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### Sport and Physical Activity Participation in Ireland

According to the ISM (Irish Sports Monitor Mid-Year Report) (2023) and the most recent CSPPA (Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity) Study (2022):

**30%**

Of Irish adults classified as ‘Inactive’ (did not participate in any activity during the past 7 days). With a Disability (21%), without (9%). Both were broadly unchanged since 2019

**39%**

of Irish adults classified as ‘Highly Active’ (considered to be meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines). An increase of 2% on the 2022 figure (37%)

**12% and 23%**

12% of post primary and 23% of primary aged children met the National Physical Activity Guidelines of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity every day (2022)

**47%**

Of Irish adults are regularly playing sport - A key aim of the National Sports Policy in Ireland is that 60% of adults regularly playing sport by 2027

The ISM 2023 report highlighted a notable recovery in participation levels following the decline experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time since the pandemic, sports participation rates have surpassed those recorded in 2019 (46%). Individual activities such as walking, running, and cycling saw unprecedented growth, while indoor and team-based sports faced declines.

Despite this progress, the proportion of Irish adults meeting the National Physical Activity guidelines has now stabilised, with efforts still needed to restore club membership and volunteering to pre-pandemic levels. The Irish Sports Monitor research also underscores the impact of these changes on different groups.

**Highlight:** The gender gap for sports participation narrowed to 3% (2.9) in 2023 compared to 5% in 2022. This is encouraging as the gender gap dropped below 3% (2.9) for the first time since 2019.

**Highlight:** There remain gaps in participation, due to age and socioeconomic status. Strikingly, Irish Sports Monitor results reveal a 20% gap in sports participation between individuals with disabilities and those without.

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## Synergy with National and International Policy

The positive impact of regular sport and physical activity participation is far reaching, cross cutting, and prioritised across government and national policies; this is summarised below:



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## National Sports Policy Alignment

**National Sports Policy 2018-2027**: The Government’s National Sports Policy is foundational for our Local Sports Plan development. This asks Local Authorities to develop ‘local sports plans’ which review needs and set out actions to increase participation locally.

**Sport Ireland Participation Plan** **2021-2024**: The Plan has a clear focus on those who have traditionally had fewer opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity and reinforces the importance of developing active places and whole system and community approaches to promoting developing sport and physical activity. These concepts are key to our new Local Sports Plan.

**National Physical Activity Plan**: The overarching target of the Plan is to increase the proportion of the population undertaking regular physical activity by 1% per annum, with the aim being that Irish people will better understand physical activity’s health benefits and learn how to be more active in their daily lives. Our Sports and Physical Activity plan synergises strongly with this and will contribute to the achievement of the Plan’s goals.

## National Health Policy Alignment

**Healthy Ireland, A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013 – 2025**: Healthy Ireland takes a “whole of government” and “whole of society” approach to tackling the issues which lead to negative health outcomes. The Framework offers six priority areas of work, two of which offer clear synergy with our Sport and Physical Activity Plan: 1) physical activity; and 2) spaces and places for health and wellbeing.

**Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone:** The Policy aims to create positive mental health and wellbeing amongst the Irish population. Our Sport and Physical Activity Plan will contribute to this Policy’s objectives as the links between mental health and physical activity are well established. The provision of a range of physical activity opportunities will promote mental resilience.

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## Governmental Policy Alignment

**Programme for Government: Our Shared Future:** The Programme shapes the Government’s direction until 2025 for Sport and Physical Activity nationally: *Mission ‘Universal Health Care’* seeks to promote physical exercise among all sections of society to stimulate long-term health benefits and *Mission ‘Building Stronger and Safer Communities’* commits the government to promoting personal health, wellbeing, and physical activity. Finally, *Mission ‘A Better Quality of Life for All’* seeks to promote sustainable modes of transport and active travel for their role in environmental sustainability.

**Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework** and the **National Development Plan 2021-2030**: Project Ireland 2040 is the Government’s high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of Ireland until 2040. Our Sport and Physical Activity Plan aligns with Project Ireland 2040’s commitments to *enhance sports facilities in Ireland* and to *improve air quality and create a clean environment for a healthy society*; the growth of active travel opportunities will support progress towards this objective.

**National Development Plan 2021-2030:** The National Development Plan sets enhancing sports facilities throughout Ireland as a strategic investment priority and sets specific environmental goals focused on the improvement of air quality and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; again, the growth of active travel opportunities will support progress towards this goal.

**Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP2023):** The growth in active travel opportunities through this strategy will the support the achievement of the Climate Action Plan’s goals for a 50% increase in daily active travel journeys by 2030 and a 25% reduction in daily car journeys.

**National Sustainable Movement Policy:** In increasing opportunities for active travel the [insert county] Local Sport and Physical Activity Plan 2024-2029 is innately synergised with the purpose of the National Sustainable Movement Policy and its targets for at least 500,000 additional daily active travel and public transport journeys and a 10% reduction in kilometres driven by fossil fuelled cars by 2030.

**NTA Active Travel Programme**: The work of the NTA’s Active Travel Programme is underpinned by the aims and objectives set out in the Government’s Climate Action Plan 2023, with a goal to increase the level of walking, cycling and public transport so that these methods of transport will account for 50% of all journeys made by 2030. Projects funded under this Programme are delivered by Local Authorities, evidencing cross-organisational and cross-sectoral synergy with the County Council Local Sport and Physical Activity Plan 2024-2029.

## A picture containing graphical user interface  Description automatically generatedInternational Policy Alignment

**United Nations: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**:

September 2015 saw the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda) by all 193 Members States of the United Nations (UN). The 2030 Agenda aims to deliver a more sustainable, prosperous and peaceful future for all and sets out a framework for how to achieve this by 2030. This framework is made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which cover the social, economic and environmental requirements for a sustainable future. Investing in a more active society through promoting walking, cycling, sport, active recreation and play can contribute directly to achieving many of the 2030

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[[1]](#footnote-2). [insert county] is fully committed to the SDGs and this plan, in seeking to inspire [insert mission statement], this plan sets out how we can make a meaningful and practical contribution at a local level.

**Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (GAPPA) Framework 2018-2030:** Worldwide, 1 in 4 adults, and 3 in 4 adolescents (aged 11-17 years), do not currently meet the global recommendations for physical activity set by the World Health Organisation (WHO)[[2]](#footnote-3). Following requests by countries for updated guidance on effective policy actions to increase physical activity at all levels, WHO developed the Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (GAPPA) Framework 2018-2030. The GAPPA Framework emphasises that effective national action to reverse current trends and reduce disparities in physical activity requires a “systems-based” approach with a strategic combination of “upstream” policy actions aimed at improving the social, cultural, economic and environmental factors that support physical activity, combined with “downstream”, individually focused (educational and informational) approaches.The framework sets out four strategic objectives; Create Active Systems, Create Active Societies, Create Active Environments and Create Active People. These four objectives are supported by 20 policy actions that are universally applicable to all countries. Together, these objectives capture the whole-of-system approach required to create a society that intrinsically values and prioritises policy investment in physical activity as a regular part of everyday life. Our plan is underpinned by a commitment to a whole system approach to sport and physical activity.

## The Cross Cutting Impact of Sport and Physical Activity

Research[[3]](#footnote-4)[[4]](#footnote-5)[[5]](#footnote-6)[[6]](#footnote-7) proves that participation in sport, physical activity and recreation brings significant positive impacts to people, communities, the environment and the economy.

**SOCIAL INTERACTION**: Physical activity reduces isolation; helps build community networks; and builds social cohesion

**MENTAL HEALTH:** Physical activity helpsmanage stress; boost energy levels; improve moods; reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression; and increases self-esteem and cognitive function

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**: Active travel reduces fossil fuel consumption; creates a healthier environment; and contributes to less congested and safer roads



**PHYSICAL HEALTH**: Physical activity helps to prevent and treat long-term health conditions and helps to control weight and manage diseases such as obesity

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**: Physical activity reduces longer-term healthcare costs in society; reduces sickness absence and enhances productivity at work; and increases tourism

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**QUALITY & INCLUSION** : Increases access and opportunities to physical activity for all groups, eliminating inequality and fostering integration and inclusiveness with those groups underrepresented in society

## The Economic Impact of Sport and Physical Activity

In 2021, Sport Ireland commissioned the Sheffield Hallam University’s Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC)[[7]](#footnote-8) to carry out research on the value of Sport in Ireland. The research looked at both the economic impact of sport in Ireland, including a valuation of sport volunteering, as well as the health impact of participation in sport and physical activity in Ireland. The report demonstrates that sport and physical activity has a measurable and substantial impact on the physical and mental health of participants in Ireland who achieve the National Physical Activity Guidelines (150+ minutes per week). The report also demonstrates the importance of sport and physical activity to the Irish economy, in generating and sustaining jobs and output.

* **Participation in sport and physical activity prevents nearly 100,000 cases of disease annually, generating savings to the Government of nearly €0.4bn**
* **Sport-related jobs accounted for 2.8% of all Irish employment in 2018**
* **Sport volunteering in Ireland valued at €1.5bn**
* **Consumers spent €3.3bn on sports related goods and services in 2018**

### Conclusion

These templates were created by Sport Ireland with the support of 8 Local Authorities (Carlow, Cavan, Clare, Dun Laoghaoire Rathdown, Dublin City, Fingal, South Dublin) and S3 Solutions in 2024.

Contact participation@sportireland.ie with any queries.



1. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272722/9789241514187-eng.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272722/9789241514187-eng.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. *Mental Health -* <https://paahjournal.com/articles/10.5334/paah.127/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. *Social Interaction -* <https://assets.gov.ie/7563/23f51643fd1d4ad7abf529e58c8d8041.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. *Equality & Inclusion -* <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/wis_policy.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. *Environmental Sustainability -* [9789241514187-eng.pdf (who.int)](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272722/9789241514187-eng.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <https://www.sportireland.ie/news/benefits-of-sport-on-irish-society-and-economy-confirmed-by-new-study> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)