



IRELAND

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FACTSHEET 2021

Total population: **5.01 m**

Median age: **38.1 years**

GDP per capita: **62 980 €**

Life expectancy, males: **80.8 years**

Life expectancy, females: **84.7 years**

Sources: Eurostat (2020/2021)



National recommendations on physical activity for health

TARGET GROUPS INCLUDED

☐ Children (< 5 years)

☒ Children and adolescents (5–17 years)

☒ Adults (18–64 years)

☒ Older adults (≥ 65 years)

☐ Frail and very elderly adults (≥ 85 years)

☐ Pregnant and breastfeeding women

☒ People with disabilities

☐ People with chronic diseases

The recommendations are based on the [European Union Physical Activity Guidelines](#) and were implemented in 2009.



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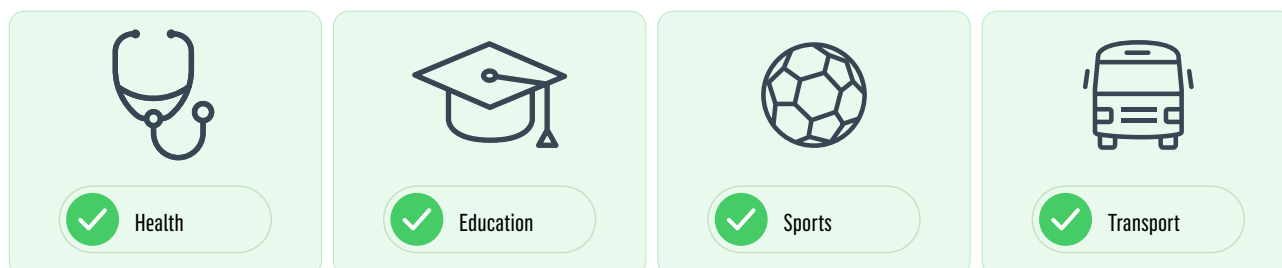
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Monitoring and surveillance of physical activity

SECTORS WITH SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

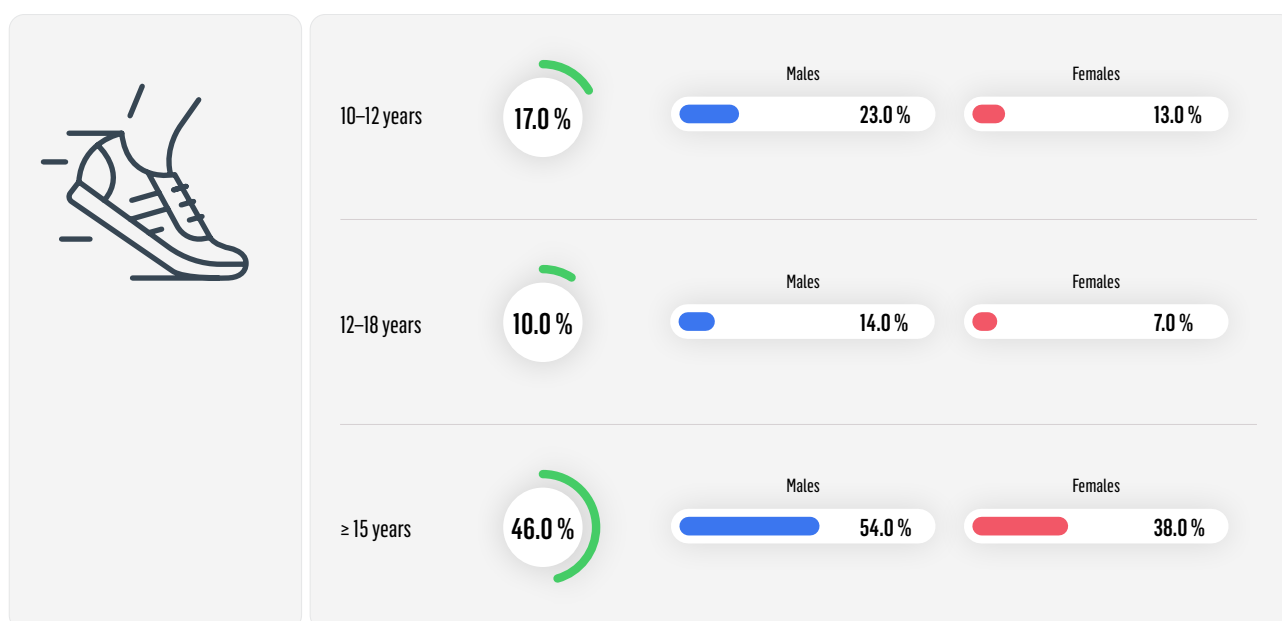


SUCCESS STORY



The National Physical Activity Plan Implementation Group offers support to various research groups. An example of such collaboration is the **Irish Physical Activity Research Collaboration**, which operates on an all-island basis and has hosted workshops and two international conferences, in 2020 and 2021. Its aim is to connect researchers, policy-makers and practitioners in finding effective ways to enable more people to be more active. It works with the Practitioner Advisory Group and an international research advisory group to develop tools for monitoring, evaluation and co-ordination of physical activity interventions in Ireland.

Estimated prevalence of sufficient physical activity levels



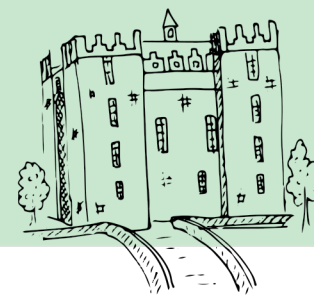
Levels of physical activity among children and adolescents were assessed in the [Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study](#) in 2018; data for adults were collected in the [Heathy Ireland Survey](#) in 2019.



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National government coordination mechanism and leadership in the promotion of physical activity

The Department of Health and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media coordinates the National Physical Activity Plan Implementation Group. The National Sports Policy, 2018-2027, is led by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and the Sports Leadership Group.

Funding for the promotion of physical activity for health

FUNDING FOR THE PROMOTION OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR HEALTH

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Health | Education | Sports | Environment | Urban planning | Transport | Other |
|  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |



SUCCESS STORY

The **Healthy Ireland Fund** was launched in October 2017 with an annual budget of € 5 million, which was increased to € 10 million in 2021. It is an innovative mechanism to stimulate and support intersectoral action and partnership to increase participation and ownership of the Healthy Ireland agenda in sectors beyond health. It supports evidence-based initiatives for implementation of policies and strategies within the Healthy Ireland Framework, including the National Physical Activity Plan. Many of the Fund's projects, at both national and local levels, have supported initiatives for physical activity .

Policy response



NATIONAL POLICIES OR ACTION PLANS FOR THE PROMOTION OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR HEALTH





























- 1 GET IRELAND ACTIVE; NATIONAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PLAN
- 2 NATIONAL SPORTS POLICY, 2018-2027
- 3 THE HEALTHY IRELAND STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2021-2025
- 4 A HEALTHY WEIGHT FOR IRELAND: OBESITY POLICY AND ACTION PLAN
- 5 NATIONAL CYCLING POLICY FRAMEWORK
- 6 PHYSICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM SPECIFICATION
- 7 PHYSICAL EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

TOTAL NUMBER OF POLICIES

7



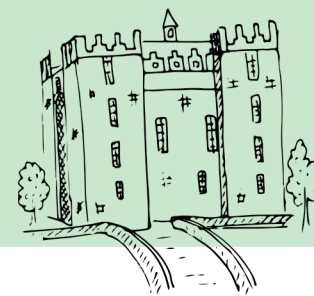
SECTORS INVOLVED IN THE DESIGN OF THE POLICY/ACTION PLAN

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Health |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Education |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sports |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Environment |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Urban planning |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Transport |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



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POPULATION GROUPS TARGETED BY EACH POLICY

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | | | | | | | |
| General population | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ○ | ○ |
| Children and adolescents (5–17) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ○ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
| Children < 5 | | | | | | | |
| Adults | | | | | | | |
| Older adults (≥ 65) | | | | | | | |
| Frail/elderly (≥ 85) | | | | | | | |
| People with disabilities | | | | | | | |
| People with chronic diseases | | | | | | | |
| Pregnant women | | | | | | | |
| Breastfeeding women | | | | | | | |
| Low socio-economic groups | | | | | | | |
| Ethnic minorities | | | | | | | |
| Deprived of liberty | | | | | | | |
| Migrants | | | | | | | |
| Unemployed people | | | | | | | |

POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Get Ireland Active; National Physical Activity Plan.** The aim is to increase physical activity throughout the population by modifying unhealthy lifestyles and promoting awareness of the benefits of physical activity. The objective is to increase regular physical activity by 1% per annum for all ages but particularly for children, young people, people with disabilities and older adults. The plan is based on evidence-based strategies for physical activity, equity and improvement of physical, social and environmental determinants. Action areas within the plan include public awareness, education, communication, health settings, workplaces, research, monitoring, evaluation and implementation. The Plan was extended to 2021 because of COVID-19. The NPAP is implemented in co-ordination with the Obesity Policy and Action Plan.
- 2 The National Sports Policy 2018-2027** outlines the long term policy objectives and aims to increase participation in sport and Physical activity in Ireland. The policy contains 57 actions across three key pillars of increasing participation, improving high performance and building capacity and capabilities. The policy aims to increase sport participation in Ireland from 43% to 50% by 2027, with the subsequent Programme for Government increasing this target to 60%. To help achieve the ambitious participation target the policy actions include a plan to increase investment in sport over the lifetime of the policy so that the amount invested doubles over the life time of the plan from €111 million in 2018 to exceeding €220 in 2027.
- 3 The Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021–2025.** The Plan was based on the first 7 years of implementation of the Healthy Ireland Framework, which provides a road map for the next 5 years of implementation. The aim is to reduce smoking, alcohol use, poor diets, physical inactivity and obesity and also to promote health and well-being during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. A Healthy Communities Programme for disadvantaged communities will be established to address health inequalities in the poorest areas. A second Healthy Ireland Council will be established to build the scope and capacity of the existing Healthy Ireland Network.

Sports Clubs for Health

The Sports Clubs for Health guidelines have been adopted by over 300 clubs in the [Gaelic Athletic Association](#) as part of their Healthy Club initiative, which was established to provide a holistic approach to health (including physical, emotional and psychological conditions) among club members and communities. It also helps clubs to identify areas for improvement and to highlight attained objectives to improve the health-enhancing experience of players, officers, coaches, parents, supporters and members of their local community.



SUCCESS STORY

Men on the Move is a free, 12-week community programme for physical activity by inactive adult men. The wellness and physical activity programme is delivered by local sports partnerships in conjunction with the Health and Safety Executive. Men on the Move supports men in (re)connecting with themselves in a safe, non-judgemental environment in which they can connect with their surroundings and other men. It includes structured group exercise, experiential workshops, resources and a celebration event.

Increasing access to exercise facilities for socially disadvantaged groups

The [Dormant Accounts Fund](#) is a scheme for disbursement of unclaimed funds from accounts in credit institutions in Ireland. The fund supports HEPA projects and other projects for people at economic, social and educational disadvantage or with disabilities. The Fund has provided about €6.5 million in funding per year to the national governing bodies of sports and local sports partnerships to enhance sport and physical activity programmes for these groups.

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



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Counselling on physical activity and exercise prescription



The Making Every Contact Count approach recognizes opportunities to influence behavioural change in the Irish population through health services. The initiative informs health professionals on using routine patient consultations to support them in making healthier lifestyle choices, to achieve long-term behavioural change and prevent and manage chronic diseases. The programme will result in routine questioning of patients about the main lifestyle risk factors for chronic diseases – tobacco, alcohol and substance abuse, diet and physical activity levels.

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE TRAINED IN HEALTH-ENHANCING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

| |  Medical doctors |  Physiotherapists |  Nurses |  Nutritionists/ dieticians |  Psychologists |  Other health professionals* |
|---------------|--|---|---|---|--|---|
| |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |
| Undergraduate |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Postgraduate |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| | Mandatory | Mandatory | Mandatory | Mandatory | Mandatory | Mandatory/ Optional |

*A Making Every Contact Count module is included in undergraduate curricula for all health professionals

Physical education in schools

| PRIMARY SCHOOLS: | HOURS PER WEEK | SECONDARY SCHOOLS: | HOURS PER WEEK |
|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
|  | 1 Mandatory |  | 2 Mandatory |

Physical activity and health (e.g. health effects, determinants, effective interventions) is a mandatory subject in the undergraduate and postgraduate curricula of physical education teachers. The quality and provision of physical education are monitored by subject inspection, in whole-school evaluations and/or occasional inspections. The Schools Inspectorate conducts a continuous programme of school evaluation, in which some inspectors specifically monitor and evaluate physical education.



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PROMOTION OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN SCHOOLS



During breaks



During lessons



After school



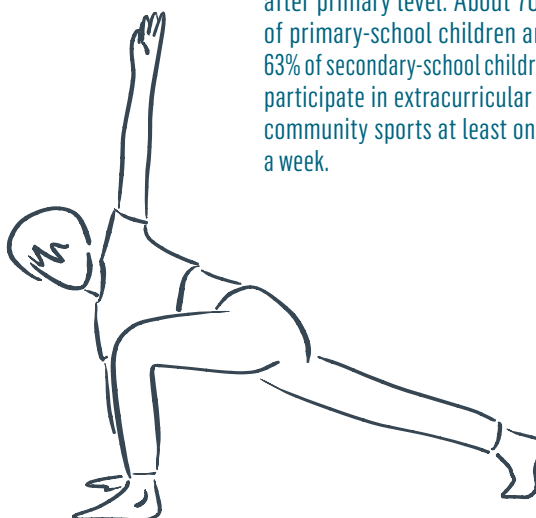
Travel to and from school

An “Active School Flag” is awarded to schools that achieve a physically educated, active school community. In order to be awarded the flag, schools self-evaluate their provision of physical education and physical activity, organize an “Active School Week” and commit to including it in school calendar. Since 2009, over 2000 primary schools have engaged with the programme, and a pilot programme has extended the active school flag to 17 secondary schools. During the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement with the initiative has remained high and measures taken to ensure that all the activities could be undertaken within the safety guidelines, for example by adapting the annual “active school week” to an “active home week”.

As part of the active school flag programme, it is a requirement that schools provide physical activity breaks in the classroom on days when children are unable to play outdoors. Short physical activity breaks are also encouraged during lesson transitions to energize the school day and restore concentration and focus.

The vast majority of schools in Ireland provide after-school extracurricular activities, including physical activity and sports in the form of football, rugby or hockey and tennis or athletics during the summer term. These are often run on a voluntary basis by parents' associations and similar at primary level and by the school itself after primary level. About 70% of primary-school children and 63% of secondary-school children participate in extracurricular or community sports at least once a week.

The Safe Routes to School Programme was launched in March 2021 by the Department of Transport, the National Transport Authority and An Taisce-Green Schools. It encourages pupils in primary and post-primary schools to walk and cycle to school. Its three aims are to build walking, scooting and cycling infrastructure on access routes to schools, provide “front of school” treatments to enhance access to school grounds and extend the area of bike parking at schools. Almost one in four schools have expressed interest in the programme and all will receive funding for walking and cycling infrastructure. Details of the work to be undertaken in and around the individual schools will be determined after a detailed assessment by the relevant local authority.



National travel survey

Several national surveys collect data on the travel of the Irish population. One example is the National Travel Survey, which provides detailed information on the domestic travel patterns of Irish residents. Within the Healthy Ireland Framework, interviews with a representative sample of the adult population are conducted every 2–3 years to collect information on health modules, including active travel. The Irish Sports Monitor is a large biannual population study of forms of physical activity, including recreational walking and cycling and, since 2019, of active transport.



WALKING

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE (PER DAY)

| | |
|--------|--------|
| < 2 km | 36.1 % |
| 2–4 km | 12.6 % |
| 4–6 km | 5.5 % |
| 6–8 km | 4.9 % |
| ≥ 8 km | 0.7 % |



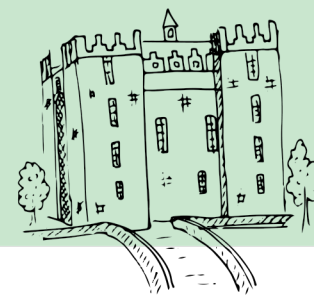
CYCLING

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE (PER DAY)

| | |
|--------|-------|
| < 2 km | 2.0 % |
| 2–4 km | 2.3 % |
| 4–6 km | 1.6 % |
| 6–8 km | 2.3 % |
| ≥ 8 km | 0.7 % |

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Infrastructure for leisure-time physical activity

Most local authorities have walking and cycling strategies as part of their city or county development plan, local economic community plan or a specific walking or cycling strategy. Significant progress was made in national planning within the Smarter Travel Areas programme, Active Travel towns programme and National Cycle Network programme, and a number of funded projects are complete. Furthermore, the budget for 2021 includes additional allocations for active travel infrastructure, such as cycle lanes and cycle ways. While active travel is not defined as including leisure-time physical activity, the improvements made by a number of local authorities in cycling and walking infrastructure in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in more people working from home and taking daily exercise.



Promotion of physical activity in the workplace

| | |
|--|---|
|  <p>NATIONAL GUIDANCE OR PROGRAMME TO PROMOTE ACTIVE TRAVEL TO WORK (E.G., WALKING, CYCLING)</p> <p> Yes</p> |  <p>NATIONAL GUIDANCE OR PROGRAMME TO PROMOTE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT THE WORKPLACE</p> <p> Yes</p> |
|--|---|

The National Transport Authority operates the Smarter Travel Workplaces and Smarter Travel Campus behavioural change programmes on behalf of the Department of Transport. The Workplaces and Campus programmes work with large employers and third-level institutions to encourage more sustainable commuting and travel by students and staff. A workplace travel plan provides measures to support sustainable travel for work-related journeys and promotes walking, cycling, public transport, car-sharing, use of technology instead of travel and flexible working practices.

The Cycle to Work scheme allows a civil or public service employer to provide employees with bicycles and bicycle safety equipment up to a limit of € 1500, while the employee is not liable for benefit-in-kind taxation. The tax exemption may be used only once in any 4-year period. The employee pays back the cost of the equipment through salary sacrifice from gross (pre-tax) salary, typically over 12 months.

Community-based interventions for older adults

| | |
|--|--|
|  <p>NATIONAL GUIDANCE OR PROGRAMME FOR COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN OLDER ADULTS</p> <p> Yes</p> | |
|--|--|

Go for Life is the national programme for sports and physical activity for older adults in Ireland. The programme is an Age and Opportunity initiative, funded by Sport Ireland and delivered nationally in partnership with local sports partnerships and Health Service Executive health promotion units. The aim of Go for Life is to get "more older people, more active, more often". Resources for people, including older adults, to remain active at home or close to home, have been provided in the In This Together and Keep Well Information campaigns.

















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National awareness-raising campaign on physical activity

MEDIA USED IN NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Television | Radio | Newspapers | Social media | Public events | Public figures | Other* |
|  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |  Yes |

*Government and partner websites, telephone help lines



SUCCESS STORY

The Healthy Ireland national citizen engagement and awareness campaigns, which had always supported people's health and wellbeing, were revised during the Covid-19 pandemic to provide specific supports for health and wellbeing in the context of necessary Covid-19 restrictions and to support population resilience. This was managed initially through the In This Together campaign, which ran during the spring and summer of 2020. In keeping with the recent Government resilience and recovery plan, the Keep Well Campaign (October 2020–June 2021) promoted resilience by showing people of all ages how they could ensure their physical and mental health and well-being by adding healthy habits to their daily and weekly routines. The national campaign was co-ordinated by Healthy Ireland and supported by Sport Ireland, local authorities, the regional offices of Local Sports Partnerships, local libraries, Children's and Young People's Services Committees and Creative Ireland. Specific supports for families, children and pregnant and postpartum women, and a Fitline helpline were available through Sport Ireland's website.