

Sport participation - practicing sport and physical activity

Statistics Explained

*Data updated in April 2022.
Planned article update: July 2027.*

" In 2019, around 44 % of the EU population practised some physical activities at least once a week."

" One third of Europeans spent at least 150 minutes per week on physical activity in 2019."

It is widely recognised that exercising is good for our health and improves our quality of life. It can generally take two different forms: professional sport and sport as a leisure activity. This article presents the most recent [Eurostat](#) statistics on sport participation in the EU. It starts with a general overview on performing any kind of physical activity not related to work, before moving on to the specific topic of sport, fitness and leisure time physical activities. The figures and tables presented here are based on the results of wave 3 of the European Health Interview Survey ([EHIS](#)), conducted in EU countries around 2019.

Leisure time physical activities

This covers all physical activity performed outside of work, including travelling under your own steam (walking, cycling, etc.), or moving as part of a sporting activity. Both moderate and vigorous activity improve our health. The activities included in wave 3 of the EHIS survey refer to at least 10 minutes per week of:

- walking or cycling – as modes of transport (not for pleasure)
- aerobic sport, fitness or recreational activity
- muscle-strengthening activity.

According to the survey, in 2019 the most popular way of exercising outside of working hours in the EU was:

- walking as a mode of transport (to get to and from a place) (83 % of population)
- aerobic sports (44 %)
- muscle-strengthening (26 %)
- cycling as a mode of transport (to get to and from a place) (24 %).

Finland recorded the highest participation both for walking and muscle-strengthening, involving 96 % and 60 % of the population respectively (see Table 1). Travelling by bike had the highest percentage in the Netherlands (61 %) and aerobic sports were most popular in Denmark (76 %).

Performing (non-work-related) physical activities, by activity at least once a week, 2019 (% of population aged 15 and older)

	Walking to get to and from place	Cycling to get to and from place	Aerobic sports	Muscle-strengthening
EU	83	24	44	26
Belgium	77	30	42	16
Bulgaria	95	11	14	10
Czechia	90	26	36	19
Denmark	83	48	76	53
Germany	81	34	67	47
Estonia	80	20	44	22
Ireland	83	13	51	27
Greece	83	14	26	12
Spain	89	8	50	21
France	82	15	45	24
Croatia	88	22	27	18
Italy	73	16	27	14
Cyprus	14	1	35	11
Latvia ⁽¹⁾	86	19	38	:
Lithuania	83	18	31	22
Luxembourg	90	17	67	43
Hungary	87	36	43	31
Malta	73	5	26	16
Netherlands	75	61	54	30
Austria	89	30	62	43
Poland	88	28	26	12
Portugal	68	6	33	15
Romania	93	12	6	3
Slovenia	85	36	55	41
Slovakia	91	34	33	16
Finland ⁽²⁾	96	39	:	60
Sweden	90	34	75	57
Iceland	54	14	71	58
Norway	71	19	84	40
Serbia	93	23	14	7
Turkey	83	5	8	4

⁽¹⁾ Data for Muscle-strengthening: low reliability.

⁽²⁾ Data for Aerobic sports: not available.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: hlth_ehis_pe3e)

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Table 1: Performing (non-work related) physical activities, by activity at least once a week, 2019 (% of population aged 15 and older) Source: Eurostat (hlth_ehis_pe3e)

Active participation in sport, fitness or recreational (leisure) physical activities

Practising sport positively influences our 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 also motivate to pursue other goals. Each person's participation in sport is affected by many factors, such as gender, age and economic situation — these aspects are analysed here based on the EHIS results.

Sports activities slightly increased between 2014 and 2019

Sport statistics only take non-work-related physical activities into account. 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 2019, 44 % of the EU population aged 15 or over reported that they have practised sport at least once a week (see Figure 1). This figure is slightly higher than in 2014 during the previous EHIS survey. Among the 24 EU countries with data available for both surveys, this increase was confirmed in 16 countries, most notably in Hungary

and Estonia with almost 10 percentage points (pps).

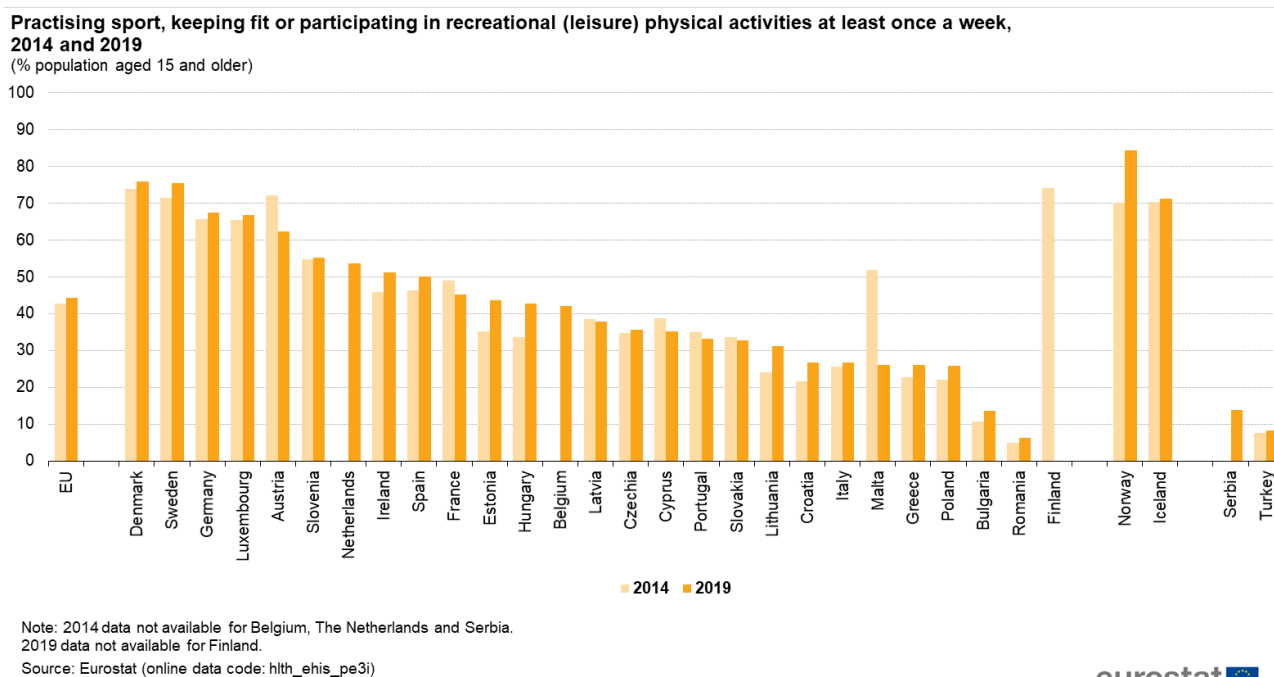


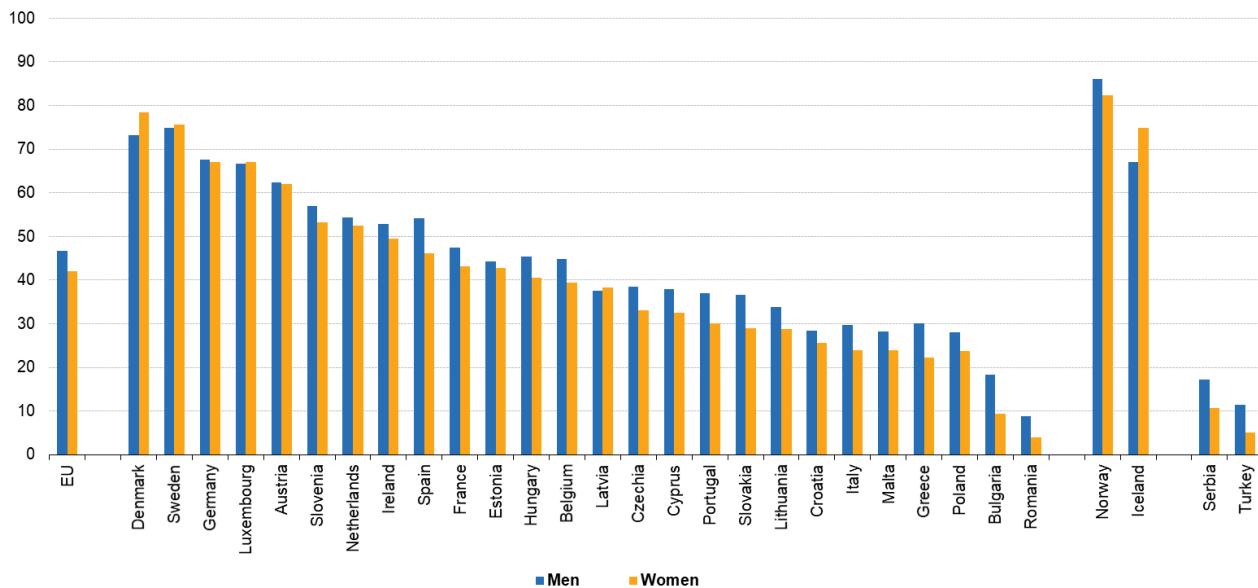
Figure 1: Practising sport, keeping fit or participating in recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, 2014 and 2019 (% of population aged 15 and older) Source: Eurostat (hlth_ehis_pe3i)

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

In the EU as a whole, in 2019 more men (47 %) than women (42 %) exercised regularly (see Figure 2). The gender gap was particularly noticeable in Bulgaria, Spain, Greece and Slovakia with a difference of almost 10 pps. In Bulgaria and Romania, few people practised sport in general and the percentage of men was double that of women. On the other hand, in the 5 EU countries where participation in sport was most common (Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Luxembourg and Austria), the percentage of women who practise sport and engage in leisure activities was either higher or almost equal to the one for men. The highest gender gap in favour of women was recorded in Denmark (5 pps).

Practising sport, keeping fit or participating in recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by sex, 2019

(% population aged 15 and older) - countries sorted by total



Data for Finland are not available.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: hlth_ehis_pe3i)



Figure 2: Practising sport, keeping fit or participating in recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by sex, 2019 (% of population aged 15 and older) Source: Eurostat (hlth_ehis_pe3i)

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

In general, as we get older we practise less sport and our physical activity decreases. In 2019, the percentage of people in the EU practising at least once a week ranged from 65 % among 15-24-year-olds to 31 % in the 65+ age group (see Table 2). The biggest gaps were recorded in Greece and Slovenia (57 and 56 pps respectively), and the smallest (7 and 11 pps) in Cyprus and Denmark. In Denmark, Sweden, Luxembourg and Germany, a majority of people aged 65 and older still exercised regularly and were physically active. Their participation rate was higher than the one observed for young people in several other EU countries.

Practising sport, keeping fit or participating in recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by age group, 2019
(% of population aged 15 and older)

	Total	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
EU	44	65	53	47	44	39	31
Belgium	42	64	51	47	41	37	26
Bulgaria	14	42	27	16	9	4	2
Czechia	36	63	48	48	37	23	13
Denmark	76	82	79	74	78	73	71
Germany	67	86	75	68	68	64	56
Estonia	44	63	55	53	44	35	25
Ireland	51	64	64	57	50	39	32
Greece	26	64	43	31	23	14	7
Spain	50	69	58	53	51	46	35
France	45	66	52	48	43	41	32
Croatia	27	53	44	41	30	22	13
Italy	27	50	40	31	28	21	12
Cyprus	35	36	36	38	36	35	30
Latvia	38	66	45	41	38	31	24
Lithuania	31	61	44	33	26	21	16
Luxembourg	67	78	71	66	64	65	58
Hungary	43	66	54	51	44	29	26
Malta	26	41	37	28	24	17	12
Netherlands	54	70	63	55	55	49	37
Austria	62	78	70	65	63	62	45
Poland	26	47	37	33	23	15	11
Portugal	33	59	42	39	34	24	19
Romania	6	20	11	7	3	2	1
Slovenia	55	83	67	67	62	45	27
Slovakia	33	57	41	39	32	22	13
Sweden	75	82	77	77	77	73	70
Iceland	71	82	70	77	76	66	62
Norway	84	89	87	87	85	84	76
Serbia	14	37	26	16	9	6	3
Turkey	8	14	12	8	5	4	2

Data for Finland not available

Source: Eurostat (online data code: hlth_egis_pe3i)

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Table 2: Practising sport, keeping fit or participating in recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by age group, 2019 (% of population aged 15 and older) Source: Eurostat (hlth_egis_pe3i)

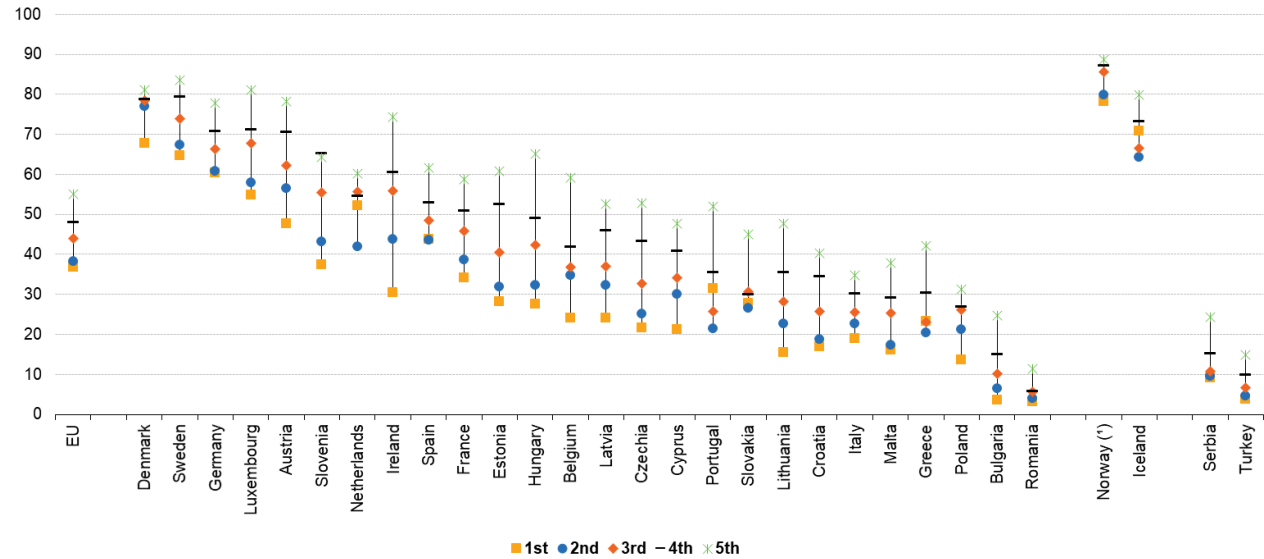
People on lower incomes are less likely to practise sport

In 2019, in the EU as a whole, nearly 55 % of people in the top income group practised sport and physical activities, as opposed to 37 % of people on the lowest incomes (see Figure 3). The biggest difference between those in the first and fifth income quintiles was recorded in Ireland (44 pps), followed by Hungary (38 pps) and Belgium (35 pps), while the Netherlands and Romania recorded the smallest disparities (8 pps).

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 correlated with the financial status, 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.).

Practising sport, keeping fit or participating in recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by income quintile, 2019

(% population aged 15 and older) - countries sorted by total



(*) Second quintile: low reliability. Data for Finland not available.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: hlth_ehis_pe3i)

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Figure 3: Practising sport, keeping fit or participating in recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by income quintile, 2019 (% population aged 15 and older) - countries sorted by total Source: Eurostat (hlth_ehis_pe3i)

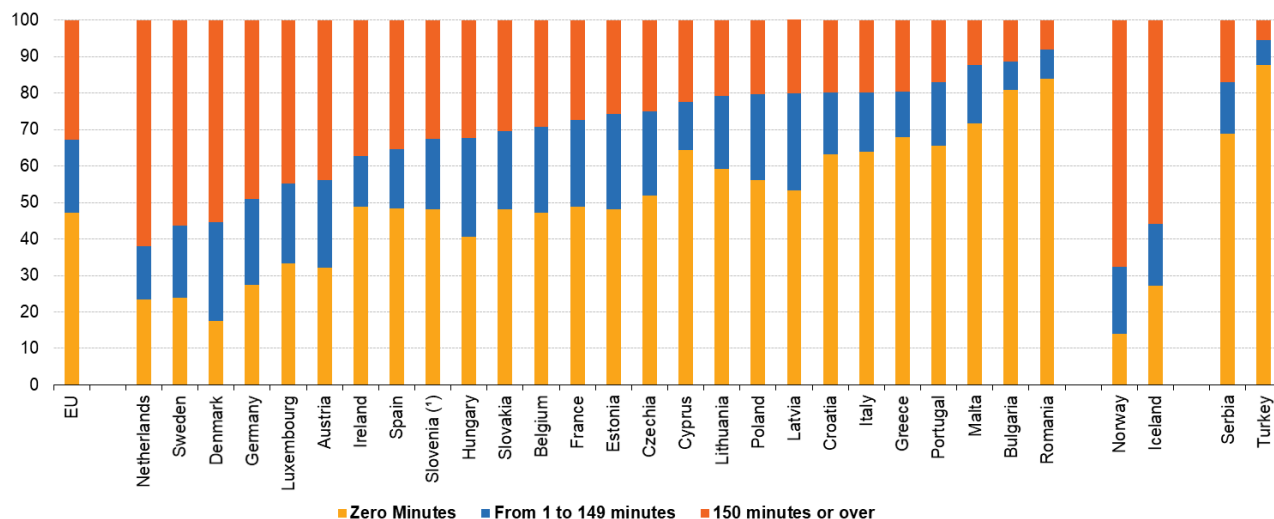
Frequency of aerobic physical activity

When evaluating the participation in sport and physical activity, it is also important to consider how often people exercise in a typical week. Regular physical activity can help create a healthy habit. The following part of the article will focus on the distribution of the population according to the time spent on health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity (in minutes per week). Physical activities included are sports and cycling as a mode of transport.

One third of Europeans spend at least 150 minutes per week on physical activity

In 2019, at EU level, around one third of the EU population aged 15+ spent at least 150 minutes per week on aerobic physical activity (see Figure 4): this percentage was over half of the population in the Netherlands (62 %), Sweden (56 %) and Denmark (55 %). On the other hand, this percentage was under one quarter in 11 EU countries, with lowest values in Malta (12 %), Bulgaria (11 %) and Romania (8 %). In 6 countries, there were relatively more people who spent at least 150 minutes per week on aerobic physical activity than people who declared they never did any activity.

Weekly frequency of health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity, 2019
(% of population aged 15 and older)



(*) Zero Minutes: low reliability. Data for Finland not reliable.
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: hlth_egis_pe2e)



Figure 4: Weekly frequency of health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity, 2019 (% population aged 15 and older) Source: Eurostat (hlth_egis_pe2e)

Men generally engage in physical activity more often than women

In 2019, 37 % of men in the EU reported at least 150 minutes of aerobic physical activity per week, as opposed to 29 % of women. Only in Denmark and Sweden was this pattern reversed, with women practising more frequently than men (see Table 3). On the other hand, this gender gap was more than 10 pps in five EU countries (France, Slovakia, Czechia, Spain and Bulgaria – in the latter, the percentage of men practising for at least 150 minutes per week was almost 3 times higher than for women exercising as often). Further analysis is needed on the underlying reasons for this large gender difference.

Time spent on health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity per week, by sex, 2019

(% of population aged 15 and older)

	Total			Men			Women		
	Zero Minutes	From 1 to 149 minutes	150 minutes or over	Zero Minutes	From 1 to 149 minutes	150 minutes or over	Zero Minutes	From 1 to 149 minutes	150 minutes or over
EU	47	20	33	44	19	37	51	21	29
Belgium	47	23	29	44	22	34	51	25	25
Bulgaria	81	8	11	73	11	17	88	5	6
Czechia	52	23	25	47	22	31	56	24	20
Denmark	18	27	55	20	27	54	16	27	57
Germany	28	24	49	27	21	52	28	26	46
Estonia	48	26	26	47	24	29	49	28	23
Ireland	49	14	37	46	14	40	52	14	34
Greece	68	13	20	62	13	24	73	12	15
Spain	48	16	35	44	15	41	53	17	30
France	49	24	27	45	21	34	52	26	22
Croatia	63	17	20	60	17	23	65	17	17
Italy	64	16	20	59	16	25	68	17	16
Cyprus	65	13	22	62	12	27	67	14	19
Latvia	53	27	20	53	23	25	54	29	17
Lithuania	59	20	21	55	20	25	63	20	17
Luxembourg	33	22	45	33	19	48	34	25	41
Hungary	41	27	32	38	26	36	43	28	29
Malta	72	16	12	68	17	15	75	15	10
Netherlands	23	15	62	22	13	65	25	16	59
Austria	32	24	44	31	23	46	33	26	41
Poland	56	24	20	52	23	25	59	24	17
Portugal	66	18	17	60	19	21	70	16	13
Romania	84	8	8	76	12	12	92	5	4
Slovenia	48	19	33	44	18	37	52	20	28
Slovakia	48	21	31	42	21	37	54	22	25
Finland	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Sweden	24	20	56	24	20	56	24	20	57
Iceland	27	17	56	30	15	55	24	19	57
Norway	14	18	68	12	18	70	16	19	65
Serbia	69	14	17	63	16	21	74	13	13
Turkey	88	7	5	82	10	8	93	4	3

Note: (:) data not available or not reliable.

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: hlth_ehis_pe2e)

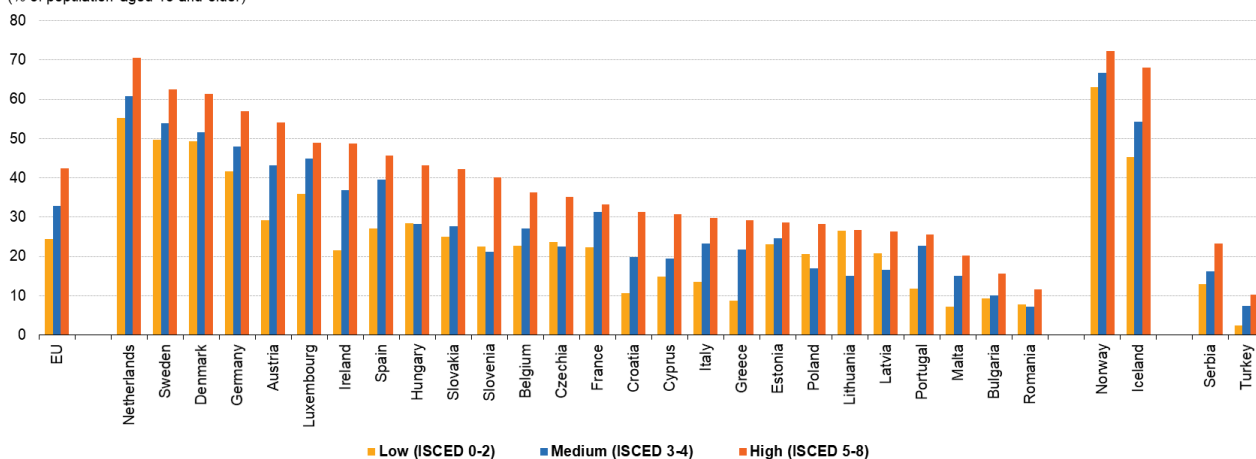
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Table 3: Time spent on health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity per week, by sex, 2019
(% of population aged 15 and older) Source: Eurostat (hlth_ehis_pe2e)

People with a high level of educational attainment spend more minutes on physical activity

Educational background is another factor which can contribute to explaining the differences in terms of weekly frequency of aerobic physical activity. In 2019, across the EU, 42 % of the population with post-secondary education (levels 5-8 in the international standard classification of education [ISCED]) spent at least 150 minutes per week on aerobic physical activity: this percentage fell to 33 % for people with a secondary level of educational attainment (ISCED levels 3-4) and further dropped to 25 % for people who completed at most a lower secondary level of educational attainment (ISCED levels 0-2) (see Figure 5). The biggest discrepancies between ISCED levels were recorded in Ireland and Austria, with 27 and 25 pps respectively, between people with a post-secondary and at most a lower secondary level of educational attainment. On the other hand, Lithuania was the only EU country where the same percentage of people with a high and low level of education spent at least 150 minutes per week on aerobic physical activity.

Distribution of persons who spent at least 150 minutes on health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity per week, by level of educational attainment, 2019
 (% of population aged 15 and older)



Data for Finland not reliable.

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: hlth_ehis_pe2e)

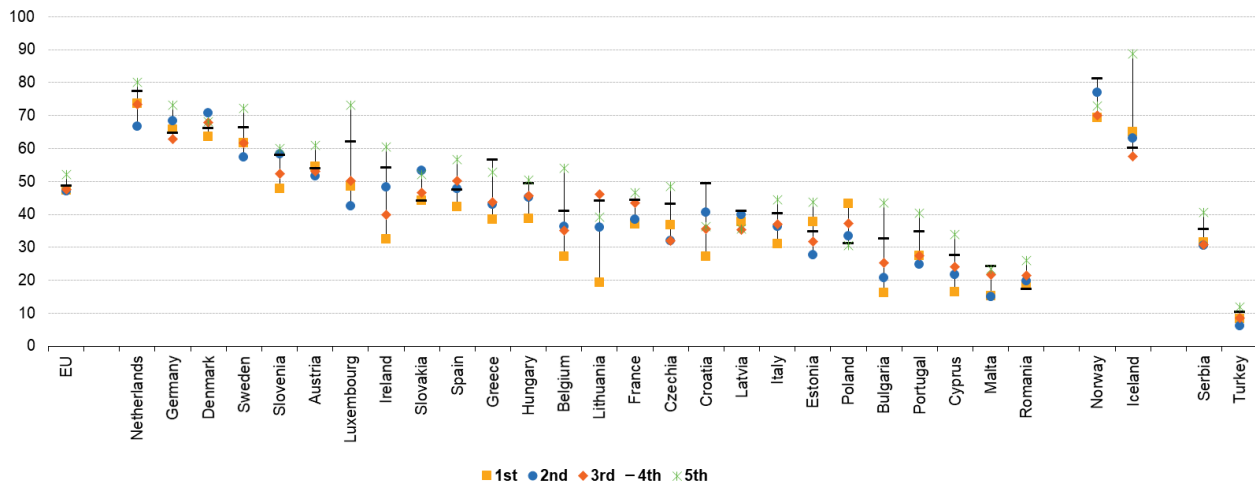


Figure 5: Distribution of persons who spent at least 150 minutes on health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity per week, by level of educational attainment, 2019 (% population aged 15 and older)
 Source: Eurostat (hlth_ehis_pe2e)

Young people (15-29 years-old) with high frequency of physical activity less influenced by their income level

Figure 3 shows that lower income could influence the participation in sport, fitness or recreational (leisure) physical activities. The following figure focuses on people aged 15-29, who are usually more active, and here the income quintile doesn't seem to create many disparities regarding the time spent on aerobic physical activity per week, at least for people with higher participation rates (150 minutes or more per week). At EU level, the share of the population aged 15-29 who belong to the 5th income quintile with at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week was 52 %, only five pps higher than the ones who belong to the 1st and 2nd income quintiles (see Figure 6). At national level, while this income difference is still low for the countries with the highest percentages of young people who exercise (the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark), for others the difference can be higher than 20 pps. This was the case for Ireland (28 pps between fifth and first income quintiles), Bulgaria and Belgium (27 pps) and Luxembourg (25 pps). In Poland and Latvia, the percentage of young people with at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week was higher in the first income quintile than in the fifth quintile.

Distribution of persons aged 15-29 who spent at least 150 minutes on health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity per week, by income quintile, 2019
 (% population aged 15-29) - countries sorted by total



Data for Finland not reliable.

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: hlth_ehis_pe2e)

eurostat

Figure 6: Distribution of persons aged 15-29 who spent at least 150 minutes on health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity per week, by income quintile, 2019 (% population aged 15-29) - countries sorted by total Source: Eurostat (hlth_ehis_pe2e)

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Participation in sport](#)

Data sources

Eurostat's sports statistics are derived from existing EU surveys, as to date there has been no dedicated data collection for sport at EU level. Data on people's active involvement in sport come from wave 3 of the EHIS module on physical activity, which was run around 2019. The survey gathered data on work and non-work related physical activity. For sports 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 7-day week and the target population consists of people aged 15 and over.

Context

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

With the ratification of the [Lisbon Treaty](#) in 2009, sport became an area where the EU has 'supporting, coordinating and supplementing' powers. For the first time, the EU was actively aiming to promote sport and physical activity at policy level — not only to improve 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.

The multiannual work programmes ([EU Work Plan for Sport for 2014–2017](#) ; [EU Work Plan for Sport 2017–2020](#) ; [EU Work Plan for Sport 2021–2024](#)) represent a tangible example of the importance that sport has gained in European policy initiatives. These programmes, agreed by the Council, set the priorities and the principles for cooperation between the European Commission and EU countries in the field of sport.

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 [annual European Week of Sport](#) from 2015 to promote sport and physical activity across Europe.

Other articles

- [Employment in sport](#)
- [International trade in sporting goods](#)
- [Enterprises in the sports sector](#)
- [Consumer prices of recreational and sporting goods and services](#)
- [Government expenditure on recreational and sporting services](#)

Database

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

[Physical activity \(sprt_pcs_pha\)](#)

Dedicated section

- [Sport](#)

Publications

- [Sport statistics - 2018 edition](#)

Methodology

- [European Health Interview Survey \(EHIS wave 3\) — Methodological manual \(re-edition 2020\)](#)
- [Sport participation \(sprt_pcs\)](#) (ESMS metadata file — [sprt_pcs_esms](#))

External links

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