



# ICELAND

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FACTSHEET 2019



The annual Reykjavik Marathon



Total population  
**352 721**

World Bank classification 2019  
**High income**

Urban population  
**93.8%**



**MEN**  
Population **50.2%**  
Life expectancy **81.1** YEARS



**WOMEN**  
Population **49.8%**  
Life expectancy **84.3** YEARS

Source: UN Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2019 Revision



### Success story

The National Olympic and Sports Association of Iceland (ÍSÍ) is the supreme authority for voluntary practice of sports in Iceland. Close to 30% of Iceland's population and close to 80% of all 12-year-old children are members of sports clubs. Participation in organized sports has proven to be an important protective factor against risk-taking behaviour in Icelandic youth. Annually, ÍSÍ runs national sport-for-all campaigns, promoting health-enhancing physical activity, i.e. Cycle to work, the Life Run, the Women's run and Walk to School. In 2014, ÍSÍ was awarded the Nordic Public Health Prize for its important contribution to the promotion of physical activity and health of Icelanders.

# MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE

## National recommendations on physical activity for health

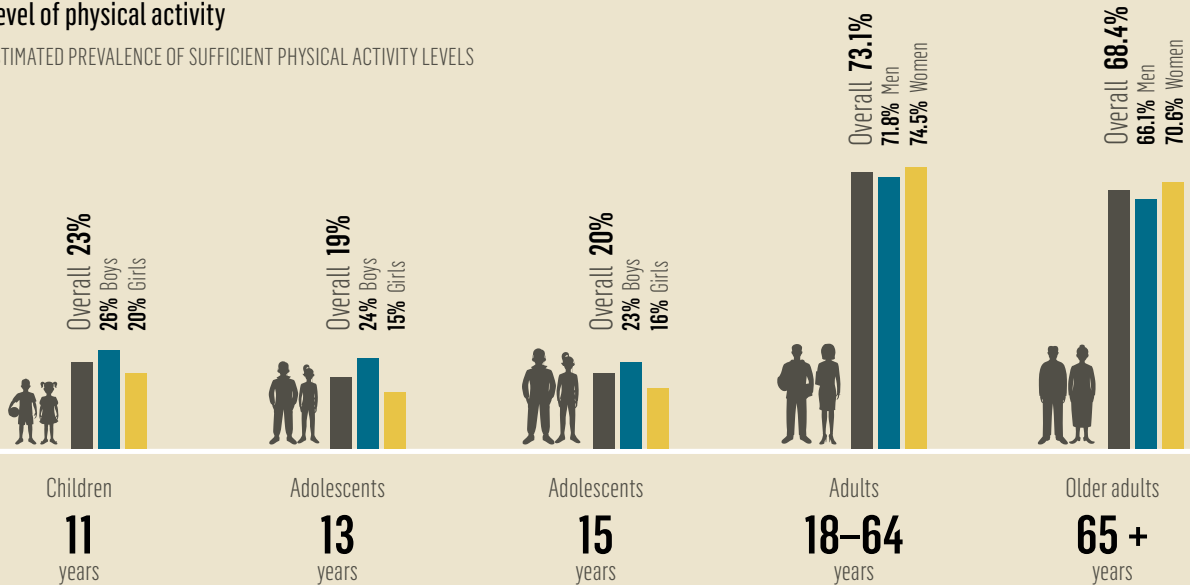
TARGET GROUPS INCLUDED



The national physical activity recommendations were published in 2008 and are currently being revised.

## Level of physical activity

ESTIMATED PREVALENCE OF SUFFICIENT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS



Physical activity levels of 11–15 year olds are monitored through the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study (2017/2018). Physical activity levels of adults are monitored using the Nordic Physical Activity Questionnaire as part of the Determinants of Health annual monitoring, which was last conducted in 2019. Levels of physical activity are calculated and reported based on the World Health Organization (WHO) Recommendations for Physical Activity and Health (2010).

## Monitoring and surveillance of physical activity

SECTORS WITH SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

Since 2007, physical activity levels of adults have been measured through the National Health Survey and annual monitoring of the Determinants of Health. In addition to the HBSC study, the Youth in Iceland surveys measure the physical activity levels of school-aged children. The Felix Club Membership and Federation Management system collects membership data from all sports clubs nationwide. Since 2012, a national transport survey has been conducted annually measuring bicycle use during summer and winter. The Directorate of Health has data on active travel to work and school.



Health



Education



Sports



Transport



# POLICY RESPONSE

## Funding allocated specifically to physical activity promotion by sector

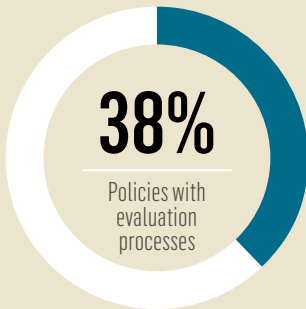
In 2005, a project manager responsible for comprehensive promotion of health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) was employed for the first time. Depending on the task, a national-level expert group is established involving relevant stakeholders and experts. Other important steps for HEPA promotion include the establishment of the *Health promoting community* (HPC) programme and the related *Health promoting schools* programme. Highlighting the synergy between the implementation of HPC and the SDGs, the multisectoral HPC steering group and the consultation platform for HPC and the SDGs were established in 2018, involving representatives from more than 30 stakeholders. These include six ministries, the prime minister's office and nine governmental agencies. In June 2020, 93% of the population lived in 32 HPC municipalities, committed to creating environments and conditions that promote a healthy lifestyle and health and well-being for all.



Creating infrastructure for leisure-time physical activity in Iceland is mainly the responsibility of municipalities, as stated in the Sports Act: "The construction of sports facilities for the use of schools and for public use shall be the responsibility of individual local authorities, unless otherwise provided by law. Municipal councils shall allocate construction grants to sports clubs and sports associations..." In the current Sports Policy (2019), there are measures regarding the infrastructure for sports, physical activity in schools, green spaces and active travel.

The Public Health Fund (Lýðheilsusjóður) is financed with 1% of the taxes on alcohol and 0.9% of the taxes collected from the wholesale of tobacco. According to the Medical Director of Health and Public Health Act (no. 41/2007, Article 4b), the role of the Fund is to support public health work, including promotion of physical activity.

## National policies by sector



8  
Total number of policies

	Health	Education	Sports	Transport	Environment	Urban planning
1	█	█	█	█	█	█
2	█	█	█	█	█	█
3	█	█	█	█	█	█
4	█	█	█	█	█	█
5	█	█	█	█	█	█
6	█	█	█	█	█	█
7	█	█	█	█	█	█
8	█	█	█	█	█	█

Sectors that are involved in each of the national policies or action plans to promote physical activity

## Target groups addressed by national policies

- ✓ GENERAL POPULATION
- ✓ Low socioeconomic groups
- ✓ Pregnant and breastfeeding women
- ✓ Ethnic minorities
- ✗ People deprived of liberty
- ✓ Migrants
- ✓ Older people
- ✓ People with disabilities
- ✓ People with chronic diseases

The role of the Planning Act (no. 123/2010) is to ensure that the development of settlement and land use in the country as a whole is guided by the economic, social, cultural, health and safety needs of the population. Based on the Planning Act, a coordinated national planning strategy provides guidance for planning at the local level. One of its main aims is to promote public health and quality of life. The strategy is currently being revised to put more emphasis on public health, air quality and land use. Supporting materials such as guidelines for comprehensive health promotion in communities and schools contain criteria regarding infrastructure for physical activity.

## Physical activity promotion in the health sector

### HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE TRAINED IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH

Since 2014, the Physical Activity on Prescription (PAP) model has been implemented in the Icelandic health-care system. It was adapted from the Swedish model with support from Swedish experts. Physical activity coordinators (physiotherapists) provide resources to suit a patient's interests and abilities. Most of the patients exercise on their own or in organized groups mostly outside the health-care system. Physical activity coordinators evaluate whether a patient needs extra support and assistance. Compliance with PAP in Iceland is between 67% and 72% and participation has increased over the years.



Medical doctors



Optional  
Undergraduate  
Postgraduate



Nurses



Optional  
Undergraduate  
Postgraduate



Physiotherapists



## Physical activity in schools

### Physical activity during school breaks

In 2011, health and welfare was established as one of six fundamental pillars of education in the national curriculum guidelines for preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools (2–20 years). Building on this policy foundation, the programmes *Health promoting community* and *Health promoting schools* support implementation of this pillar. Participating schools work towards creating a supportive environment and conditions that promote physical activity during the whole school day within lessons, between school lessons, through active travel, and after school hours in collaboration with sports clubs and other community organizations. Checklists for physical activity include criteria that schools work towards fulfilling. The publication "Active schools – handbook for physical activity in compulsory schools" was published in 2010 and is an example of supporting material that gives schools ideas on how they can integrate physical activity into the whole school day, how to design an environment that promotes physical activity and why and how schools can work with sports clubs to promote physical activity during and after school hours.

### Physical activity programmes after school

The National Olympic and Sports Association of Iceland (ÍSÍ) is the supreme authority with regard to the voluntary practice of sports in Iceland and the foreign relations of the sports movement. The Icelandic Youth Association is an independent NGO in the field of sports. ÍSÍ is the umbrella organization for 32 national sports federations, 25 regional sports districts, about 430 clubs and over 800 divisions. ÍSÍ's sport members are around 95 000 (~28.5% of the total population). Around 80% of 12-year-old children in Iceland participate in after-school sports, organized by sport clubs.

Total hours of physical  
education per week in  
**PRIMARY SCHOOLS**



2

All mandatory

Total hours of physical  
education per week in  
**SECONDARY SCHOOLS**



1.5

All mandatory

PE is mandatory for 6–19-year-old students (3 lessons per week in primary schools and 1 lesson per week in secondary schools).



Hjólakraftur (Cycle-force) is a programme that is designed to empower children and young people through cycling, with a focus on marginalized groups (e.g. difficult social situation, immigrants, etc.). For example, in the compulsory school Norðlingaskóli, Cycle-force has become a permanent part of school activities for pupils in all grades (6–16 years old). Students cycle together in the morning before school starts and older students cycle around Iceland by the end of June. Cycle groups for parents have also been established. They have been running with positive results in many places in Iceland with students and parents reporting better mental, physical and social well-being.

## Promotion of physical activity in the workplace

✓ Active travel to and from the workplace

✓ Physical activity at the workplace



The Cycle to Work campaign (Hjólað í vinnuna) is run over 3 weeks each year since 2003 by the ÍSÍ. The main aim of the campaign is to promote cycling and walking as healthy, efficient, environmentally friendly and overall smart ways to travel. It is considered an important contributor to the positive development of active travel in Iceland. Many workplaces use financial incentives to promote active travel. Subsidies paid by unions and employers to support employees to be physically active (þróttastyrkur) are exempted from taxes within certain limits.

## National awareness-raising campaign on physical activity

### MEDIA USED IN NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS



Television



Radio



Newspapers



Social media



Public events



Public figures



Annually, the ÍSÍ runs the Life Run campaign (Lífshlaupið, over 3 weeks in February). The main aim of the campaign is to encourage people to be active according to the national physical activity recommendations via the workplace setting (workplace competition) and the school setting (compulsory schools and upper secondary school competitions). Daily physical activity is registered online, with local team captains keeping up the momentum. There are two components measured: (1) number of days with a minimum 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA); and (2) number of minutes of MVPA. Final results in both categories are the sum of the total number of days and minutes, divided by the total number of employees or students (not only those participating). In addition to the Cycle to Work campaign, there is also a "Women's Run" in June and a "Walk to School" in September. The Icelandic Youth Association (UMFÍ) has annually, since 2012, run the MOVE Week (Hreyfivika, in May) in Iceland.