

# IRELAND

## COUNTRY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FACTSHEET 2024

World Bank classification: High income  
Total population: 5 060 004  
Median age (years): 38.8  
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (€): 77 430  
GDP for health (%): 4.9  
GDP for education (%): 2.7  
GDP for sports (%): 0.4  
Population, male (%): 49.5  
Population, female (%): 50.5  
Life expectancy, males (years): 80.9  
Life expectancy, females (years): 84.2

Source: Eurostat  
[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00205/default/table?lang=en&category=t\\_demo.t\\_demo\\_mor](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00205/default/table?lang=en&category=t_demo.t_demo_mor)



Photo: © Colin O'Hehir

### ► National recommendations on physical activity for health

#### Target groups included

<b>YES</b>	Children (< 5 years)	<b>NO</b>	During pregnancy
<b>YES</b>	Children and adolescents (5–17 years)	<b>NO</b>	During breastfeeding
<b>YES</b>	Adults (18–64 years)	<b>YES</b>	People with disability
<b>YES</b>	Older adults (≥ 65 years)	<b>YES</b>	People with chronic diseases
<b>YES</b>	Frail and very elderly adults (≥ 85 years)		

Link to national recommendations: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/44751-every-move-counts-national-physical-activity-and-sedentary-behaviour-guidelines-for-ireland/>

### ► Monitoring and surveillance of physical activity

#### Sectors with surveillance systems



Health

**YES**



Education

**YES**



Sports

**YES**



Transport

**NO**

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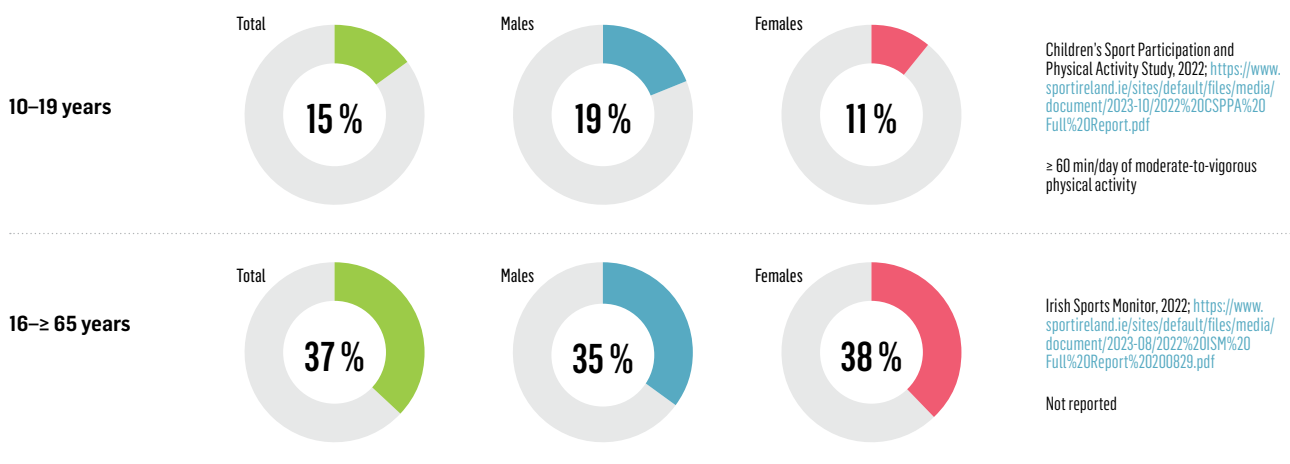
### SUCCESS STORY

Ireland's Physical Activity Research Collaboration inspires the best use of evidence, effective delivery methods and supportive environments to increase physical activity levels throughout Ireland. One objective is to establish a mechanism by which researchers, practitioners and policy-makers can share knowledge and experiences.

<https://i-parc.ie/>

## ► Prevalence of physical activity

### Physical activity indicators



## ► National government coordination mechanism and leadership on the promotion of physical activity

The Department of Health and the Department of Sport coordinate the National Physical Activity Plan Implementation Group, established in 2016. The Group is responsible for overseeing implementation of the National Physical Activity Plan.

## ► Funding for the promotion of physical activity for health

### Funding allocated specifically to physical activity promotion by sector

Health	Education	Sports	Environment	Urban planning	Transport
YES	YES	YES	—	—	—



### SUCCESS STORY

The Active School Flag programme is a national initiative designed to enhance physical activity levels in schools by providing a structured framework to guide and support schools in creating a culture of physical activity. It emphasizes integration of physical education, active breaks and opportunities for physical activity throughout the school day. By encouraging collaboration among teachers, staff, students and the wider community, the programme fosters a whole-school approach that not only improves students' well-being and academic performance but is also aligned with broader public health goals. Schools awarded the Active School Flag demonstrate a commitment to promoting lifelong healthy habits, contributing significantly to national initiatives to increase physical activity among children and adolescents.

<https://activeschoolflag.ie/>

## ► National policies or action plans for the promotion of physical activity for health

### National policy highlights

#### Get Ireland Active, the National Physical Activity Plan

The Plan is a strategic initiative designed to increase physical activity levels in all segments of the population to create a society in which active living is part of daily life, at home, at work or during leisure. The plan is a collaboration among several Government departments and stakeholders in various sectors, including education, transport, health and the private sector. By emphasizing the broad benefits of physical activity, from improved health outcomes to economic and social gains, the plan serves as a blueprint for collective action towards a healthier, more active population.

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/7563/23f51643fd1d4ad7abf529e58c8d8041.pdf#page=null>

#### National Sports Policy 2018–2027

The Policy is a strategic framework for enhancing the role of sports in Ireland by 2027, including both recreational and competitive sports, all forms of physical activity for improving physical fitness, mental well-being and social connections. The policy addresses the economic burden of physical inactivity, which costs Ireland approximately € 1.5 billion annually. It complements other initiatives such as the National Physical Activity Plan, which promotes overall physical activity, and Healthy Ireland, which supports broader goals for health and well-being. It is aligned with the Smarter Travel Policy, which encourages active transport, and reinforces the importance of physical education in schools to foster lifelong participation in sports. By integrating these initiatives, the aim of the National Sports Policy is to reduce mortality rates, enhance mental health and cultivate a more active, healthier society.

<https://assets.gov.ie/15979/04e0f52cee5f47ee9c01003cf559e98d.pdf>

### National policies or action plans for the promotion of physical activity for health



- 1 Get Ireland Active, the National Physical Activity Plan  
<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/7563/23f51643fd1d4ad7abf529e58c8d8041.pdf#page=null>
- 2 National Sports Policy 2018–2027  
<https://assets.gov.ie/15979/04e0f52cee5f47ee9c01003cf559e98d.pdf>

### Sectors involved in the design of the policy or action plan



Health	1	2	Environment	1	2
Education	1	2	Urban planning	1	2
Sports	1	2	Transport	1	2

### Plan for evaluation of a specific policy



Policy	1	2
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### Target groups included

General population	1	2	Frail/elderly (≥ 85 years)	1	2	Low socio-economic groups	1	2
Children < 5 years	1	2	People with disability	1	2	Ethnic minorities	1	2
Children and adolescents (5–17 years)	1	2	People with chronic diseases	1	2	Deprived of liberty	1	2
Adults	1	2	Pregnant women	1	2	Migrants	1	2
Older adults (≥ 65 years)	1	2	Breastfeeding women	1	2	Unemployed people	1	2

### ► Sports clubs for health

The WHO Guidelines for Sports Clubs for Health Programmes have been implemented: approximately 447 Gaelic Athletic Association clubs have adopted them through the Healthy Club initiative. The initiative integrates a healthy philosophy into daily club activities in order to position local clubs as community health hubs. Other sporting associations are being encouraged to adopt similar health-related activities. The Association conducts a biennial recruitment campaign in which clubs submit expressions of interest and outline their current work on health and well-being and their capacity for further initiatives. Clubs are scored on their suitability, including socio-demographic factors and location, to ensure sustainable, effective health promotion in the clubs and their communities.

<https://healthyclubs.gaa.ie/>; <https://www.gaa.ie/my-gaa/community-and-health/healthy-club>

### ► Increasing access to exercise facilities for socially disadvantaged groups

Ireland has several targeted initiatives under the Healthy Ireland Framework and the National Physical Activity Plan to increase access to exercise facilities for socially disadvantaged groups. The Healthy Communities programme provides tailored support to 19 communities at economic disadvantage to increase opportunities for physical activity. Active Disability Ireland ensures that people with disabilities have access to a variety of physical activities tailored to their needs. Age and Opportunity supports older adults in specialized programmes designed to promote physical activity and active ageing.

Healthy Communities: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/slahtecare-healthy-communities/>; <https://www.brayareapartnership.ie/content/free-four-week-physical-activity-programme-starting-19th-february>; Active Disability Ireland: <https://activedisability.ie/>; Age and Opportunity: <https://ageandopportunity.ie/active/#desktop>

### ► Counselling on physical activity and exercise prescription






The Making Every Contact Count programme trains and supports health-care professionals in primary care and hospitals to provide regular brief interventions on lifestyle such as physical activity, healthy eating, alcohol use and smoking. The Physical Activity Pathways model is being integrated into the programme, with additional training and resources to help health-care professionals deliver interventions on physical activity and refer patients to community opportunities.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/making-every-contact-count/framework/>



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### Health professionals who are trained in health-enhancing physical activity

					
	Medical doctors	Physiotherapists	Nurses	Nutritionists/ dieticians	Psychologists
	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Undergraduate	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Postgraduate	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

### Physical education in schools

Primary schools	Average per week	Secondary schools	Average per week
	1.4 1 Mandatory		1.3 Mandatory

### HEPA in training of physical education teachers

YES	Part of undergraduate studies	Mandatory	YES	Part of postgraduate studies	Mandatory
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### Promotion of physical activity in schools

YES	During school breaks	NO	After school
NO	During lessons	YES	Active travel to and from school

#### SUCCESS STORY

Cycle Bus Galway (Bus Rothaíochta na Gaillimhe) is a community initiative to persuade schoolchildren to cycle to and from school safely all over Galway City.

<https://galwaycyclebus.weebly.com/>





### ► National travel survey

The National Household Travel Survey is a nationwide study of Ireland's travel habits undertaken by the National Transport Authority. The 2022 report was the first annual survey. Previously, reports were published every 5 years.

### ► Infrastructure for leisure-time physical activity

The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Health issues guidelines under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act to direct planning authorities at all levels. The guidelines include Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements and require plans to include strategies for a hierarchy of multifunctional public open spaces that meet the recreational needs of the population while supporting nature and ecosystem services. Public open spaces must cater to both active and passive recreational activities, such as play, physical activity and community gardens, while conserving biodiversity. New residential developments must allocate 10–15% of the net site area to public open spaces, except in exceptional circumstances.

### ► Promotion of physical activity in the workplace



**National guidance or programme to promote active travel to work (e.g. walking, cycling)**

YES

The national Bike to Work scheme provides financial tax incentives for anyone wishing to buy a new bicycle through their employer.

<https://www.biketowork.ie/#how-it-works>



**National guidance or programme to promote physical activity at the workplace**

YES

The National Framework for Healthy Workplaces in Ireland was published in 2021 to influence workplace culture and policies and practices that allow individuals to increase their control over and improve their health. It includes promoting physical activity in the workplace. A dedicated Healthy Workplaces website has been established to provide practical information for both employees and employers on implementing the Framework, which includes practical advice.

<https://healthyworkplace.ie/resource/categories/wellbeing-areas/physical-activity/other-physical-activity-resources/>

### ► Community interventions for older adults



**National guidance or programme for community interventions to promote physical activity in older adults**

YES

Age and Opportunity is a leading national development organization working to ensure the best possible quality of life for older adults. Promotion of physical activity for older adults is a key objective of the organization's work.

<https://ageandopportunity.ie/active/#desktop>



### SUCCESS STORY

The aim of the Age and Opportunity Walking Football initiative is to attract older men to play football. It takes place over 5 consecutive weeks and is a perfect introduction to the game. As football is a team sport, it also allows socializing to improve mental health as well as physical health.

<https://ageandopportunity.ie/active/walking-football/>

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