedentary people between 2024 and 2025, is largely driven by the declines in recreational walking.

Overall activity status combines sport and recreational walking to classify adults as highly active or sedentary. Nearly two out of every five people are considered to be highly active through sport and recreational walking. The percent reduction in those who are “highly active” between 2024 and 2025 appears closely linked to the decline in recreational walking.

Sport policy makers and programme development managers should consider whole of society solutions using systems thinking to continue increasing physical activity rates and reducing sedentarism.

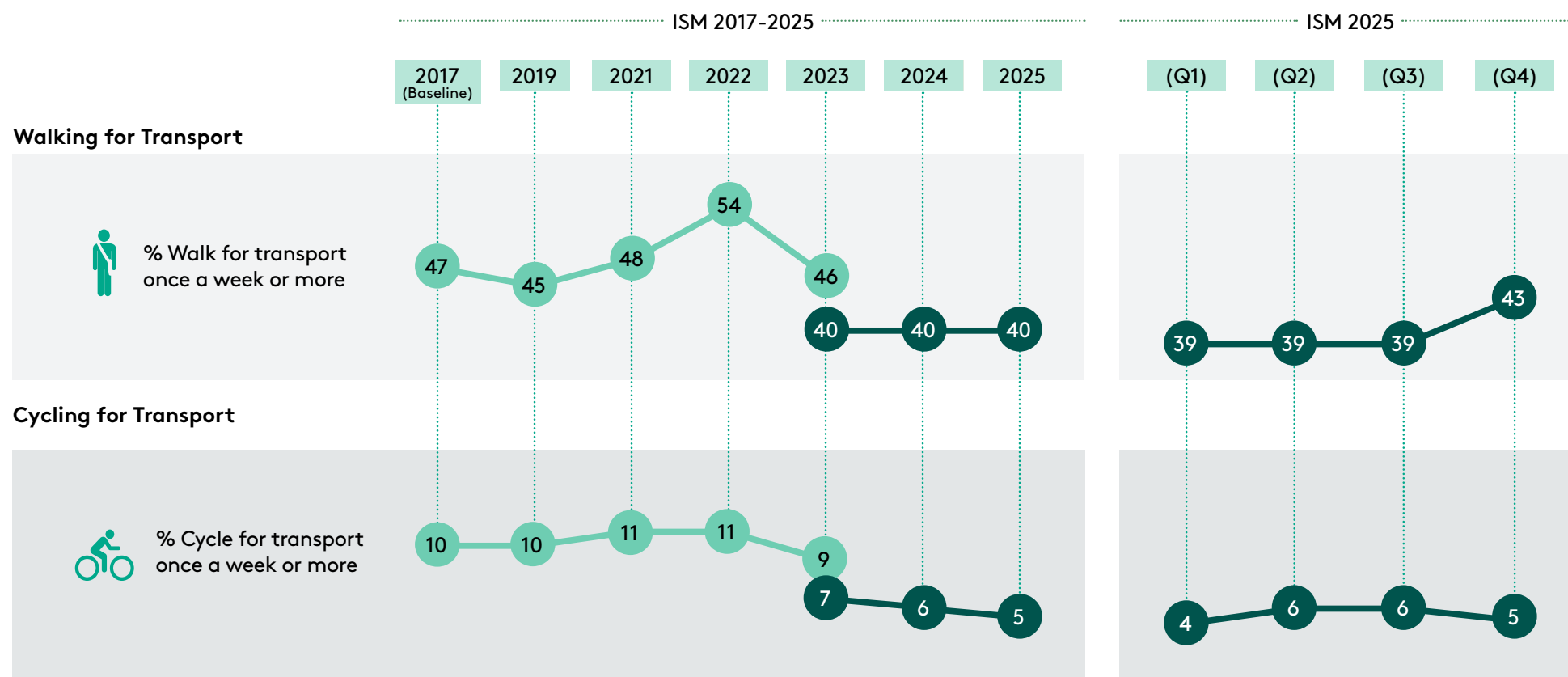


6. Walking and Cycling for Transport

New questions to measure walking and cycling for transport were included in the 2023 survey. The revised wording asked for the number of days during the previous week that the respondent has walked/cycled for transport for at least 30 minutes.

The proportion reporting one day or more is presented here, alongside historic data from 2017 to 2023 which asked whether or not the respondent regularly walks/cycles for transport once a week or more.

Two out of every five people walk for transport, while only one out of every twenty people cycle for transport. Active travel contributes to the wider active living agenda and provides actionable evidence for local planning and cross-sector collaboration.



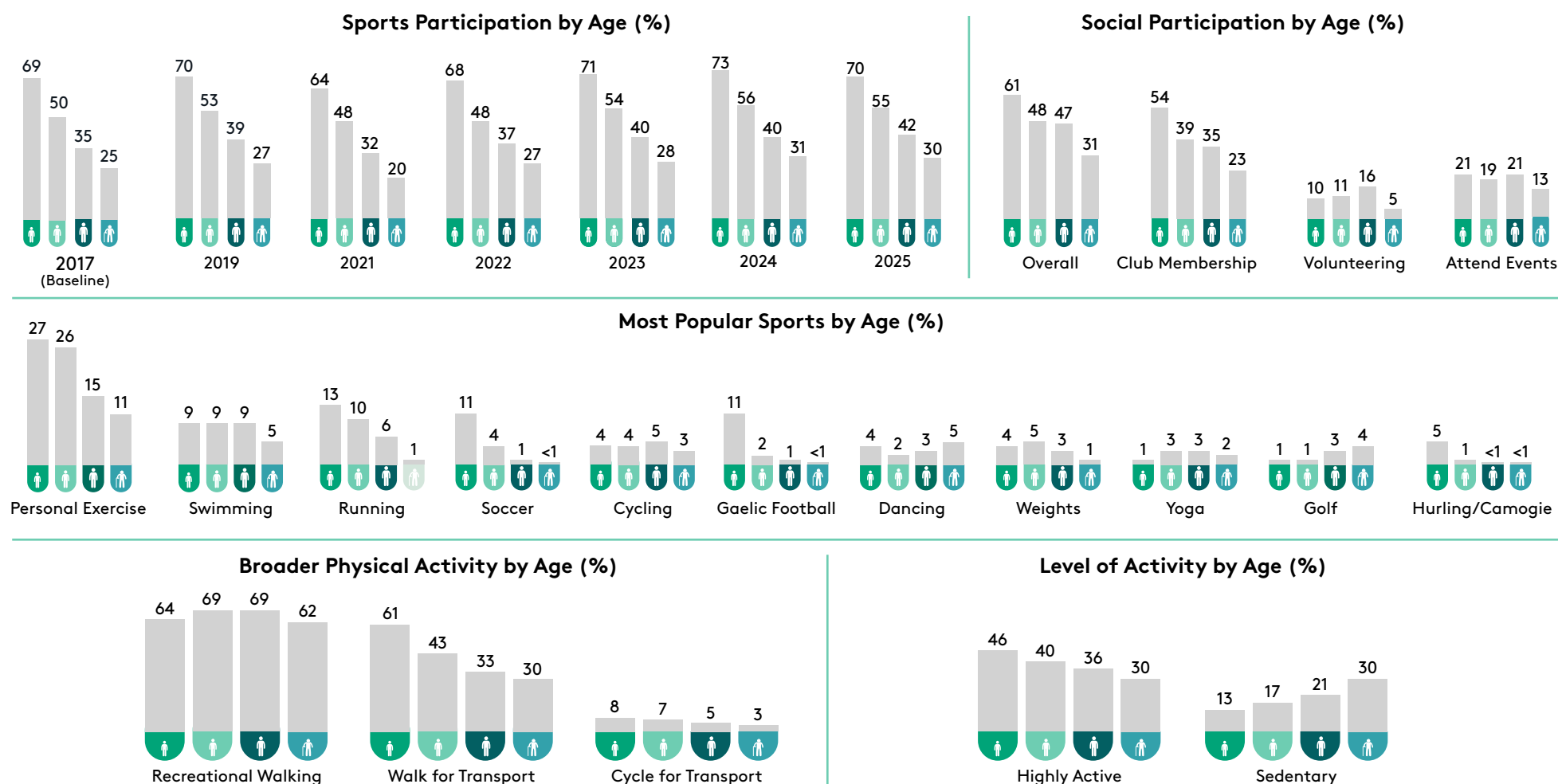
7. Spotlight on Age

This page explores various aspects of sport participation by age by comparing results across four age groups; 16-24 year olds, 25-44 year olds, 45-64 year olds and those aged 65 years and older. Participation and social involvement vary substantially across age groups, with notable drop-off at key life stages.

Compared to 2017 baselines, sports participation rates having increased significantly by 5 to 7 percentage points for all age groups except for 16-24 year olds, whose sports participation rates remain similar to that reported in 2017. Focusing on this young cohort to increase their sports participation rates will be critical to achieving long term sports policy targets.

Understanding these patterns supports the Sports Action Plan 2024-2027 focus on reducing teenage dropout, school-club links and age-appropriate pathways that sustain lifelong participation.

16-24 25-44 45-64 65+



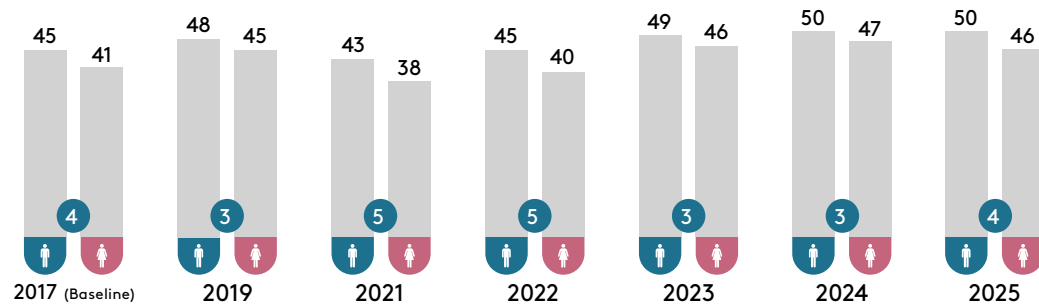
8. Spotlight on Gender

This page explores various aspects of sport participation by gender by comparing results across males and females. Gender differences persist across participation and social engagement in sport.

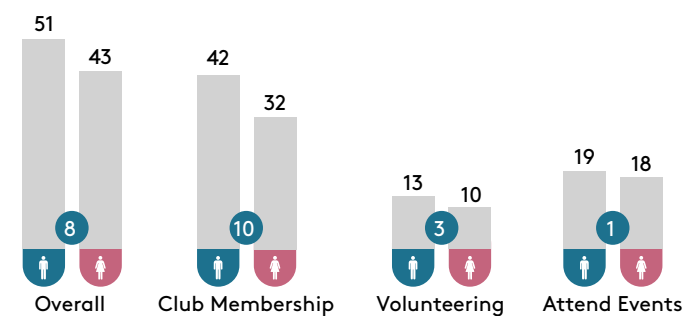
These findings directly inform the National Sports Policy 2018-2027 and Sports Action Plan 2024-2027 priorities to narrow the gender participation gap and guide targeted investment, programme design and visibility initiatives.

● Male ● Female ● Gender Gap

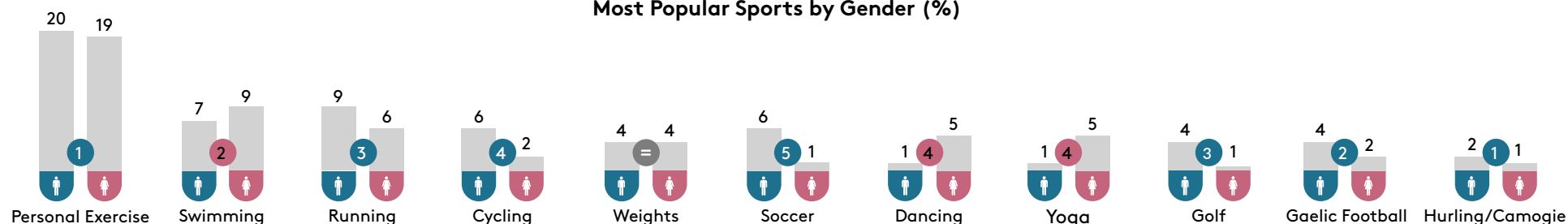
Sports Participation by Gender (%)



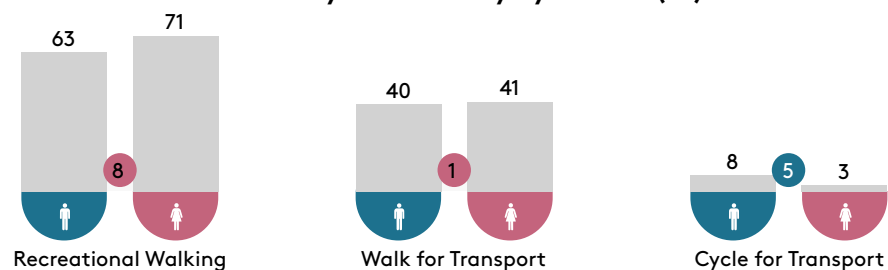
Social Participation by Gender (%)



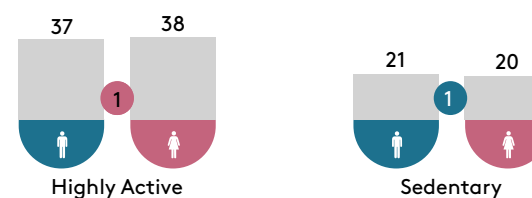
Most Popular Sports by Gender (%)



Broader Physical Activity by Gender (%)



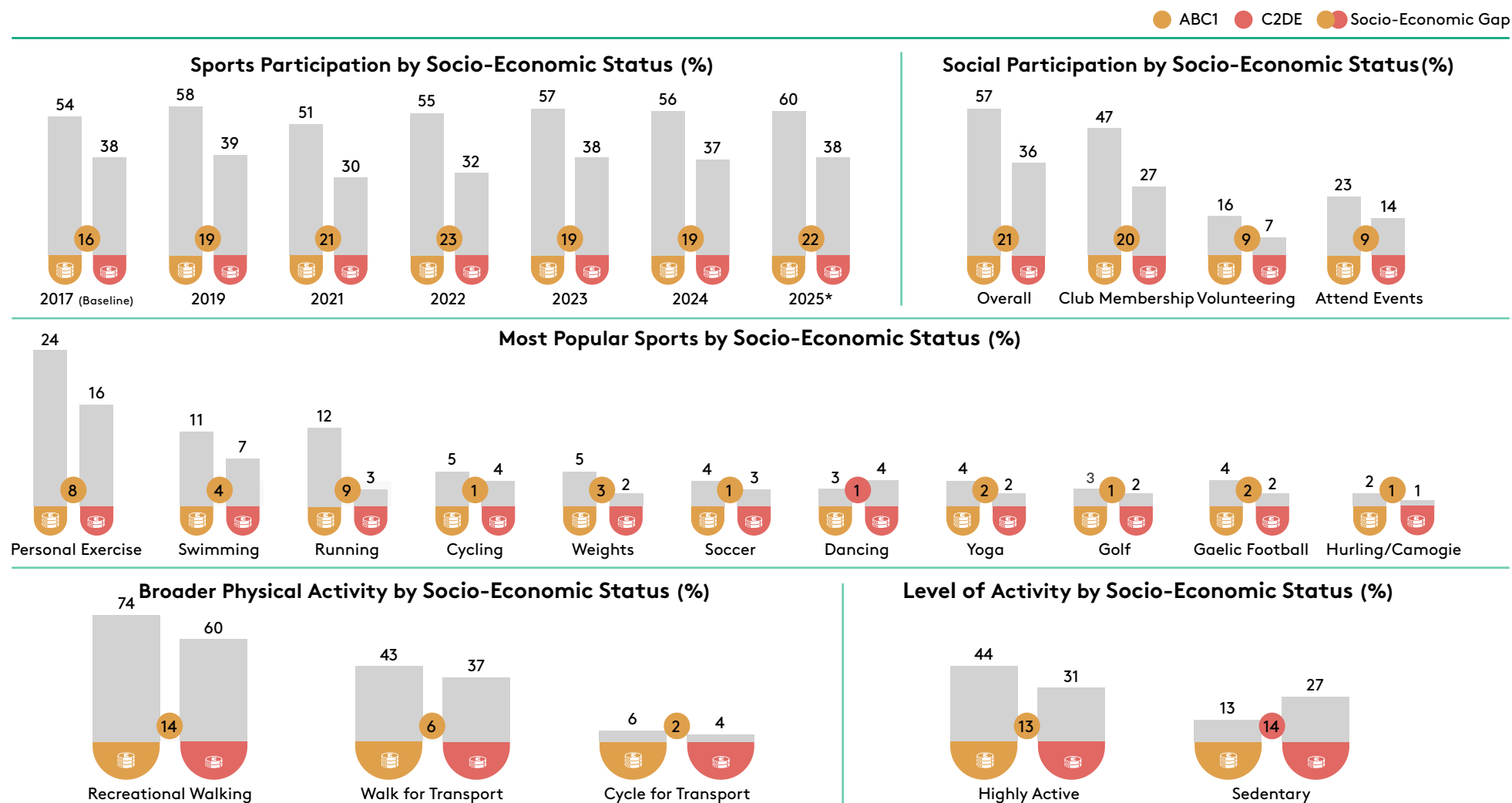
Level of Activity by Gender (%)



9. Spotlight on Socio-Economic Status

This page explores various aspects of sport participation by socio-economic status by comparing results across higher (ABC1s) and lower (C2DEs) socio-economic groups.

Clear socio-economic gradients remain across participation and activity levels, reflecting barriers related to cost, access and opportunity. Addressing these inequalities is central to a Sport for All approach and to the Sport Action Plan's emphasis on targeted, local delivery.



*There was a decline in participation among those not categorised to either socio-economic group that is larger than the aggregate change among ABC1 and C2DE groups.

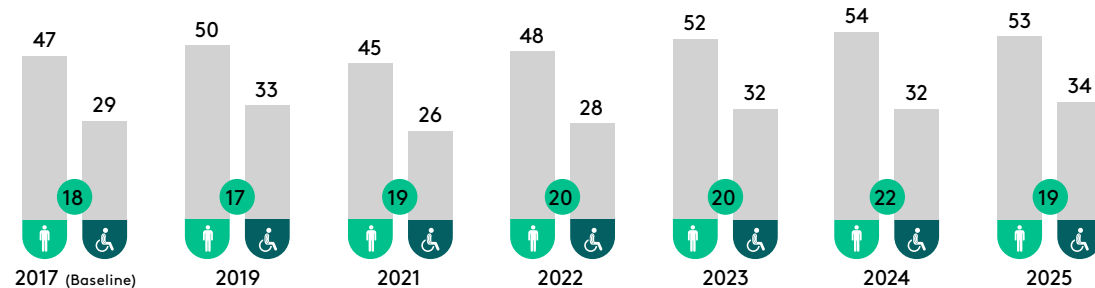
10. Spotlight on Disability

This page explores various aspects of sport participation by comparing results across those with a disability and those without a disability.

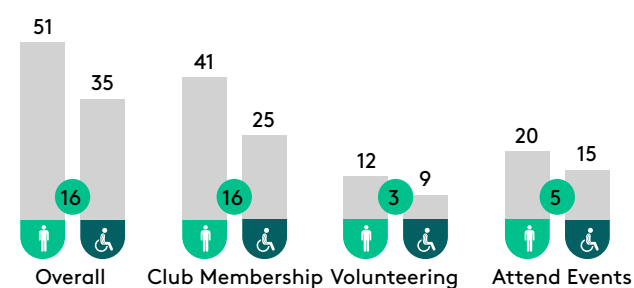
Adults with a disability remain less likely to participate in sport and physical activity. These findings provide a strong evidence base for the enhanced disability focus in the Sports Action Plan, including inclusive design, accessible facilities and tailored supports.

Without a Disability With a Disability Disability Gap

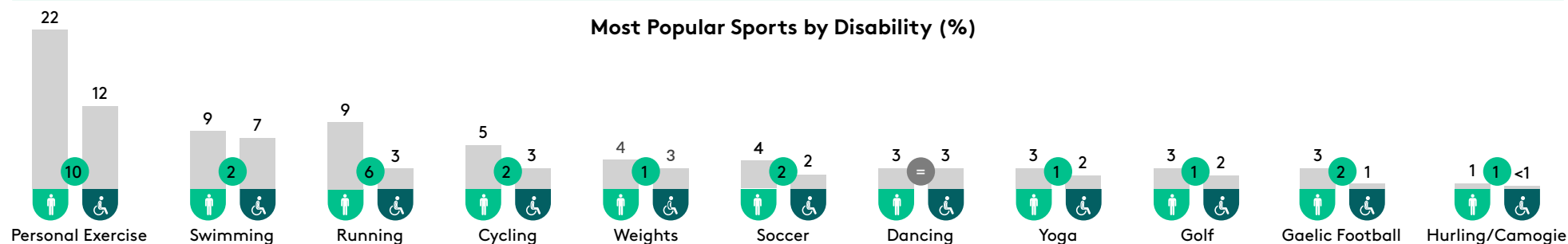
Sports Participation by Disability (%)



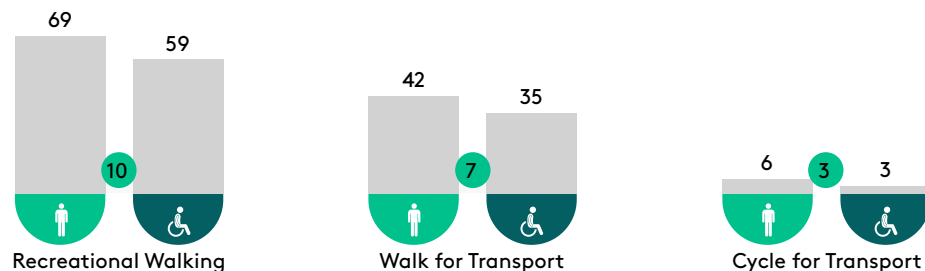
Social Participation by Disability (%)



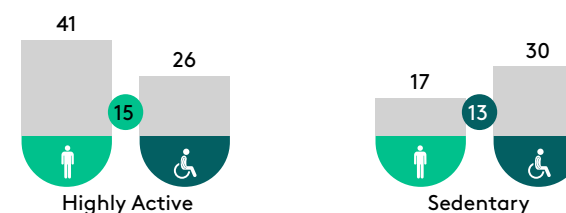
Most Popular Sports by Disability (%)



Broader Physical Activity by Disability (%)



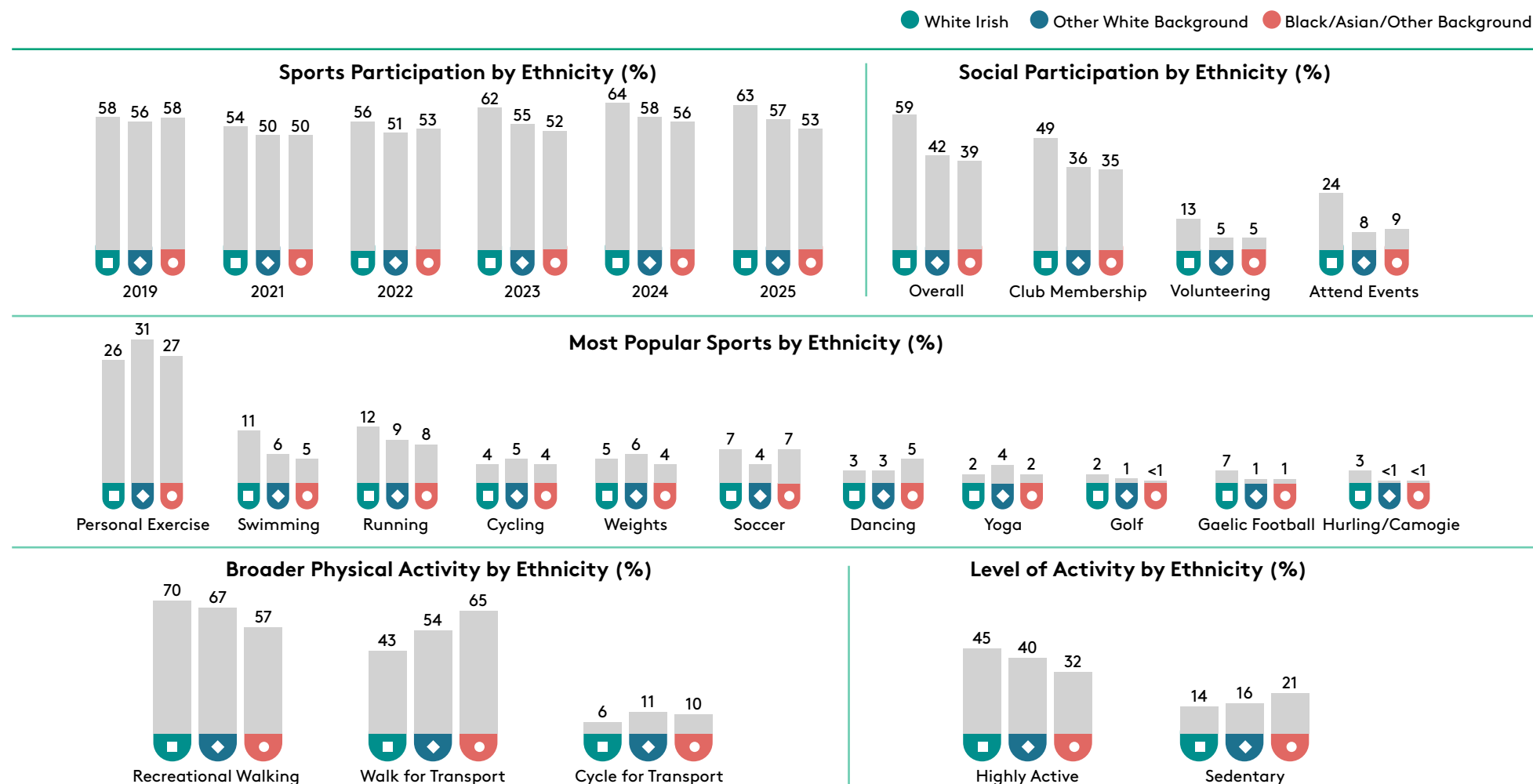
Level of Activity by Disability (%)



11. Spotlight on Ethnicity

This page explores various aspects of sport participation by ethnicity by comparing results across three groups; White Irish, Other White Background and Black/Asian/Other Background. To equalise the average age across the ethnic groups, results for ethnicity categories are based only on respondents aged under 45 years.*

Results for respondents aged under 45 illustrate differences in participation by ethnic background, while also reflecting sample size limitations for some groups. Monitoring these patterns supports inclusive participation objectives and informs culturally responsive provision and outreach.



*Due to the size of the sample of respondents identifying as Other White Background or Black/Asian/Other Background, the approximate margins of error on these groups are between 3 and 4%.

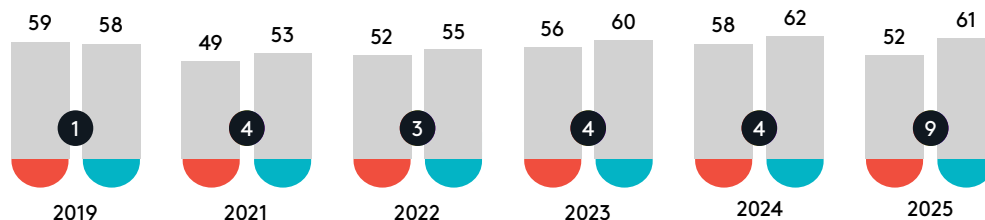
12. Spotlight on Participation by Sexual Orientation

This chart explores various aspects of sport participation by Sexual Orientation (based on under 45s)*. Between 2024 and 2025, the orientation gap has increased from 4 to 9 percentage points.

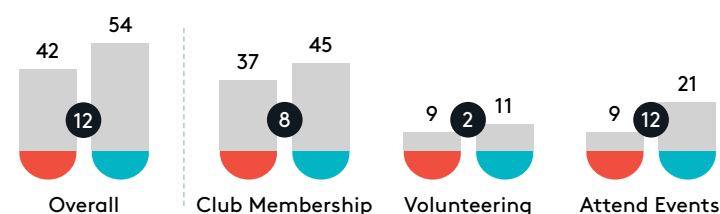
Participation trends by sexual orientation, presented for under-45s, highlight where disparities in participation and social engagement may exist. These insights support efforts to create safe, inclusive and welcoming sport environments that encourage sustained involvement.

● LGBTQ+ ● Heterosexual ● Orientation Gap

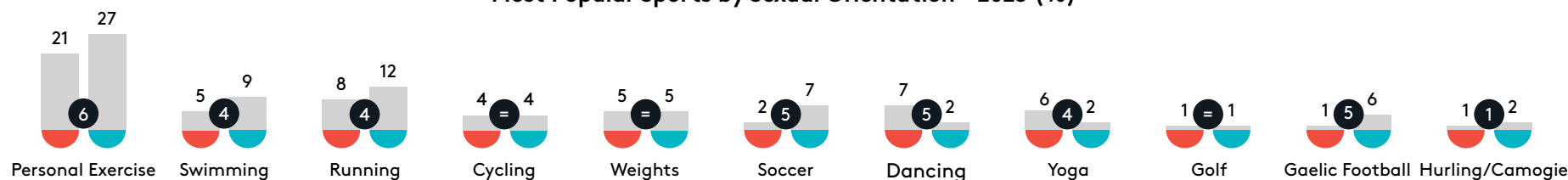
Sports Participation by Sexual Orientation - 2019-2025 (%)



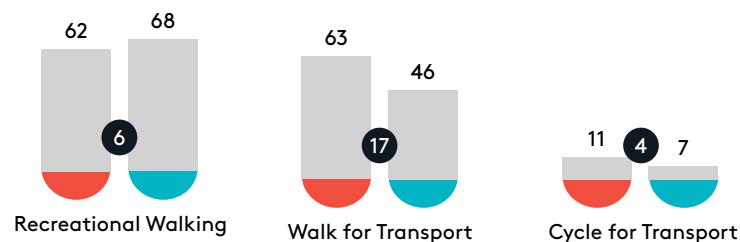
Social Participation by Sexual Orientation - 2025 (%)



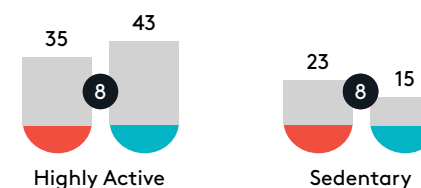
Most Popular Sports by Sexual Orientation - 2025 (%)



Broader Physical Activity by Sexual Orientation - 2025 (%)



Level of Activity by Sexual Orientation - 2025 (%)



*Due to the size of the sample of respondents identifying as LGBTQI+, the approximate margin of error on this group is roughly 4%.

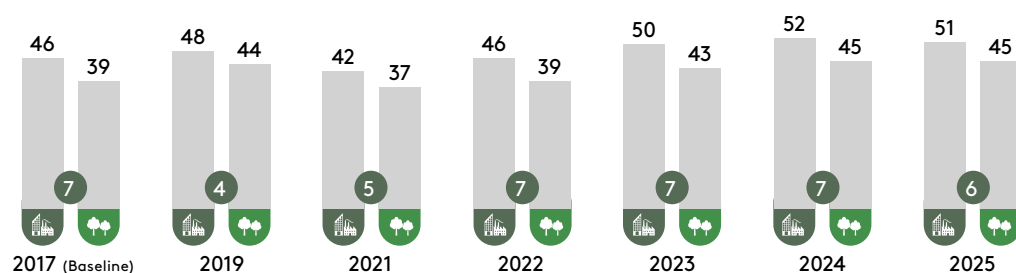
13. Spotlight on Urban-Rural Communities

This page explores various aspects of sport participation by location by comparing results across those living in urban and rural areas.

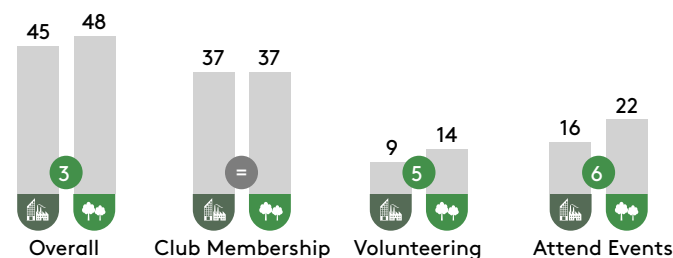
Urban-rural differences reflect variations in access to facilities, transport and natural environments as well as demographic differences such as age, where urban populations tend to be younger than rural populations. The findings reinforce the importance of Local Sports Plans in tailoring opportunities to local context and ensuring participation gains are shared geographically.

Urban Rural Location Gap

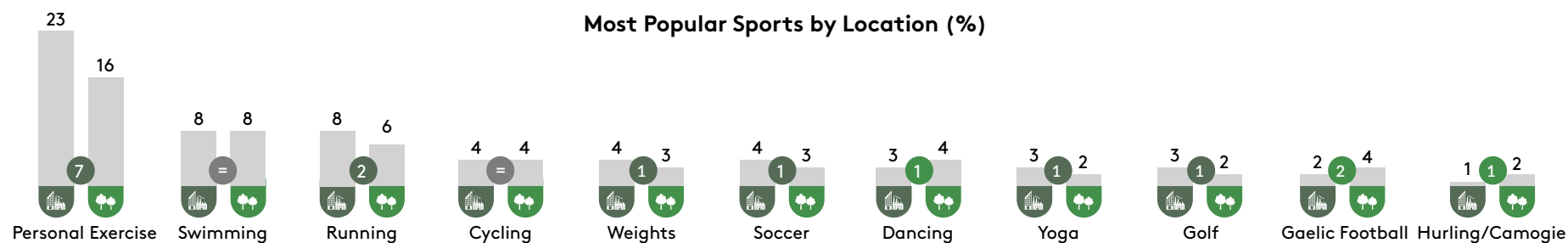
Sports Participation by Location (%)



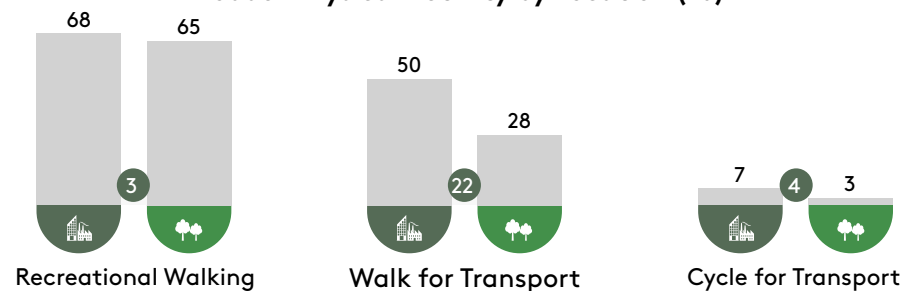
Social Participation by Location (%)



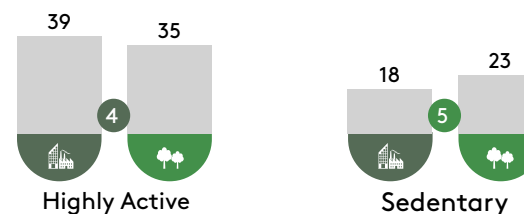
Most Popular Sports by Location (%)



Broader Physical Activity by Location (%)



Level of Activity by Location (%)

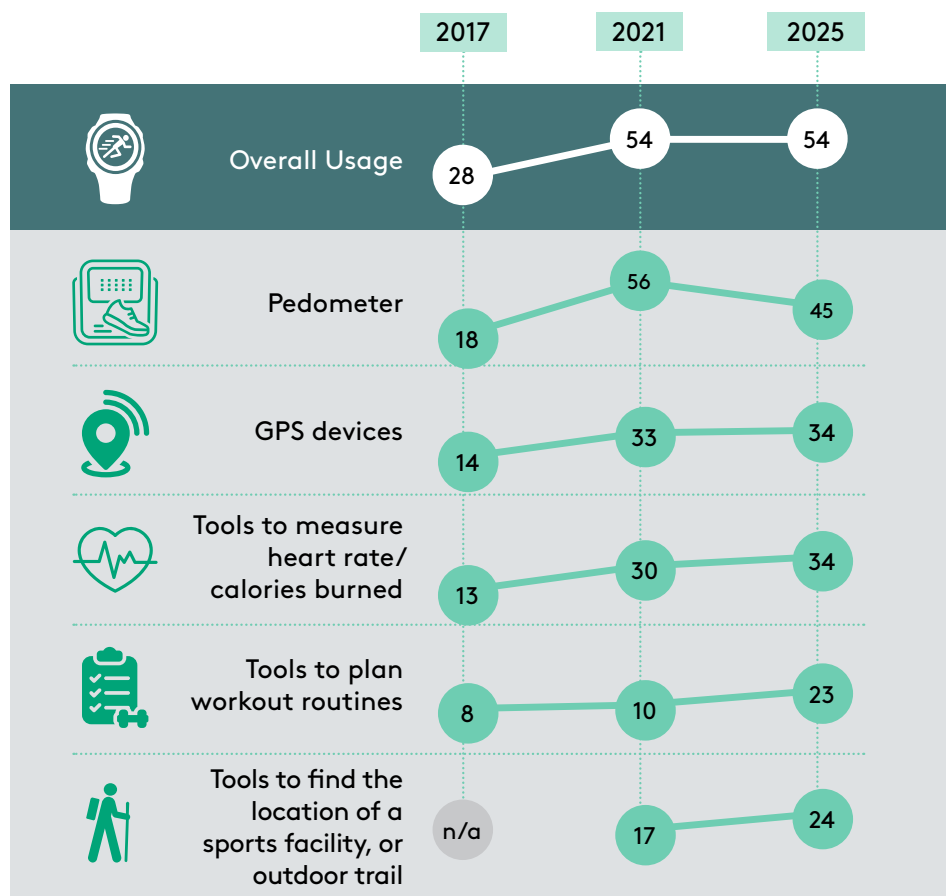


14. Special Module on Wearable Technology

A special module was included on ISM 2025 asking all respondents about the use of five different types of wearable technology in sport and physical activities. This is a repeat of similar modules conducted on ISM 2017 and ISM 2021.

This module tracks the use of wearable technologies and whether users perceive an impact on their activity levels. The results indicate a flattening of wearable adoption rates, with use of pedometers decreasing whilst use of other technologies increased. The findings highlight the role of digital tools in motivation and self-monitoring, informing behaviour-change approaches and participation supports with clear differences in how technology influences men and women.

Usage of wearables



Perceived impact of technology on activity levels

	MAJOR INFLUENCE	MINOR INFLUENCE	NO INFLUENCE
2017	26	51	23
2021	31	48	21
2025	30	48	21

Ways that it influences physical activity (Top 5)

Influence on activity	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Tracking progress	53	57	51
Encourages me to get more steps	44	28	55
Encourages me to exercise/exercise more	42	29	51
Encourages me to work harder/meet goals	38	34	41
Allows me to analyse exercise data	22	30	16

15. Special Module on Media Coverage of Sport

This special module asked respondents about how they watch, listen or read about sport across various media. It also explored attitudes towards media coverage of women's sport.

Strong demand for increased women's sport visibility supports policy action on gender equality, reflecting the link between representation, role models and participation. This work supports the recently published report by Sport Ireland on the Gender Balance of Sports Media Coverage in Ireland.



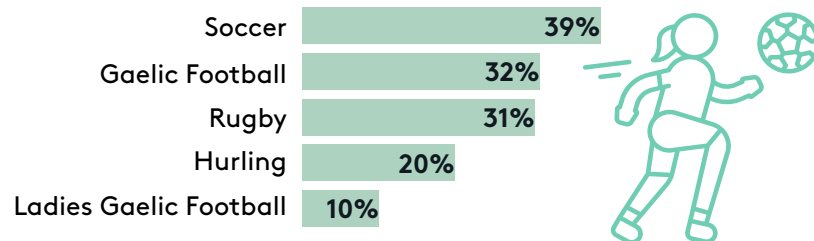
82%

watch, listen or
read about sport

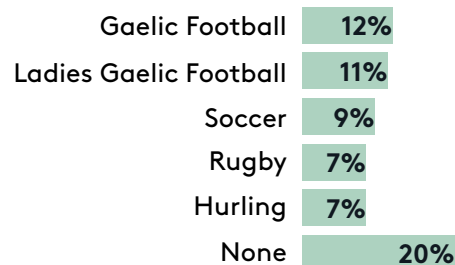
89%
men

76%
women

Sports followed most in the media (Top 5)



Sports would like to see more coverage of in the media (Top 5)



Attitude towards media coverage of women's sport

		Should be more coverage of women's sport (%)	Adequate amount of coverage (%)	Should be less coverage of women's sport (%)	Don't know (%)
Total		42	48	5	5
Aged under 45	Men	34	58	5	3
	Women	62	31	2	5
Aged 45+	Men	36	48	9	7
	Women	41	52	4	3

Strongest demand for increased coverage comes from **women under 45**.

16. Special Module on Impact of Working Arrangements on Participation in Sport and Physical Activity

This special module asked all those in employment or studying about changes in physical activity compared to before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Changes in working and study patterns since 2019 are associated with shifts in activity behaviours. These insights help inform programme design and messaging that align with modern lifestyles and support sustained participation as work patterns evolve.

Key changes in physical activity behaviours



27%

of those in employment/studying spend more time at home now compared to before Covid-19

50%

of these have changed the way they participate in physical activity as a result



54%

Get more activities done



33%

More flexibility in time of day



24%

Do more home exercises



13%

Do activities with family/friends



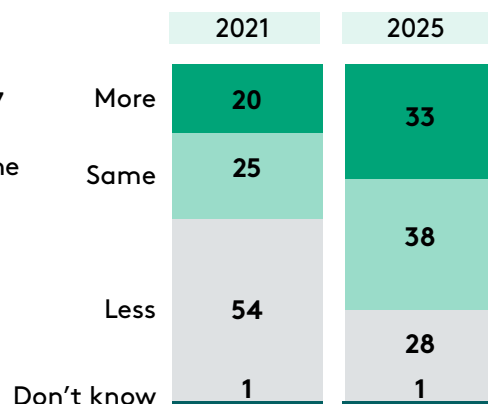
11%

Do group sessions/training

Types of changes

Activity levels now compared to before the Covid-19 pandemic

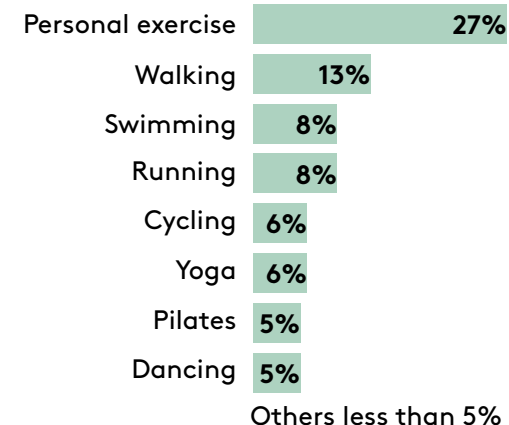
Respondents were asked in each year whether, in the past 7 days, they had done more, less, or the same amount of physical activity compared to a typical week before Covid-19 restrictions were introduced.



New activities people have taken up since 2019

30%

have taken on a new activity/sport since 2019



17. Special Module on Outdoor Activities

This special module was asked to those participating in certain outdoor activities during the past 7 days (includes recreational walking, hillwalking, cycling, running and others).

Outdoor participation brings significant health benefits but depends on safe, well-managed environments. Findings on anti-social behaviour and environmental awareness align with the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy's growing emphasis on sustainability and stewardship of outdoor spaces.

Outdoor Sports Participants are generally safety conscious



85%

took steps to ensure their safety

48%

Brought a mobile phone

40%

Wore appropriate clothing

26%

Told someone where they were going

Minimising environmental impact



46%

took steps to minimise their environmental impact

74%

Disposed of waste correctly

16%

Respected farm animals and wildlife

8%

Used sustainable travel

Unsafe or anti-social behaviour

30%

witnessed behaviour that is considered unsafe or against the rules, when participating in their sports



32%

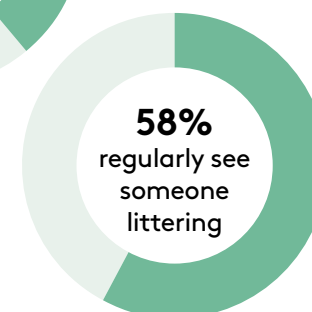
Saw dangerous behaviour

26%

Saw anti-social behaviour such as loitering

19%

Saw speeding



Dogs

49%

saw a dog off their lead



51%

saw dog waste

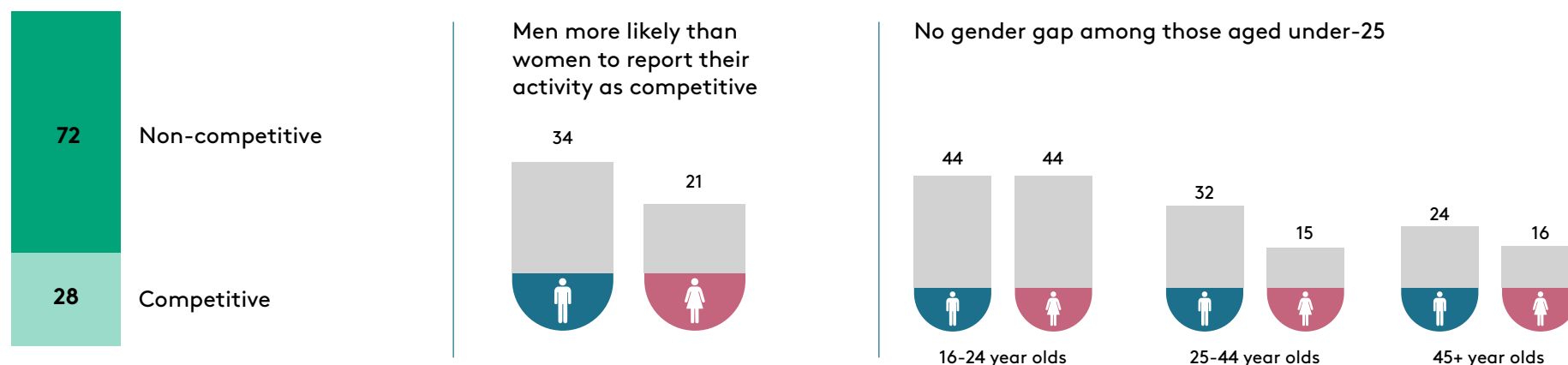
18. Special Module on Nature of Participation in Sport

This special module asked those playing sport about the nature of their participation. Two questions were asked – firstly whether they considered it to be competitive or non-competitive, and secondly whether they perceived that activity to be exercise, recreational physical activity, or sport.

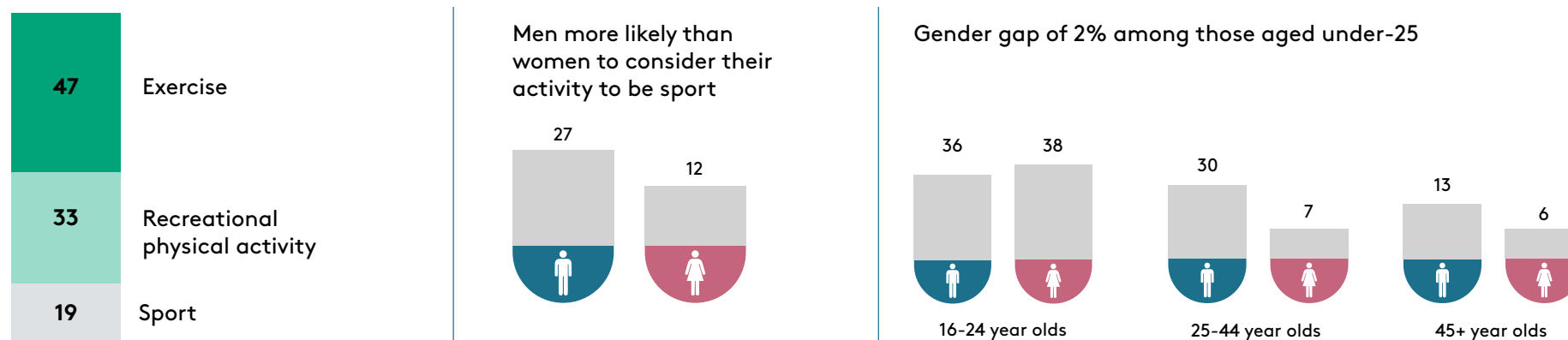
Understanding these motivations supports the design of opportunities that match preferences and sustain long-term engagement and participation pathways.

● Male ● Female

What % of people consider their participation to be competitive or non-competitive



What % of activities are considered to be sport, exercise or physical activity



19. Technical Details

The Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) is a large population study undertaken annually in order to provide trends in participation in sport and physical activity in Ireland. Data collection is conducted by telephone among a representative sample of the population aged 16 and over.

Fieldwork dates and sample sizes for this research are as follows:

Phase	Fieldwork Dates	Sample Size
ISM 2017	Jan - Dec 2017	8,482
ISM 2019	Jan - Dec 2019	8,504
ISM 2021	Jan - Dec 2021	8,508
ISM 2022	Jan - Dec 2022	8,512
ISM 2023	Jan - Dec 2023	8,512
ISM 2024	Jan - Dec 2024	8,515
ISM 2025	Jan - Dec 2025	8,529



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