

**THE  
IRISH SPORTS  
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AN CHOMHAIRLE SPÓIRT



# The Irish Sports Council Report of Participation in Sport by Adults in Mayo & Sligo

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Mayo Sports Partnership



Comhpháirtíocht Spóirt Mhaigh Eo  
An Irish Sports Council Initiative

**Irish Sports Council Report of Participation in Sport by Adults in Mayo & Sligo**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Active Participation in Sport**

- 48.1% of residents in Mayo/Sligo take part in sport regularly, this is the equivalent of over 73,600 people aged 16 and over taking part every week.
- Women (49.0%) participate slightly more than men (47.1%).
- Social gradients are strong determinants of participation in sport with income and education impacting participation. Those with an illness/disability are also less likely to take part.
- Exercise and swimming are the most popular activities overall.
- The proportion of women taking part in running is higher than the national average.
- Three out of four participants take part in more than one session a week with the majority playing at intensity sufficient to raise their breath/sweat.

### **Broader Physical Activity**

- Over 64% of Mayo/Sligo residents take part in recreational walking, women (71.1%) are more likely to take part than men (57.8%).
- On average participants spend 2.5 hours a week walking.
- Walking for transport is below the national average.

### **Social Participation**

- Almost 50% take part in some form of social participation, either belonging to a club, volunteering for sport or attending a sporting event.
- The majority of club sports are individual activities.
- Gaelic Football is the most common sport for club members, volunteers and spectators.

### **Sport and Health**

- The proportion who are highly active is fairly well in line with the national picture although sedentarism in Mayo / Sligo is slightly higher primarily due to male sedentarism
- 58.9% would like to take part in more sport.
- Time is cited as the most common barrier to taking part in more sport.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Physical Activity Guidelines<sup>1</sup> recommend at least 30 minutes of moderately intense activity on 5 or more days a week for adults. The 30 minutes can be accumulated in bouts of 10 minutes or more over the course of a day. Being active confers significant health and related benefits<sup>2</sup> and participation in sport and active leisure plays an increasingly important role in adult physical activity levels worldwide<sup>3</sup>. The benefits from activity can be gained at any age. The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing<sup>4</sup> tracked participants whose average age was over 65 for 8 years. Participants who took up activity in those 8 years also saw health benefits despite being previously inactive. Physical activity contributes to healthy ageing regardless of current age.

This report provides evidence on sport and recreational exercise activity of adults (aged 16 and over) in counties Mayo and Sligo. The analysis aims to be of interest and assistance to those involved in the promotion of sport in Mayo and Sligo, particularly Local Authorities, LSPs, clubs and volunteers.

### Scope

The figures in this report are based on the results of the 2011 and 2013 Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) surveys, analysis was conducted by Research Director Peter Smyth and Elizabeth Doyle of the Irish Sports Council. The data from both years were combined into one dataset of 760 respondents to reduce the error margin within the results. 61.9% of respondents were based in Mayo while 38.1% were based in Sligo. Based on this sample size the error margin around key high level results is about 3.6%. So if we report a participation rate of 48.1% in the report we would expect that the true participation rate for Mayo / Sligo to lie somewhere between 48.1 – 3.6% and 48.1 + 3.6% i.e. between 44.5% and 51.7%<sup>5</sup>. Where the sample has been divided into further sub-samples by gender or age, the error margin is increased. **So, the results are only an indication of sports participation in Mayo/Sligo and should be treated with caution.**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.getirelandactive.ie/guidelines-resources/how-much-physical-activity-is-required/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1402378/pdf/20060314s00023p801.pdf>

<http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/chapter2.aspx>

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs385/en/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3401184/pdf/nihms389131.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Regular physical activity in later life boosts likelihood of 'healthy aging' up to sevenfold, November 5<sup>th</sup> 2013, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/11/131125185600.htm>

<sup>5</sup> This is known as a 95% confidence interval for the statistic in question. We would expect this interval to contain the true proportion 95% of the times that the survey was undertaken.

The ISM asks interviewees about their active and social participation in sport in the previous 7 days. Further details of the aims and methodology of the ISM can be found in ISM Annual Reports (available at [http://www.irishsports council.ie/Research/The\\_Irish\\_Sports\\_Monitor/](http://www.irishsports council.ie/Research/The_Irish_Sports_Monitor/)). The ISM is designed to be representative of Ireland's population as a whole rather than the population of any individual county. Therefore it was necessary to re-weight the data for this report so that the sample more closely represented Mayo and Sligo's current demographic profile. Gender and age, age overall, employment status and year were considered in this re-weighting exercise. The Appendix compares the demographic profile of the dataset used for the report with the profile of Mayo/Sligo recorded by the Central Statistics Office in the 2011 Census of Population.

A feature of the ISM is the inclusion of periodic flexible modules on particular topical policy issues. These modules are administered over a number of months only and therefore include a sub-sample of the annual survey respondents. For this reason it is not always possible to carry out a meaningful analysis beyond the national picture. During 2011 and 2013 flexible modules were included on topics such as gender issues in Irish sport, respondent interest in playing more sport, motivations for participating in sport, barriers to participation, perceptions of health and wellness and engagement in other behaviours (smoking, drinking alcohol, dieting, watching TV, etc.) which might influence health and wellness, and knowledge of the sports policy environment nationally and locally. These issues are reported on in the relevant annual report to which the reader is referred for more detail. However, where respondent numbers allowed and where findings of local interest emerged these issues are explored in this current report. Readers are reminded of the statistical limitations within such analysis and to regard such references as indicative only.

### **Statistical Analysis**

In this report, the charts and tables generally show percentage participation rates in a given activity by a particular group (e.g. the percentage of women who play team sport). Where this is not the case the report highlights the basis for the participation rates. The report includes certain national figures for comparison purposes. In the main such national figures are composite averages from 2011 and 2013. Exceptions to this approach are noted.

### **ISM Definition of Sport and Physical Activity**

The primary justification for public investment in sport is to increase physical activity and hence to improve health<sup>6</sup>. Consistent with this aim (and with the *Irish Sports Council Act, 1999*), the report defines “sport” broadly, to include recreational exercise (e.g. swimming, gym, dance classes, yoga, etc.), as well as field games (e.g. soccer, Gaelic football). The ISM also records recreational walking, walking and cycling for transport, allowing sport to be set in the context of more general physical activity.

### **Limitations**

All statistical surveys are approximate. In the case of the ISM, measurement error may be caused by people recalling activity inaccurately, respondents wishing to paint themselves in a good light (social desirability bias), failure to survey hard-to-reach groups, mistakes made by interviewers, and so on. For example foreign nationals are underrepresented in the overall ISM and in the Mayo/Sligo sample. Previous research has suggested that their participation rates are lower than Irish nationals. All participation rates have margin of errors and small differences should not be over-interpreted as meaningful particularly where the sample size is relatively small. So, when looking at the figures below it is important to remember that they are at best an approximation.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dttas.ie/corporate> - High Level Goal for sport “To contribute to a healthier and more active society by promoting sports participation and by supporting high performance and the provision of facilities.”

## 2. RESULTS

### 2.1 Overall Physical Activity

**Table 1** compares physical activity participation in Mayo / Sligo with the national average. It captures regular<sup>7</sup> participation activity through sport, recreational walking and active travel i.e. walking and cycling for transport. In the tables below, the “highly active” are those who meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines<sup>8</sup> while those who are “sedentary” play no sport, are not recreational walkers and don’t walk or cycle for transport. Based on the 2011 Census data the 48.1% participating in sport is equivalent to approximately 73,600 adults aged 16 and over taking part in regular sporting activity in the Mayo/Sligo region.

**Table 1: Summary of Physical Activity – Mayo / Sligo vs. National**

	Mayo / Sligo	National
Sporting Participation	48.1%	46.0%
Recreational Walking	64.5%	64.3%
Walk for Transport	29.6%	40.0%
Cycle for Transport	10.8%	10.1%
Highly Active	29.2%	30.3%
Sedentary	15.4%	13.2%

Participation rates are broadly similar to the national figures except in the case of walking for transport where the rate is considerably lower in Mayo – Sligo. This is not surprising given the highly rural nature of the region and the fact that urban dwellers are significantly more likely to walk for transport than their rural counterparts. The reduced levels of walking for transport are also reflected in the slightly higher rates of sedentarism within the counties than nationally. Urban residents are significantly more likely to play sport, walk recreationally and for transport purposes than their rural counterparts in Mayo / Sligo.

In **Table 2** overleaf we look at these behaviours by gender within Mayo / Sligo. The most notable feature is the higher participation rate in sport among women than men. The significance of this is that it stands in stark contrast to the national situation where the proportion of men participating in

<sup>7</sup> The ISM asks respondent about their participation in the previous 7 days so “regular” can be regarded here as being equivalent to participation at least once a week in each type of activity

<sup>8</sup> For adults to be highly active requires that they take part in at least 5 sessions of physical activity per week of at least 30 minutes duration at a moderate intensity or greater. Moderate intensity is considered sufficient to raise the person’s breathing rate.

sport exceeds that of women by nearly 10%. While this is partly due to the fact that men in Mayo / Sligo are slightly less likely to participate than their national counterparts<sup>9</sup>, the main factor here is that women in Mayo / Sligo are significantly more likely to participate than their national counterparts – 49% vs. 40.9% respectively. As we will see below participation levels among women in Mayo / Sligo are higher in nearly all sports when compared to the national situation with the gap being particularly large in respect of exercise, swimming, running and cycling.

Women in Mayo / Sligo are also much more likely to take recreational walks than men. As a result they are significantly more likely to be highly active than men. It is also notable that men in Mayo / Sligo are much less likely to be highly active than their national counterparts. The low levels of walking for transport in Mayo / Sligo is evident among both men and women. Women are less sedentary than men in the region who themselves are more likely to be sedentary than their national counterparts.

**Table 2: Summary of Physical Activity by gender – Mayo / Sligo vs. National**

	Mayo / Sligo		National	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Sporting Participation	47.1%	49.0%	51.5%	40.9%
Recreational Walking	57.8%	71.1%	58.0%	70.3%
Walk for Transport	28.8%	30.3%	39.1%	40.9%
Cycle for Transport	11.9%	9.7%	14.6%	5.7%
Highly Active	24.4%	33.9%	29.9%	30.7%
Sedentary	17.4%	13.4%	13.3%	13.0%

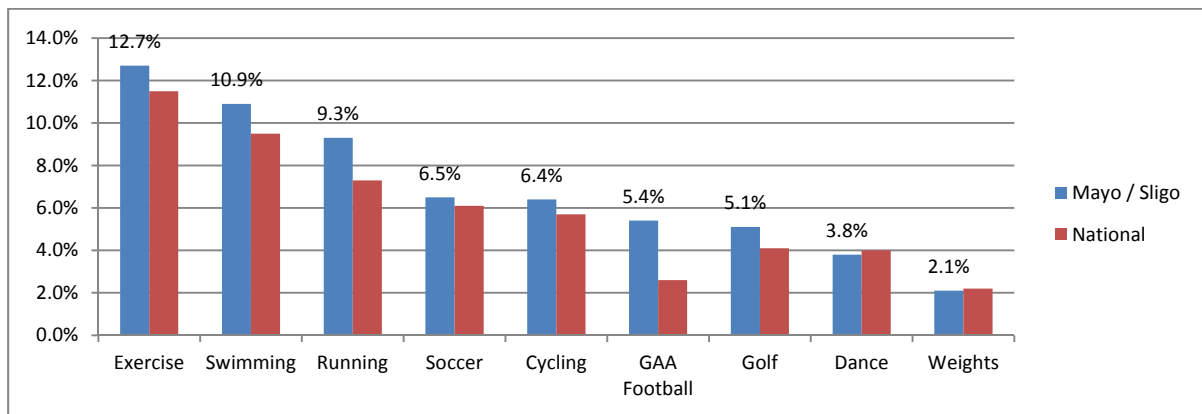
## 2.2 Most Popular Sporting Activities

Figures 2.2 and 2.3a and b show the most popular sports in Mayo / Sligo overall and by gender. Only sports with participation levels of 2% or greater are shown. Individual sports dominate, accounting for 7 of the 9 most popular activities. This is reflected at a combined level where the proportion playing individual sports (42.6%) is almost 4 times higher than those playing team sports (11.4%). Participation levels are higher in Mayo / Sligo than nationally in the top 7 sports even if none of the differences are statistically significant. The contribution of women’s participation to this situation is clear from Figure 2.3b.

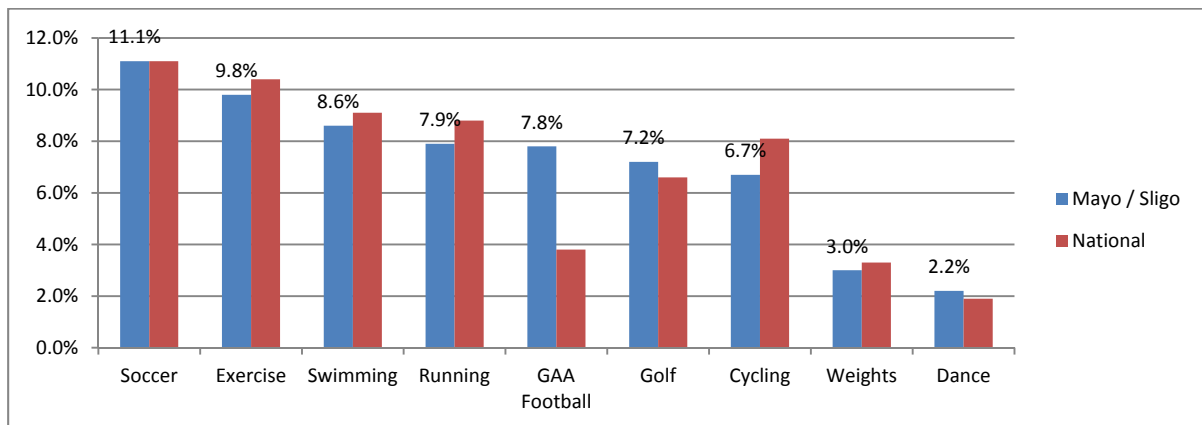
<sup>9</sup> The difference of 4.4% between men in Mayo / Sligo participating (47.1%) and men participating nationally (51.5%) is within the margin of error and is not statistically significant.



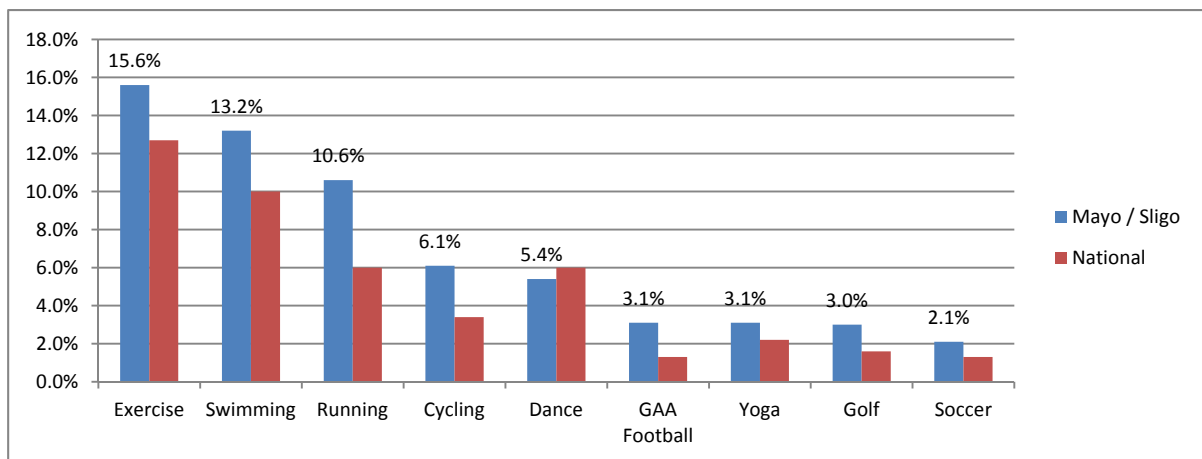
**Figure 2.2: Top Participation Sports in Mayo / Sligo and Nationally- Overall<sup>10</sup>**



**Figure 2.3a: Top Participation Sports in Mayo / Sligo and Nationally – Men**



**Figure 2.3b: Top Participation Sports in Mayo / Sligo and Nationally- Women**



The most popular sports for men and women in Mayo / Sligo are similar to the most popular sports nationally by gender. However, participation levels among men in Mayo / Sligo are slightly lower than nationally across all sports with the exception of gaelic football where participation levels are

<sup>10</sup> The national figures for overall, male and female participation are based on the composite average of the 2011 and 2013 ISM figures.

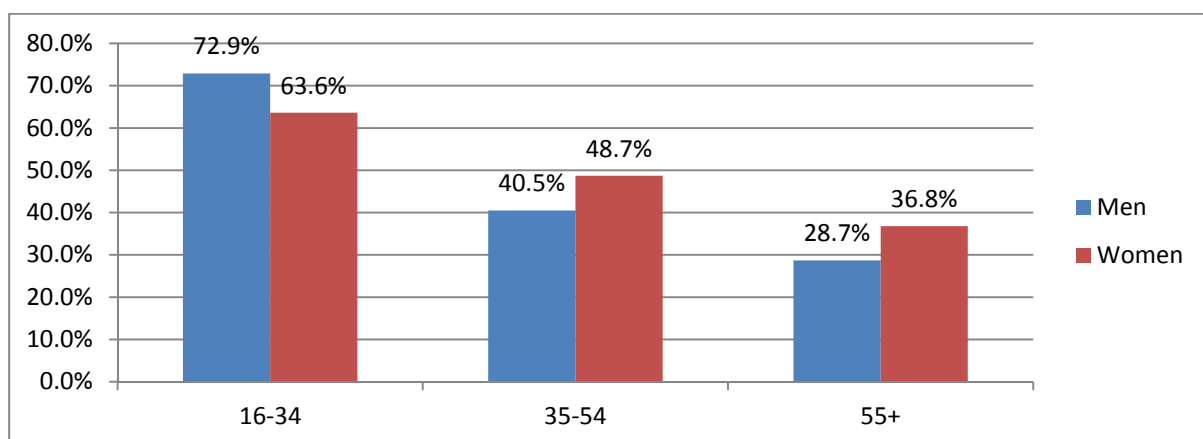
substantially higher than nationally. Unsurprisingly given what we have already seen above the situation is very different in the case of women. Here, for 7 of the most popular 9 sports participation levels are higher than nationally and in the case of the 4 most popular sports in the counties – exercise, swimming, running and cycling – the gap between the numbers playing in the counties and those playing nationally is considerable. We can only speculate what might be driving these participation levels. But what is clear is that the reasons and factors behind them are worthy of further investigation by national and local policy makers to assess the scope for their possible emulation elsewhere.

Team sports are much more popular among men (17.8%) than women (5.1%). However, more women (46.4%) participate in individual sports than men (38.6%). It is particularly noteworthy that there are 9 times as many women participating in individual activities than in team sports.

### 2.3 Participation and Age

Participation declines among men and women with age as can be seen in **Figure 2.4** below. The drop off is steeper for men than for women from the 20s to the 30s reflecting the extent of drop out by men from team sport during this period of their lives<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand participation in individual sports (not shown) tends to sustain more strongly and endure transitions across the life course for both men and women. While younger men in Mayo / Sligo are more likely to take part in sport than younger women the situation is reversed from the mid-30s onwards linked largely to women’s greater attraction to individual sports than men.

**Figure 2.4: Participation by Age and Gender**



<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Research/Keeping-Them-in-the-Game-2013-/> for detailed analysis of transitions into and out of sport over the life course

## 2.4 Participation and socio-economic status

While the ISM has shown that the gender gap has narrowed over the years, the depiction of social gradients has been a consistent feature of sports participation research in Ireland for over a decade and these gradients have been relatively resilient to policy efforts seeking to address them in the intervening period. A detailed analysis of social gradients is not possible for Mayo / Sligo because of the sample size. However, the available evidence suggests that social gradients are as strong here as elsewhere in the country. 58.3% of those with a third level education participate in sport compared to only 39.7% of those without while those with a third level education are also more likely to have played sport as a child (75.2% compared to 65.8%). These figures reflect the finding of previous research which found that social gradients in sports participation tended to emerge during the adolescent years and grow into adulthood.

## 2.5 Participation and disability

Illness and disability also have an obvious impact on participation. The ISM asks respondents whether they have any long-term illness, health problems or disability that limits their daily activities. Those who answer “yes” to this question are also asked whether this problem prevents their participation in sport or exercise. 20.2% of Mayo / Sligo based respondents answered yes to the first question with over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of these (15% of overall sample) also answering yes to the second question. These figures are higher than the national figures<sup>12</sup>. Those with an illness/disability are significantly less likely to take part in sport than those without (28.4% compared to 53.1%). In consequence they are also less likely to be highly active (19.3% vs. 31.7%) and more likely to be sedentary (25.8% vs. 12.7%).

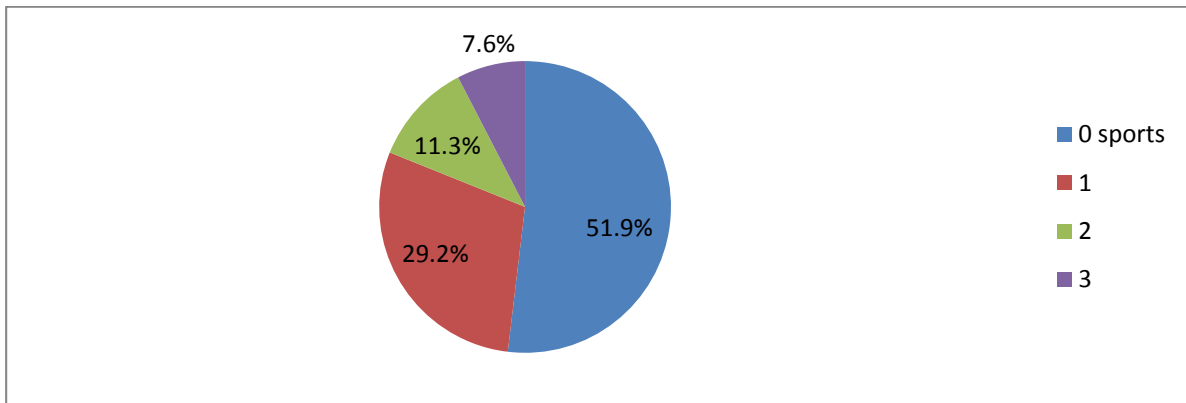
## 2.6 FITT Analysis

The ISM asks respondents questions about how often they play sport, for how long, at what intensity and in what context. This allows us to conduct an F (Frequency), I (Intensity), T (Time) and T (Type) analysis on participation patterns. Before looking at this aspect of participation we briefly look at the distribution of participants by number of sports played in **Figure 2.5** overleaf. We can see that almost 19% of adults played two or more sports in the previous 7 days.

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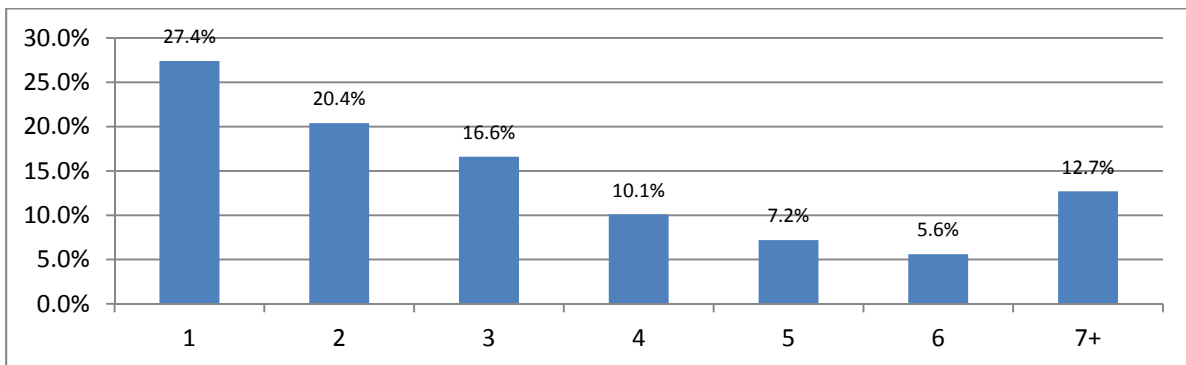
<sup>12</sup> Nationally the ISM reported that 18.3% had an illness/disability with 13.7% of the population indicating that this prevented participation.

**Figure 2.5: Proportion playing none, one, two and three sports**

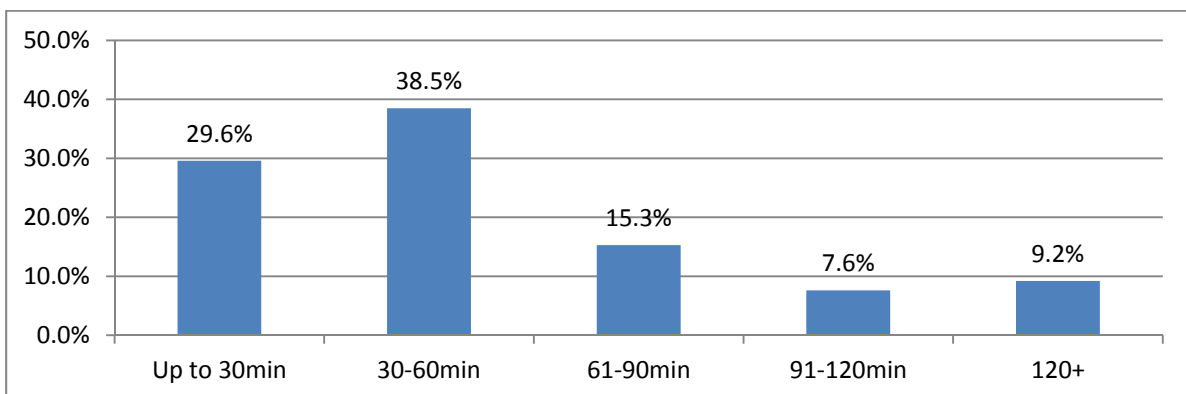


In **Figures 2.6 – 2.9** we look at the FITT of participation. Figure 2.6 shows that almost 3 in every 4 participants played sport more than once in the previous week. The average number of sporting sessions a week is just over 3, with little difference between men and women in this regard.

**Figure 2.6: Number of sporting sessions of participants in previous 7 days**



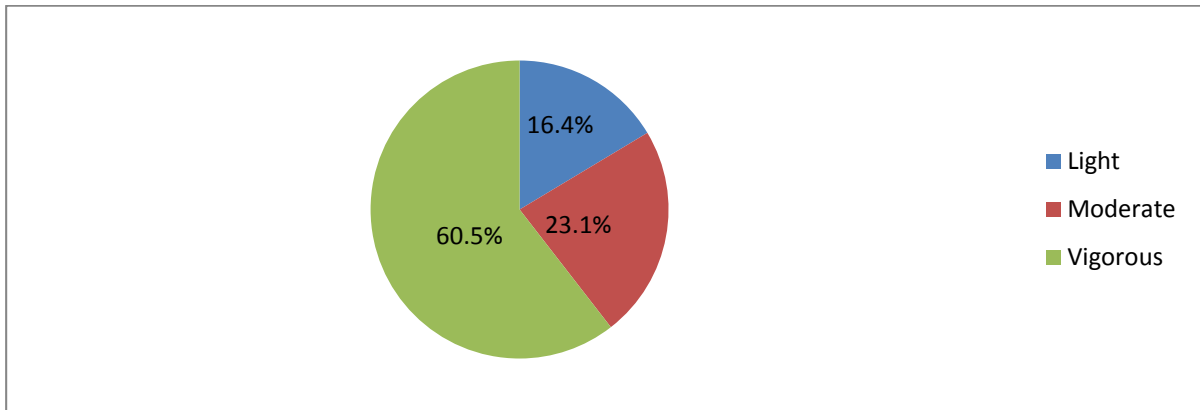
**Figure 2.7: Duration of sporting sessions in previous 7 days**



From **Figure 2.7** we see that over 70% of participants take part in sessions of 30 minutes or more with the average session lasting almost 70 minutes. Men are more likely to take part in longer

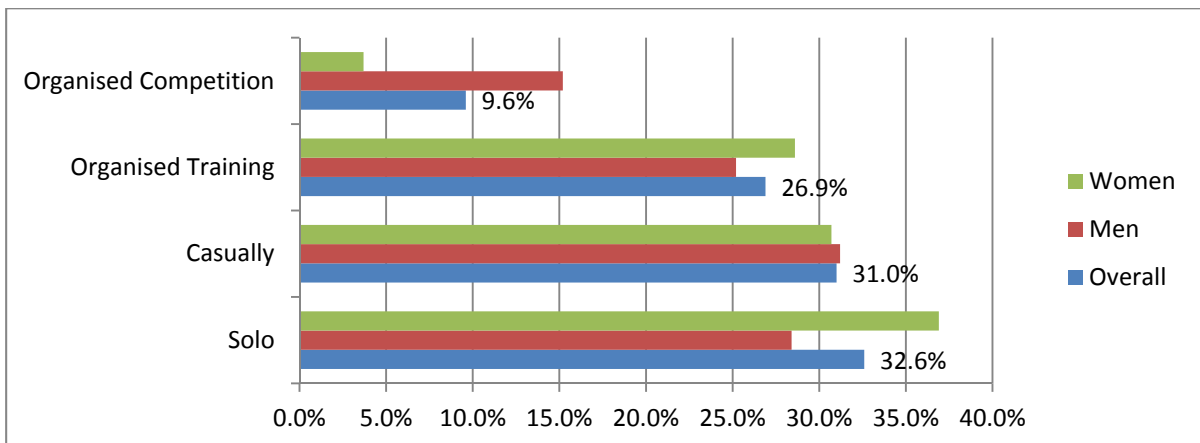
sporting sessions than women (81 minutes vs. 55 minutes) influenced strongly by their greater participation in team sports and golf. On average, team sport participants take part over 4 times a week while those who play individual activities do so over 3 times a week.

**Figure 2.8: Intensity of sporting sessions of participants in previous 7 days**



In Figure 2.8 we see that the majority of sessions were sufficient to raise the participant’s breathing rate (moderate) or make them out of breath or sweat (vigorous).

**Figure 2.9: Context of sporting participation**



**Figure 2.9** shows that just over a third of sport was played in an organised context with the majority of that being in played in training sessions and classes rather than in an organised competition. Most adult sport now takes place in a solo context followed closely by casual participation with family or friends. This reflects the growth of sports such as running, swimming, exercise, and cycling in recent years. Overall structured sport is more popular among men than women (37.8% vs. 33.2%); however both groups prefer unstructured sport (62.2% and 66.8% respectively). Organised competition is the least popular context for adult participation. In a flexible module conducted as part of the 2013 ISM,

clubs being overly associated with competitive participation was cited as one reason for people not wanting to join them.

Research has shown that the biggest disparity in health status is between those who participate in no sport or physical activity and those who are active to any extent, rather than between those who are active to differing degrees (Fahey et al., 2004; Lunn and Layte, 2008<sup>13</sup>). In keeping with this, it is a primary focus of national policy to concentrate on getting people, who do not actively participate in sport and exercise, to take up some form of activity. The analysis presented above supports this as an appropriate goal for policy. What it shows is that once an individual is engaged in a sport or exercise activity, there is a good chance they will participate more than once a week, for longer than half-an-hour and that they will do so sufficiently to get out of breath or sweat. Thus, most participants are likely to be getting some degree of health benefit from their participation. The key issue remains whether they are an active participant in the first place.

Nevertheless, the findings with respect to the context of participation are also noteworthy as regards policy that aims to increase participation. The majority of sporting activity is occurring outside of formal sporting structures suggesting that policy mechanisms that rely on pre-existing sporting bodies are less likely to be successful unless those bodies can reach out beyond the existing sporting and social networks with which they currently engage.

As regards the social benefits of sport, the fact that nearly one-third of all adult sporting activity is undertaken by people on their own is striking. Previous research has also identified that the primary reason cited by non-participants for not playing sport is lack of time (Fahey et al., 2004; CSO, 2007)<sup>14</sup>. The solo activities identified are highly efficient forms of exercise, which take up relatively little time and do not require much in the way of coordination between people. There may therefore be a trade off between the health benefits that such solo exercise activities bring and the social benefits that accompany other types of participation.

## **2.7 Interest in doing more sports**

In 2011 ISM respondents were asked whether or not they were interested in doing more sport or exercise, if so which sport they would like to do more of and, if not, what were the reasons preventing them from engaging in more activity. Encouragingly over half (58.9%) of participants in

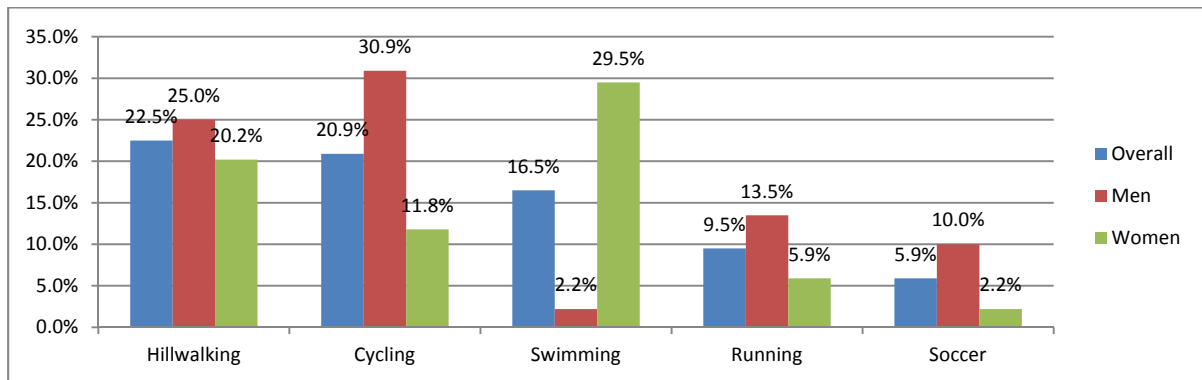
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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Research/Sports\\_Participation\\_Health\\_Among\\_Adults\\_2004\\_/Sports\\_Participation\\_Health.pdf](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Research/Sports_Participation_Health_Among_Adults_2004_/Sports_Participation_Health.pdf)  
[http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Research/Sporting\\_Lives\\_An\\_Analysis\\_of\\_a\\_Lifetime\\_of\\_Irish\\_2008\\_/Sporting\\_Lives.pdf](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Research/Sporting_Lives_An_Analysis_of_a_Lifetime_of_Irish_2008_/Sporting_Lives.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/labourmarket/current/qnhssports.pdf>

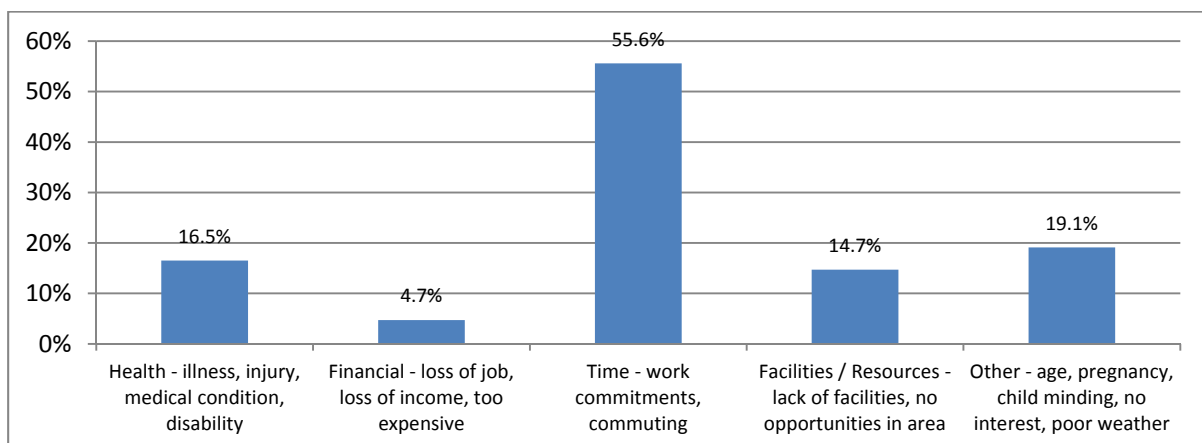
Mayo / Sligo are interested in increasing their sporting activity with non-participants more likely to agree with this than current participants (63.2% and 52.9%). **Figure 2.10** shows the preferred sports in Mayo / Sligo which is broadly similar to what was reported nationally. While men would like to cycle more, women are more attracted to swimming.

**Figure 2.10 Interest in doing more sport – by sport (Base: All interested in doing more sport)**



When it comes to barriers to increasing participation, time is overwhelmingly the most commonly cited factor overall while for those with an illness or disability, health is the most common barrier. Neither financial issues nor lack of facilities feature particularly strongly as barriers to increasing participation. This echoes previous research findings (Fahey et al 2004, CSO 2007). Among the “other” category in **Figure 2.11** below, pregnancy and child minding responsibilities feature prominently. Overall, the analysis suggests that the major factors limiting people’s ability to participate in (more) sport lie outside their immediate control but may be capable of being influenced by the provision of more convenient, accessible offerings which they can fit into their otherwise time-pressed lives.

**Figure 2.11: Barriers to increasing participation (Base: Respondents not interested in increasing their participation)**



### 3. Broader Physical Activity

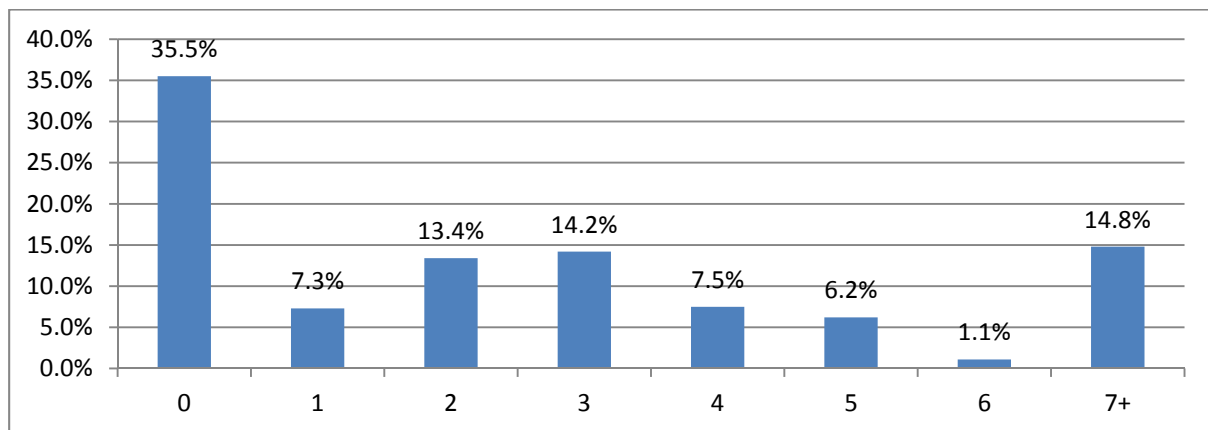
#### 3.1 Introduction

Apart from looking at participation in sport, the ISM also looks at participation in broader physical activity including recreational walking, and walking and cycling for transport. This section looks at these issues and at the extent to which respondents meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines.

#### 3.2 Recreational Walking

Recreational walking is an important source of physical activity for the majority of the adult population. It can be particularly beneficial in providing health and other benefits to older age groups who do not play sport. As a low load-bearing activity that can be undertaken at various intensities, it overcomes one of the main disadvantages for older people to physical activity, namely that it is easier to injure yourself.<sup>15</sup> The ISM records the walking habits of Irish adults including the number of walks, the duration of each walk and the usual walking pace. Just over 64% of Mayo / Sligo adults walked at least once in the past 7 days (**Figure 3.1**). The majority of recreational walkers took part in more than one walk per week with about 1 in 7 respondents taking part in 7 or more walks. The average time spent walking per week is just approximately 2.5 hours with individual walks lasting about 36 minutes on average. There is little difference between the genders in either regard. Most walkers walk at a steady pace or higher with over 50% walking at a brisk or fast pace.

**Figure 3.1: Recreational walking by number of walks in the previous 7 days**



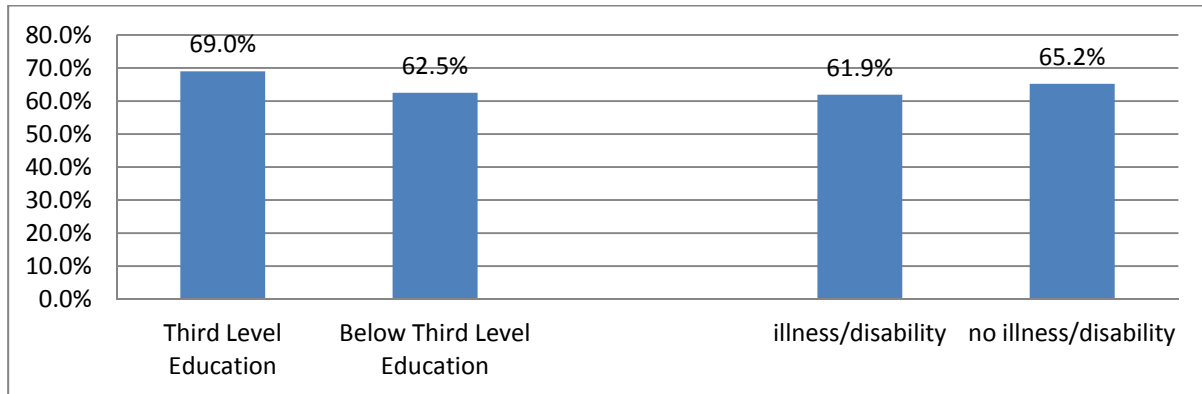
Walking is significantly more popular among women (71.1%) than men (57.8%) and is highly popular across all age groups. Urban residents are much more likely to take a recreational walk than their rural counterparts (69.9% vs. 61.9%). Unlike other sporting activities, walking holds a broad appeal

<sup>15</sup> Physical Activity and Sport: Participation and Attitudes of Older People in Ireland, Ipsos MORI September 2009



across social groups and among those with an illness/disability as can be seen from **Figure 3.2** below. Recreational walking offers both a gateway to activity and an activity to take part in while participants are transitioning from sports.

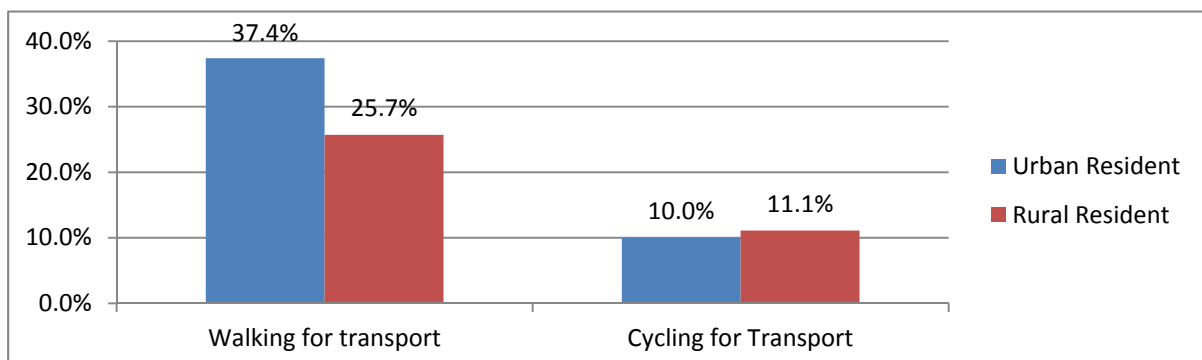
**Figure 3.2: Recreational Walking by highest level of educational attainment and by presence / absence of illness/disability**



### 3.2 Walking and Cycling for Transport

The ISM asks respondents if they have engaged in any walking or cycling for transport in the previous 7 days. While walking for transport is equally appealing to men and women in Mayo / Sligo albeit to a far lesser extent than elsewhere in the country, slightly more men cycle for transport than women as we have seen in **Table 2** earlier in the report. The highly rural nature of the two counties is likely to be a critical factor in the low levels of walking for transport. In **Figure 3.3** below we see that urban residents are significantly more likely to walk for transport while there is no difference in the numbers cycling for transport. Fears about safety, distance and suitability of paths may be factors here which might also be affecting recreational walking levels. On the other hand, that cycling for transport is as popular in the two counties might be due to the significant improvements in the cycling infrastructure which have been put in place in recent years within the counties.

**Figure 3.3: Walking and cycling for transport by location of residence**



### 3.3 Overall Activity Levels

The ISM allows an approximate<sup>16</sup> analysis of adult activity levels against the National Physical Activity Guidelines<sup>17</sup> based on a four-category classification system shown in **Figure 3.4**. The system is bookended by “sedentary” and “highly active” categories which are the main focus of this section.

**Figure 3.4: Activity Spectrum Categories and Definitions**

<b>Highly active</b>	Participate in 30 minutes moderate <sup>1</sup> physical activity at least five times during the previous seven days (i.e. meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines)
<b>Fairly Active</b>	Participated in 30 minutes physical activity at least twice during the previous seven days
<b>Just active</b>	Participated in a sporting activity or recreational walking for 20 minutes at least once during the previous seven days, or regularly walks or cycles for transport (at least once a week)
<b>Sedentary</b>	Did not participate (20 minutes) in sporting activity or recreational walking during the previous seven days and does not cycle or walk regularly for transport.

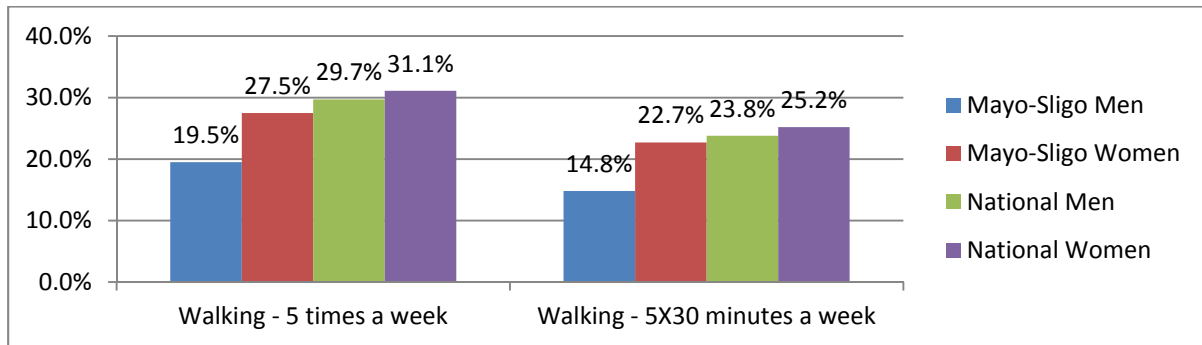
We have already seen in Table 1 earlier in the report that, overall, “highly active” levels in Mayo / Sligo are in line with the national picture while sedentarism is slightly higher. However, when we looked at these by gender in Table 2 we saw a different picture. Women in Mayo / Sligo are more likely to be highly active than their national counterparts due primarily to their greater sporting participation. On the other hand, men in Mayo / Sligo are significantly less likely to be highly active and more likely to be sedentary than both their national counterparts as well as women in the counties.

That fewer men in Mayo-Sligo are highly active than their county and national counterparts is due primarily to their recreational walking patterns rather than their participation in other sporting activities. In **Figure 3.5** overleaf we look at the proportions of men and women taking part in at least 5 sessions of walking a week in Mayo-Sligo and nationally. From this we can clearly see that men in Mayo-Sligo are simply not walking often or for sufficient duration to meet the Guidelines directly through recreational walking.

<sup>16</sup> This analysis can only be regarded as approximate as it does not take account of physical activity undertaken in the workplace or in the home while walking and cycling for transport are only considered in the context of sedentarism i.e. they are not considered when looking at whether or not an individual meets the National Physical Activity Guidelines

<sup>17</sup> For adults to meet the Guidelines requires that they take part in at least 5 sessions of physical activity per week of at least 30 minutes duration at a moderate intensity or greater. Moderate intensity is considered sufficient to raise the person’s breathing rate. In the case of the ISM these sessions can be through sport, recreational walking or a combination of both.

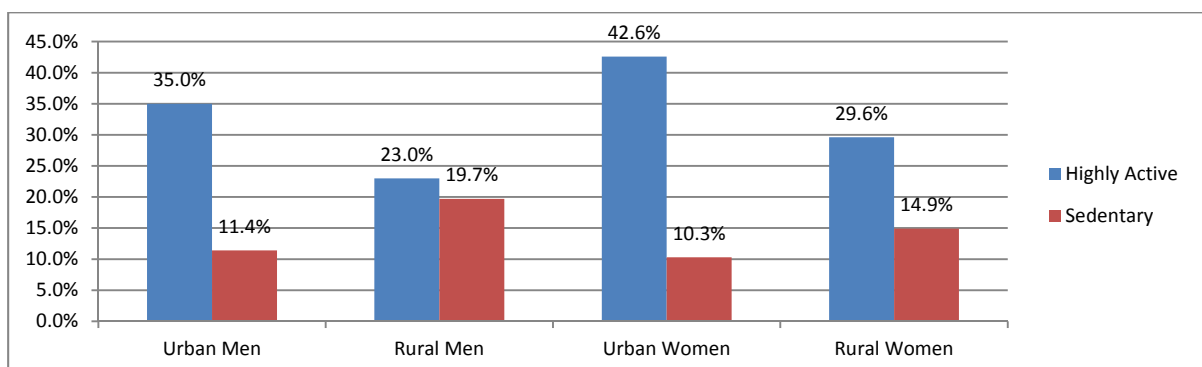
**Figure 3.5: Proportions engaging in at least 5 recreational walking sessions per week by gender – Mayo-Sligo vs. National**



The relatively high levels of sedentarism among men in Mayo-Sligo are primarily accounted for by their low levels of participation in walking for transport. While women in Mayo-Sligo are also significantly less likely to walk for transport than their national counterparts they more than compensate for this by their higher levels of participation in sport and recreational walking.

Living location is another factor that appears to strongly influence whether or not an individual is likely to be highly active or sedentary within the two counties. We can see this from **Figure 3.6** below where we have combined the analysis by living location with gender. While again stressing our caution around over-interpreting the results here, **Figure 3.6** shows strong gender and living location effects around both categories of activity. Rural men are significantly less likely to be highly active and significantly more likely to be sedentary than their urban counterparts. For women the difference between urban residents and rural residents is only significant for the highly active. Similarly women in each location are more likely to be highly active and less likely to be sedentary than their male counterparts with some of these differences being significant e.g. highly active urbanites. What this suggests is that the main policy challenges in Mayo / Sligo are around getting rural residents, particularly men, to engage in regular sporting or other forms of physical activity.

**Figure 3.6 : Highly Active and Sedentary in Mayo / Sligo by Location of Residence and Gender**



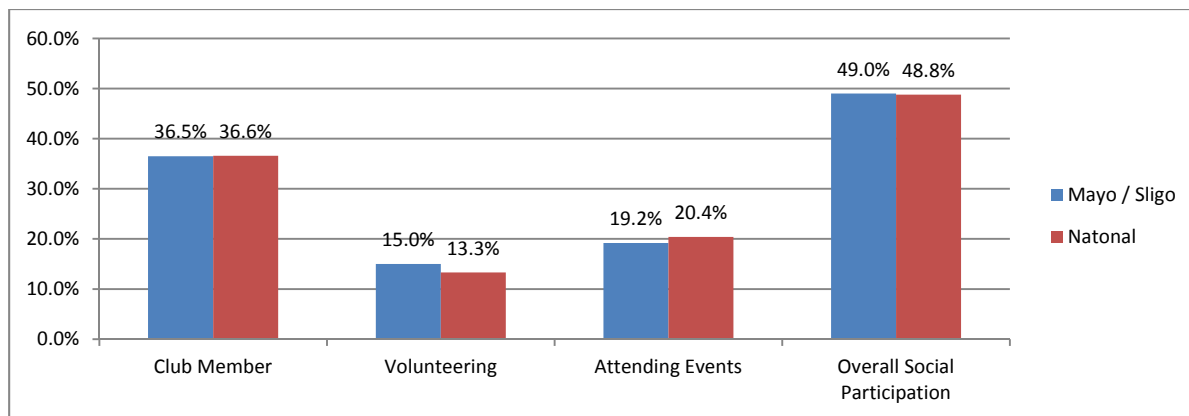
## 4. Social Participation

### 4.1 Overall

The ISM looks at social participation in sport through club membership, volunteering and attendance at sports events. In 2013 it also looked at perceptions of gender issues and sports administration locally and nationally as well as the reasons for participating in sport outside of the club environment. These issues are examined in depth in the 2013 ISM Annual Report<sup>18</sup> to which the reader is referred for further detail. That report also examines the demographics of social participation in some detail. This chapter therefore concentrates on the main headlines around social participation in Mayo / Sligo.

Before looking at each of the different forms of social participation in turn we compare the overall levels of social participation in Mayo / Sligo with the national situation in **Figure 4.1** below. Social participation in Mayo / Sligo is on par with the national figures. Overall, 49% of Mayo / Sligo adults report their involvement in some form of regular social participation in sport underscoring the importance of sport in contributing to social capital in the two counties.

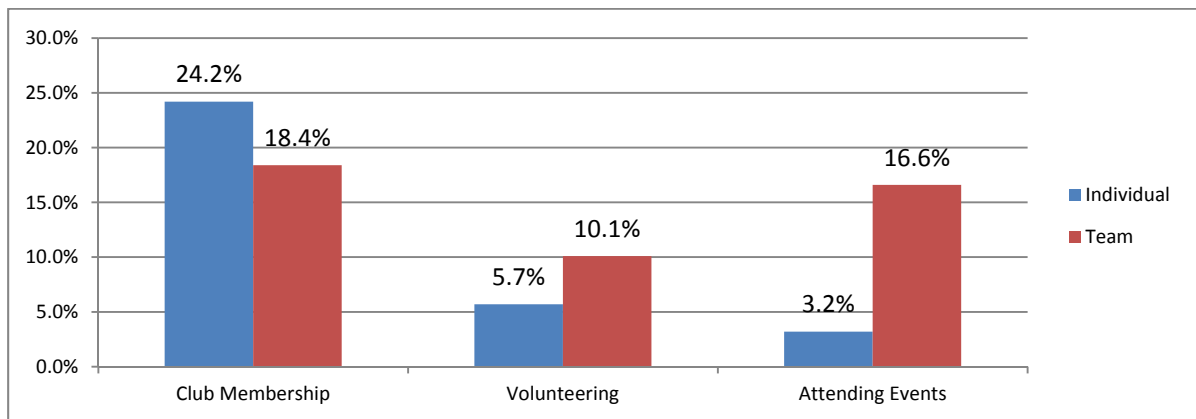
**Figure 4.1: Levels of Social Participation Mayo/Sligo and nationally**



While active participation is dominated by individual sporting activities the situation is more mixed when it comes to social participation as we can see from **Figure 4.2** overleaf. The overwhelming majority of volunteering and attendance at sporting events is associated with team sports, in all likelihood most of this being connected with children's participation. On the other hand, club membership favours individual sports reflecting to some extent the dominance of those types of sports which are preferred by active participants.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Research/Irish-Sports-Monitor-Annual-Report-2013/>

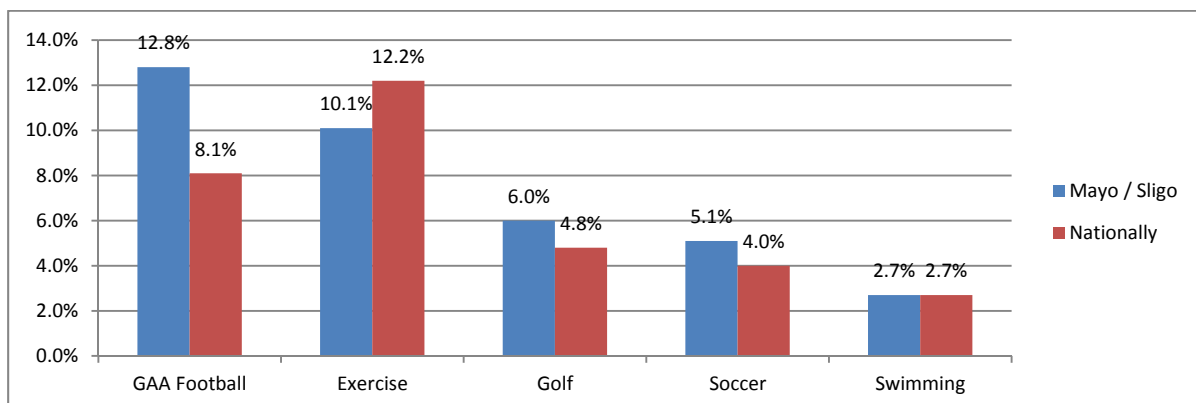
**Figure 4.2: Social Participation by type of sport**



#### 4.2 Club Membership

Team and individual sports are well represented in terms of club membership as seen in **Figure 4.3**<sup>19</sup> below. The strength of gaelic football in the counties can be seen echoing the relatively high levels of active participation in the sport already seen in Figure 2.2.

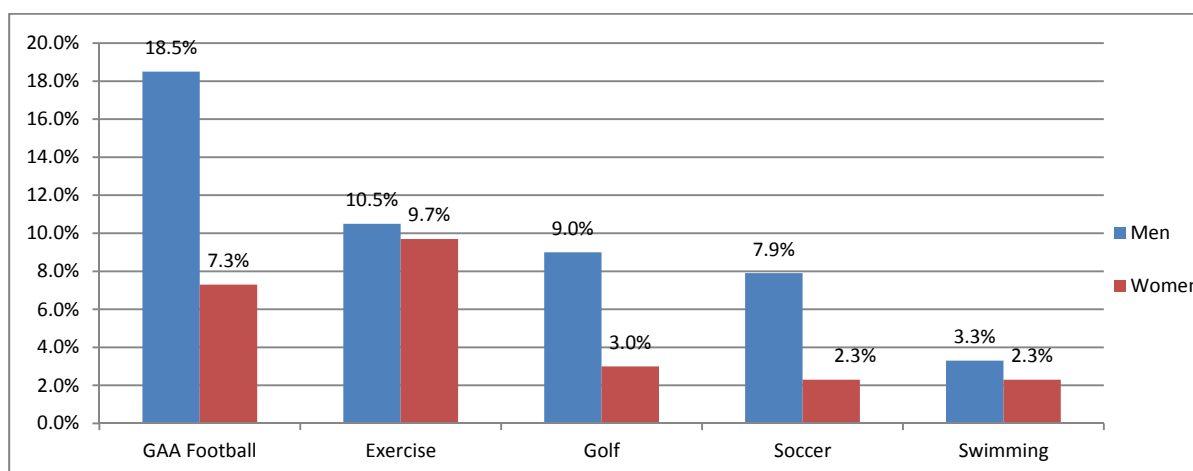
**Figure 4.3: Club Membership by sport – Mayo / Sligo vs. Nationally**



While we have seen that women in Mayo / Sligo participate more than men in sport, there is a large gender gap in favour of men when it comes to club membership (45.7% vs. 27.5% respectively). It is clear from **Figure 4.4** overleaf that the greatest disparity here relates to membership of team sports clubs where men are more than twice as likely to be members as women. Of the individual sports, golf also demonstrates a strong gender gradient in favour of men while membership of gyms and swimming clubs is more evenly distributed.

<sup>19</sup> Only sports with membership of 2% or more in Mayo / Sligo are shown. Sports with membership between 1% and 2% are hill walking, hurling / camogie, rugby, running and cycling.

**Figure 4.4: Club Membership by sport by gender<sup>20</sup>**



Apart from the influence of gender, younger people, those who own a car and individuals with a 3<sup>rd</sup> level education are also more likely to belong to a club. There is no significant difference between urban and rural residents.

### 4.3 Volunteering

Volunteering is regarded by many as the lifeblood of sport, without which much of sporting activity, particularly that involving children, would simply not occur. It is a key component of organised sport in Ireland and, according to official sources, sport features as the single activity involving the greatest amount of volunteering. The 2006 Census of Population<sup>21</sup> identified that 33% of all volunteers were involved in sport.

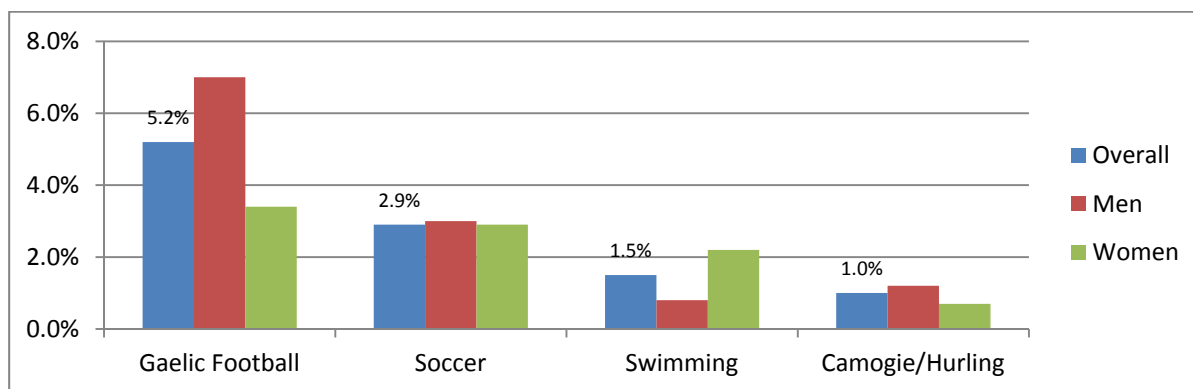
The picture for volunteering in Mayo/Sligo is similar to that nationally. Almost one in seven adults in the Mayo / Sligo region volunteered at least once in the previous 7 days during 2011 – 2013 with men being more likely to volunteer than women. Team sports dominate the volunteering landscape as seen in **Figure 4.5** overleaf. Only sports with an overall volunteering rate of 1% or more are shown. There is almost no difference in the proportion volunteering between urban and rural regions. Volunteering is strongly associated with children's participation in sport and this is also true in Mayo / Sligo with 18% of those with children volunteering compared to 11% without. As with other forms of participation, volunteering demonstrates strong social gradients e.g. those with a 3<sup>rd</sup> level education are significantly more likely to volunteer than those with lower levels of educational

<sup>20</sup> Of those sports with membership levels of between 1% and 2%, large gender differences are seen in rugby, cycling and hill walking ( the latter in favour of women) while hurling / camogie and running have similar levels of membership by gender

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/saveselections.asp>

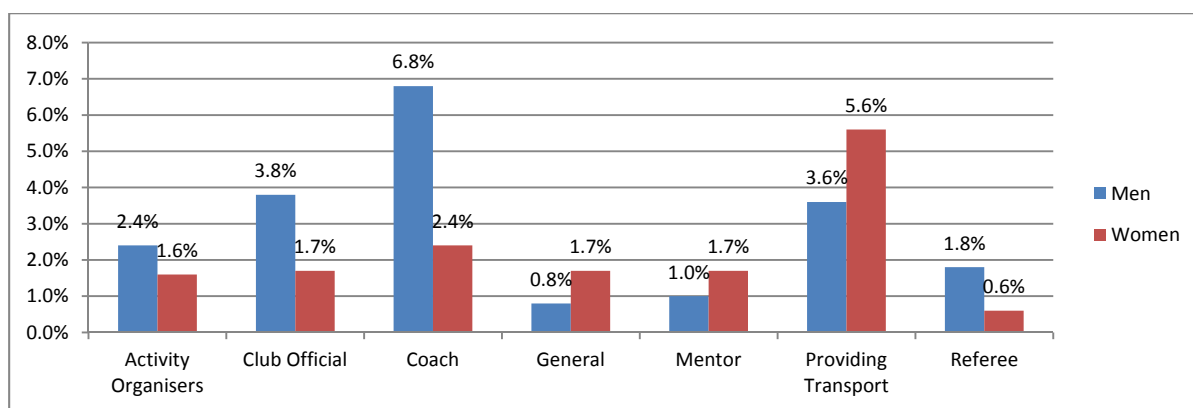
attainment (18.8% vs. 12.5% respectively). Gaelic football is the number one sport for volunteering among men and women although there are significantly more men volunteering here than women. On the other hand soccer has an even distribution of men and women volunteers.

**Figure 4.5: Volunteering by sport**



Those who volunteer spend on average<sup>22</sup> 3 hours per week volunteering with men spending more time than women (3 vs. 2 hours) which may be due to the type of volunteering duties men and women perform, which can be seen in **Figure 4.6** below. Men are more likely to volunteer for coaching and club official duties while the dominant role for women is in providing transport. The nature of these roles tends to reinforce the highly gendered nature in the administration of Irish sport as perceived by the ISM respondents during 2013 and reported on in the Annual Report.<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 4.6: Volunteering Roles by gender**



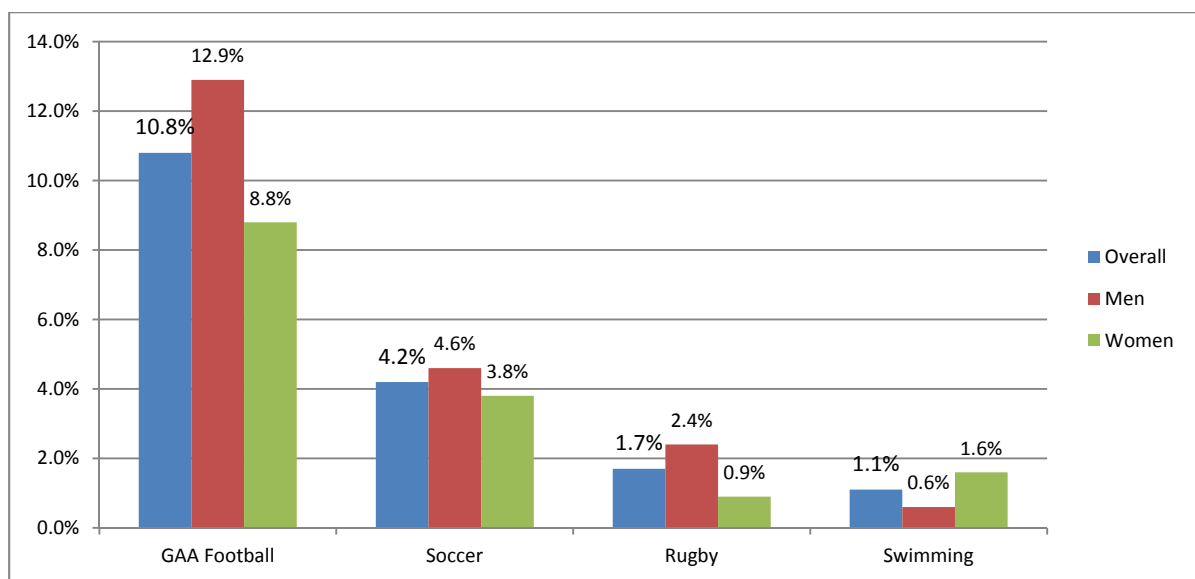
<sup>22</sup> We use the median here instead of the mean to reduce the influence of outliers on the results.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Research/Irish-Sports-Monitor-Annual-Report-2013/>

#### 4.4 Attendance at Sporting Events

Just less than one in five adults in the Mayo / Sligo region regularly attend some form of sporting event whether involving adults or children. Even more than volunteering, attendance is dominated by team sports with over 5 times as many adults attending such events as those involving individual activities. This reflects the importance of children's activities to attendance patterns with 22.5% of those with children attending events compared to 14.7% without. **Figure 4.7** below shows attendance by sport by gender during 2011 – 2013 in Mayo / Sligo. The strength of gaelic football is again apparent.

**Figure 4.7: Attendance at sporting events by sport in Mayo / Sligo by gender**





## 5. Policy Implications

This briefing report has provided descriptive information on participation in sport and physical activity in the Mayo and Sligo counties. Mayo / Sligo has much in common with the rest of the country in terms of participation patterns but some notable differences have also emerged as a result of our analysis. Age, socio-economic status and the presence or absence of a disability all play important roles in whether or not individuals within the counties are likely to be active through sport and physical activity. Policy responses to these issues have been looked at in the context of previously commissioned ISC research such as the Sporting Lives, Fair Play?, Keeping Them in the Game and Irish Sports Monitor reports; all available at [www.irishsportsCouncil.ie](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie). The reader is referred to these reports for further exposition on these issues and some suggestions on how to deal with them.

This section therefore focuses on issues where Mayo-Sligo might be slightly different to the rest of the country or those which have not necessarily been covered in depth in the previous research reports; the high levels of women's participation in sport, the potential role of walking and the urban-rural divide in terms of activity levels. There is a degree of overlap between the issues.

### a) Women's Participation in Sport

This report is most unusual in reporting that more women than men in Mayo / Sligo participate in sport even if the difference is slight. The finding is substantially at odds with the findings of the previous research reports mentioned above, much of the international research literature and the results of an earlier study carried out on Mayo / Sligo based on Irish Sports Monitor data from 2007 to 2009<sup>24</sup>. And, while recent ISM reports have suggested that the gender gap in participation is closing, the 2013 ISM still found that nearly ten per cent more men than women participated in sport nationally.

Apart from finding that women participate at least to the same extent as men, we also found that for 7 of the most popular 9 sports participation levels in Mayo / Sligo are higher than nationally and in the case of the 4 most popular sports in the counties – exercise, swimming, running and cycling – the gap between the numbers playing in the counties and those playing nationally is considerable.

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Research/Regional\\_Participation/Mayo\\_Sligo\\_PDF/](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Research/Regional_Participation/Mayo_Sligo_PDF/)

While we have no reason to doubt the ISM data or our analysis of it here we consider that our findings here merit closer examination and assessment in the first instance on the part of local policy makers. At the very least such an examination will help to confirm or otherwise the veracity of our findings and, if such should prove to be the case, to understand better the factors helping to drive women's participation. Given the policy imperative around narrowing the gender gap in participation such an assessment might also help to throw some light on what might constitute "good practice" in encouraging women's participation with a view to possible emulation elsewhere.

**b) The potential role of walking**

We have seen in the report that one of the main policy challenges in Mayo / Sligo is around getting men, particularly rural men, to engage in regular sporting or other forms of physical activity. Rural men are significantly less likely to be highly active and significantly more likely to be sedentary than all other groups in Mayo / Sligo. Recreational walking could have a role to play in addressing these challenges.

Recreational walking is the most popular physical activity in the country with 2.3 million adults taking part regularly. While men in Mayo / Sligo are as likely to walk for recreation as their national counterparts it would appear that they are not engaging in the activity often enough or for long enough to contribute towards meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines. Recreational walking offers the further benefit of being both a gateway to more intensive activity and an activity to take part in while participants are transitioning between sports. We recommend that local policy makers consider the development of promotional / awareness campaigns to communicate key messages around how men might benefit their health from increasing the "dosage" of their walking activity.

As part of any efforts to increase recreational walking, particularly among rural residents, some consideration will need to be given to development of a supportive physical infrastructure in the same way as cycling infrastructure has been developed in the counties.

**c) Overall participation among rural men**

Women living in urban and rural regions have similar levels of participation in sport while men living in rural regions are less likely to take part in sport than men living in urban regions (53.5% compared

to 44%). Rural men also have lower participation rates in recreational walking than urban men (53.5% and 66.7% respectively) while women have similar rates of participation regardless of living location. Men living in rural locations are a possible future target group for Mayo / Sligo LSPs. Men living in rural regions are potentially being deprived of the social, mental and physical health benefits of participation. There is evidence that rural communities are at risk of isolation with those populations more likely to be at risk of suicide than urban regions.<sup>25</sup> According to 2011 CSO figures, 82.7% of suicides in Ireland were males with those aged 45-64 the most likely to be at risk<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Pain and Distress in Rural Ireland a qualitative study of suicidal behaviour among men in rural areas (2012)

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/ss/suicidestatistics2011/#.VRVTqfl\\_vlo](http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/ss/suicidestatistics2011/#.VRVTqfl_vlo)

Appendix

	<b>2011 Census</b>	<b>2011+2013 ISM combined</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>16 years plus</b>	<b>16 years plus</b>
Male	49.5%	49.2%
Female	50.5%	50.8%
<b>Age</b>		
16-19	6.5%	6.4%
20-24	7.3%	7.2%
25-34	17.1%	17.0%
35-44	17.7%	17.6%
45-54	17.3%	17.2%
55-64	15.3%	14.9%
65+	18.8%	19.7%
<b>Working Status (Census 2011 includes those under 16)</b>		
Employee/Self Employed	48.5%	47.8%
Unemployed	10.5%	10.2%
Retired	15.5%	16.9%
Homemaker	9.2%	9.3%
Student	11.2%	10.7%
Unemployed-illness/disabled	5.1%	5.1%

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