

Statistics on sport participation

Statistics Explained

*Data updated in November 2020.
No planned update.*

It is widely recognised that participation in sport has a significant positive impact on people's health and quality of life. It can take two different forms: professional sport and sport as a leisure activity.

This article presents statistics on participation in sport available in [Eurostat](#) and related to:

- practising sport (in terms of physical activity) — according to the results of wave 2 of the European Health Interview Survey held in EU countries around 2014;
- attendance at live sport events — with data from the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions ([EU-SILC](#)) 2015 ad hoc module on social and cultural participation.

Active participation in sport

Practising sport has a positive influence on personal health and well-being. In addition, team sports foster players' communication skills and build team spirit and self confidence. Achieving a sport or fitness goal can motivate people to achieve other goals. Individuals' participation in sport is affected by many factors, most obviously gender, age and economic situation — these aspects are analysed here on the basis of the results from the European Health Interview Survey ([EHIS](#)).

Practice of sport varies greatly across countries

Sport statistics take account of non-work related physical activities only. These include sport, fitness and recreational (leisure) physical activities (that cause at least a small increase in breathing or heart rate) such as Nordic walking, brisk walking, ball games, jogging, cycling, swimming, aerobics, rowing, badminton, etc.

In 2014, some 43 % of the [EU-27](#) population aged 15 or over reported that they practised sport at least once a week (see Figure 1). However, discrepancies between countries were very large — the proportion ranged from over 70 % in Nordic countries and Austria to around 10 % or less in Bulgaria and Romania.

In general, women practise sport less than men, but there are exceptions

In the EU-27 as a whole, in 2014, more men than women took part in regular sport and physical activity - 45 % as against 40 % (see Figure 1). The gender gap was particularly marked in Portugal and Spain, with around 10 percentage points (p.p.) difference. In Bulgaria and Romania, few people practise sport and the percentage of men who did was around twice that of women.

On the other hand, in the five EU [Member States](#) where participation in sport was most common (Denmark, Germany, Finland, Sweden and Austria), the percentage of women than took part in sport and leisure activities was higher or equal than the one for men. The gap in favour of women was highest in Denmark (6 p.p.).

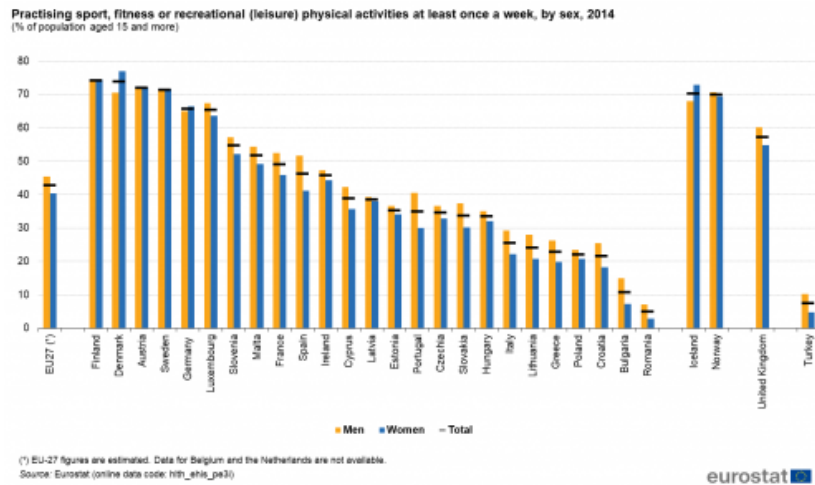


Figure 1: Practising sport, fitness or recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by sex, 2014 (% of population aged 15 and more) Source: Eurostat (hlth_ehis_pe3i)

Older people in some Member States are sportier than young people in others

In general, the practice of physical activities decreases with age. In 2014, the percentage of people in the EU taking part in sport ranged from 62 % among 15-24-year-olds to 30 % in the 65+ age group (see Table 1). The biggest gaps were recorded in the Czechia and Slovakia (58 and 55 percentage points respectively), and the smallest (11 percentage points) in Denmark and Cyprus.

In the Nordic countries, Austria and Germany, a majority of people aged 65 and beyond still took part in physical activity. Their participation rate was higher than the one observed for young people in several other EU countries.

Practising sport, fitness or recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by age group, 2014
(% of population aged 15 and more)

	Total	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
EU-27 (*)	43	62	49	43	43	38	30
Bulgaria	11	37	21	12	7	2	1
Czechia	35	68	54	43	31	19	10
Denmark	74	81	74	73	75	71	70
Germany	66	80	66	63	66	66	60
Estonia	35	56	48	41	35	26	15
Ireland	46	67	60	53	42	32	20
Greece	23	49	38	26	20	16	6
Spain	46	64	56	51	45	39	30
France	49	67	52	49	49	50	34
Croatia	22	44	28	23	20	14	10
Italy	26	47	37	30	26	20	11
Cyprus	39	44	39	39	40	37	33
Latvia	39	63	50	42	35	31	22
Lithuania	24	61	30	23	18	12	8
Luxembourg	65	84	71	66	62	62	49
Hungary	34	63	46	39	28	22	13
Malta	52	59	55	52	51	54	42
Austria	72	83	73	70	71	73	66
Poland	22	44	32	25	16	13	8
Portugal	35	61	49	37	30	30	19
Romania	5	19	7	4	2	1	0
Slovenia	55	82	68	60	54	47	30
Slovakia	34	65	44	38	28	20	10
Finland	74	82	80	76	75	73	64
Sweden	71	81	73	74	72	72	61
Iceland	70	81	73	72	70	67	58
Norway	70	78	74	73	73	71	55
United Kingdom	57	66	65	65	60	54	43
Turkey	8	13	10	7	4	4	2

(*) EU-27 figures are estimated. Data for Belgium and the Netherlands are not available
Source: Eurostat (online data code: hlth_egis_pe3i, demo_pjan, and demo_pjangroup)

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Table 1: Practising sport, fitness or recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by age group, 2014 Source: Eurostat (hlth_egis_pe3i) and (demo_pjan) and (demo_pjangroup)

People with lower incomes are less likely to practise sport

The cost of participating in sport and recreational activities may be one of the barriers to wider involvement. In 2014, in the EU as a whole, nearly 53 % of people in the top income group practised sport, as against 35 % of people with the lowest incomes (see Figure 2). The biggest differences between those in the first and fifth income quintiles were recorded in Slovenia (37 p.p.), followed by Hungary (33 p.p.), Estonia (32 p.p.) and France (30 p.p.); Ireland, Sweden and Romania recorded the smallest disparities (2-3 p.p.).

Obviously, some sports are expensive and less accessible for people on low incomes. However, walking, for example, does not cost anything. The level of people's involvement in sport can probably be explained also by other factors that are not directly financial but are associated with higher income (e.g. higher educational attainment, social background and position, greater awareness of the benefits of physical activity, maybe more free time, etc.).

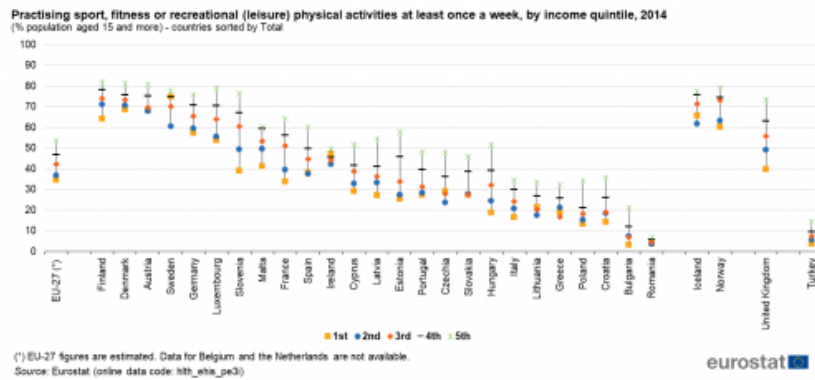


Figure 2: Practising sport, fitness or recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by income quintile, 2014, (% population aged 15 and more) - Source: Eurostat (hlth_ehis_pe3i)

Passive participation – attending live sport events

As regards attendance at live sport events, the question in the EU-SILC 2015 ad hoc module on social and cultural participation referred only to physical attendance of organised events as a spectator, i.e. watching an event on TV/computer was excluded, as was the active participation of the players themselves.

Attending sport events does not only reflect an interest in sport competitions but also brings people together, i.e. has important 'socialising' value.

In 2015, 28 % of Europeans attended a live sport event

In 2015, at EU-27 level, less than a third of the EU population aged 16+ reported attendance at a live sport event in the previous 12 months; 72 % had not participated in such an event. The highest attendance at sport venues was observed in the Netherlands (54 %), Finland and Sweden (both 48 %); the lowest rates of participation were recorded in Italy (19 %), Bulgaria (18 %) and Romania (16 %) - see Figure 3.

In the majority of countries, people going to sport events at most three times a year were relatively more numerous than those who attended at least four times a year. In eight countries, however, this pattern was inverted.

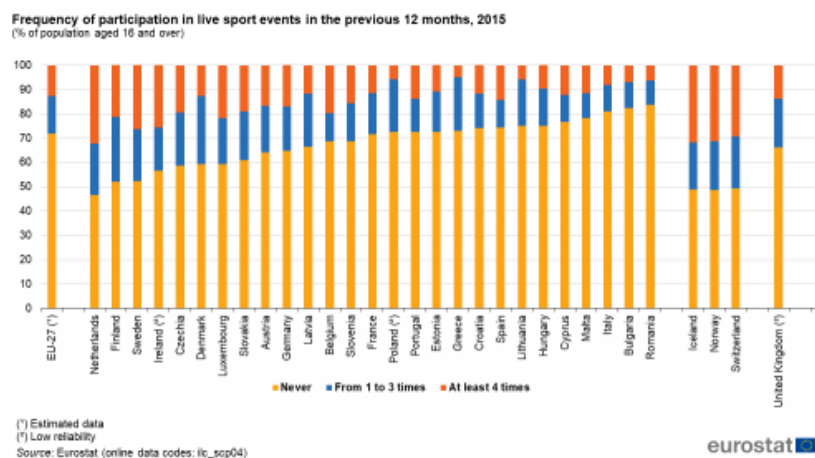


Figure 3: Frequency of participation in live sport events in the previous 12 months, 2015 (% population aged 15 and more) - Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp04)

More men than women attend live sport events

In 2015, some 39 % of men in the EU reported attendance at live sport events, as against 22 % of women. In no Member State did women participate more than men in such events, but the width of this 'gender gap' varied across countries (see Figure 4). It was smallest in the Netherlands (58 % of men and 49 % of women), while in 12 Member States the participation rate of men was at least twice as high as that observed among women.

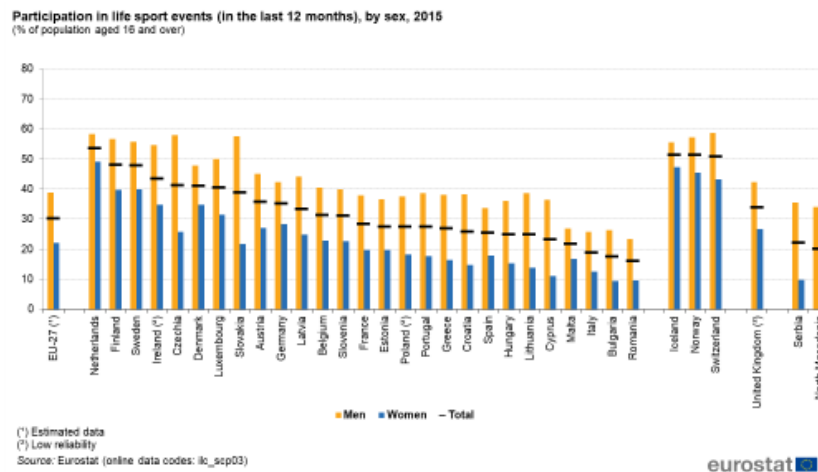


Figure 4: Participation in life sport events (in the last 12 months), by sex, 2015 (% of population aged 16 and over) - Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp03)

Young people attend live sport events more than older people

There is a wide 'generation gap', in terms of attendance at live sport events, between young people (aged 16-24) and older people (aged 50 or over), at both EU and country level.

In 2015, across the EU, 48 % of young people had attended live sport events in the previous 12 months, as against 36 % of people aged 25-49 and 21 % of those aged 50 or over (see Figure 5). In the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, the participation of people aged 25-49 was similar to that of 16-24 year old (less than 5 percentage points of difference).

Attendance at live sport events was lowest everywhere for people aged 50+. Rates of participation by young people aged 16-24 ranged from 30 % in Romania to 66 % in Latvia, while for people aged 50 or more they varied from 6 % in Bulgaria to 41 % in the Netherlands. The biggest discrepancy between countries was recorded for the 25-49 age group, with 18 % attendance in Romania and 60 % in the Netherlands.

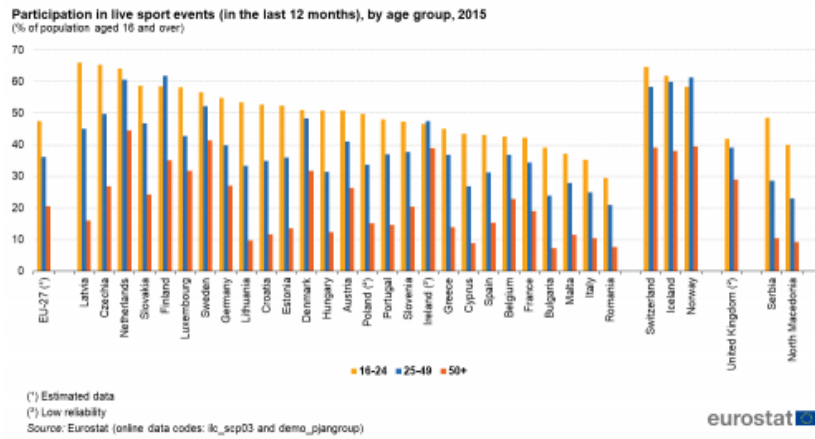


Figure 5: Participation in live sport events (in the last 12 months), by age group, 2015 (% of population aged 16 and over) - Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp03)

In the EU, more than half of non-participants in live sport events are not interested in them

In the 2015 EU-SILC ad hoc module, interviewees were asked about their main reason for not participating in sport events. They were given a choice between four answers:

- financial reasons ('I can't afford it');
- lack of interest;
- lack of proximity ('nothing in the neighbourhood', e.g. no stadium nearby); and
- other reasons.

At EU level, the main reported reason was a lack of interest (52 %). The countries that scored highest in this respect were Greece (74 % of non-participants), Austria (73 %) and the Netherlands (70 %) - see Table 2. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that the question in the survey did not allow a distinction to be made between 'no interest in the event' and 'no interest in attending the event'. It is possible that some of the people who declared a lack of interest understood the question in the second sense (i.e. they were interested in one or more events but preferred to watch them on TV or via the internet).

In the EU as a whole, financial reasons for non-participation in live sport events were reported by 11 % of respondents but the percentages were higher in nine Member States and in particular in Greece (20 %), Spain (19 %), Romania and Bulgaria (both 16 %), Lithuania (15 %) and Slovenia (14 %).

As regards 'lack of proximity', it is important to note that 'nearby' should be understood as being determined not only by physical distance but also by accessibility. If, for example, a venue was easily accessible by public transport, despite being quite far from a person's home, it should be considered as being nearby. At EU level, only 5 % of people reported lack of proximity as a main reason for non participation in sport events, with the highest proportions in Romania (21 %) and Finland (10 %).

Reasons of non-participation in live sport events (in the last 12 months), 2015
(% of non-participants)

	Financial reasons	None in the neighbourhood	No interest	Other
EU-27 ⁽¹⁾	10.8	5.0	51.5	32.7
Belgium	8.1	0.4	61.3	30.2
Bulgaria	15.6	6.3	27.4	50.7
Czechia	5.1	1.2	56.5	37.2
Denmark	6.0	2.6	57.5	33.8
Germany	9.9	4.2	52.9	32.9
Estonia	4.2	4.4	53.6	37.9
Ireland ⁽²⁾	10.9	4.0	66.5	18.6
Greece	20.3	2.4	73.5	3.8
Spain	18.7	2.8	42.5	36.0
France	6.4	4.9	64.3	24.3
Croatia	6.4	3.0	33.9	56.7
Italy	12.1	2.9	43.0	42.0
Cyprus	8.6	0.3	64.6	26.4
Latvia	9.5	5.5	51.2	33.8
Lithuania	14.8	6.6	41.7	36.9
Luxembourg	2.6	2.1	52.6	42.7
Hungary	11.4	3.4	52.5	32.7
Malta	4.2	0.4	57.9	37.5
Netherlands	7.4	2.2	70.2	20.2
Austria	6.1	4.2	72.8	16.9
Poland ⁽²⁾	7.1	8.2	46.0	38.7
Portugal	11.6	2.8	63.8	21.8
Romania	15.9	20.7	30.3	33.2
Slovenia	14.3	4.5	58.6	22.6
Slovakia	9.3	3.0	53.9	33.8
Finland	2.6	10.3	57.2	29.9
Sweden	3.7	7.4	66.9	22.1
Iceland	3.0	4.6	61.3	31.1
Norway	2	7	62.8	28.2
Switzerland	4.8	4.1	58.2	32.9
United Kingdom ⁽²⁾	13.1	4.9	58.3	23.7
Serbia	10.9	3.9	53.1	32.1

⁽¹⁾ Estimated data

⁽²⁾ Low reliability

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: ilc_scp06)

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Table 2: Reasons of non-participation in live sport events (in the last 12 months), 2015 (% of non-participants)- Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp06)

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Participation in sport](#)

Data sources

Eurostat's sport statistics are derived from existing EU surveys, as to date there has been no specific data collection devoted only to sport at EU level.

Data on the practice of sport and physical activity (people's active involvement in sport) come from wave 2 of the EHIS module on physical activity, which was run around 2014. The survey gathered data on work- and non-work related physical activity. For sport statistics purposes, only the latter was taken into account. The data presented in this article refer only to engaging in sport, fitness or recreational activities (e.g. Nordic walking, brisk walking, ball games, jogging, cycling, swimming, aerobics, rowing, badminton, etc.). The reference period is a typical seven-day week and the target population consists of people aged 15 and over.

Data on attending live sport events come from the EU-SILC 2015 ad hoc module on social and cultural participation. People's attendance of live sports events was measured by frequency: at least once in the previous 12 months, one to three times, more than three times and never. People were also asked for their reasons for not participating. Data are presented as a proportion of the target population (aged 16 or over) or of non-participants (for reasons of non-participation).

Context

EU-level cooperation and dialogue in sport has greatly improved since 2007, when the Commission adopted a [White Paper on Sport](#) — the first sport policy document published by the EU.

Sport became one of the EU's supporting, coordinating and supplementing competences with the ratification of the [Lisbon Treaty](#) in late 2009. For the first time, the EU was actively aiming to promote sport and physical activity at policy level — not only with a view to improving health and physical well being across the EU, but also to enhance the role that sport can play in boosting social cohesion and for its educational value.

In early 2011, the Commission adopted a [Communication on sport](#), focusing on the role of sport in society, its economic dimension and organisational issues. On the basis of that Communication, the Council adopted the first [EU Work Plan for Sport, for 2011-2014](#), which strengthened EU level cooperation by setting priorities for the Member States and the Commission. This was followed by the second [EU Work Plan for Sport \(2014-2017\)](#) and more recently (with adoption in May 2017) the [EU Work Plan for Sport \(2017-2020\)](#), which establishes the integrity of sport, the economic dimension of sport and 'sport and society' as the three main priorities for the period.

In addition, in 2012 the Council adopted conclusions on promoting health-enhancing physical activity and strengthening the evidence base for sport policy making; it called on the Commission to issue regular surveys on sport and physical activity. The 2013 [Council Recommendation on health-enhancing physical activity \(HEPA\)](#) sought to encourage more effective policies and cooperation among all sectors that have a role to play in this field, i.e. sport and health, but also education, urban planning and the work environment.

Among other EU initiatives aimed at encouraging people to engage more in sport and physical activity, the Commission established the European [Week of Sport](#) from 2015 to promote sport and physical activity across Europe.

Other articles

- [Employment in sport](#)
- [International trade in sporting goods](#)
- [Manufacturing_of_sporting_goods](#)
- [Government expenditure on recreational and sporting services](#)

Database

- [Sport participation \(sprt_pcs\)](#), see:

Attending sport events - EU-SILC survey (sprt_pcs_aes)

Attending sport events - AES 20117 and 2011 data (sprt_pcs_aes)

Physical activity (sprt_pcs_pha)

Perception survey results (urb_percep)

Dedicated section

- [Sport participation](#)

Publications

- [Sport statistics - 2018 edition](#)

Methodology

- [Sport participation \(sprt_pcs\)](#) (ESMS metadata file — [sprt_pcs_esms](#))

External links

- [DG Education and Culture — Sport policy and programmes](#)
- [Erasmus+ \(Sport\)](#)
- [Health and Participation](#)
- [European Week of Sport](#)
- [Special Eurobarometer — Sport and physical activity](#)
- [Preparing for life — How the European Commission supported education, youth, culture and sport \(2010–2014\)](#)