

# Experience of sport by adults in Northern Ireland

Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2019/20

Annual publication

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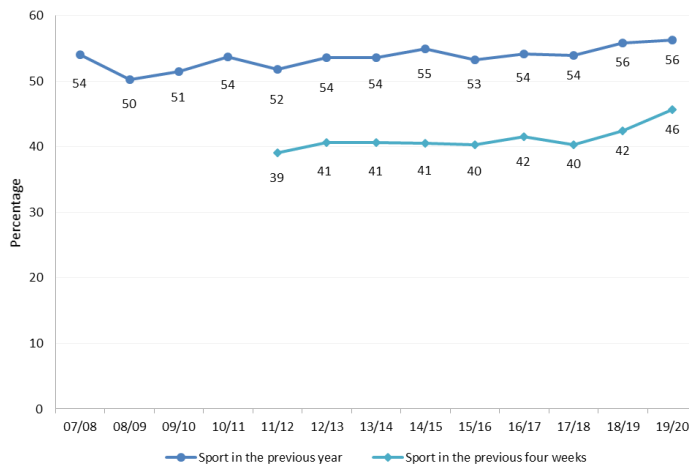
Coverage: Northern Ireland

## Main stories

- In 2019/20, over half of all adults had participated in sport within the last 12 months, similar to 2018/19 (both 56%).
- 52% of adults normally participated in sport at least one day per week, with a fifth (20%) normally participating on 4 or more days per week.
- Males (61%) were more likely to have participated in sport within the last year compared to females (51%).
- Around three-quarters of all adults who had participated in sport cited “keep fit” and “improved physical health” as a benefit of participating (75% and 73% respectively), while almost two-thirds (64%) cited “improved mental health”.

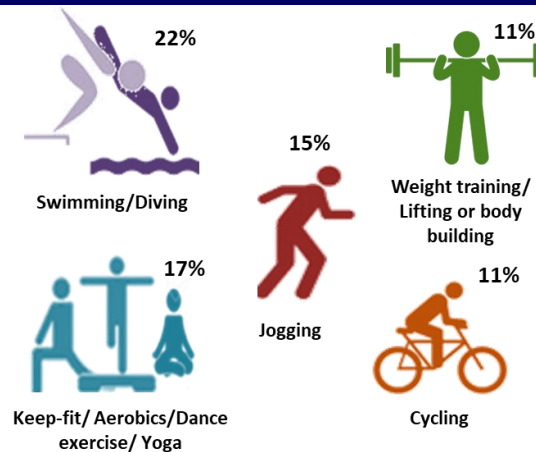
## Sport participation

Similar to previous year's figure



The proportion of adults who had taken part in sport within the last year was similar to the previous year, while sport participation in the last 4 weeks increased from the previous year's results.

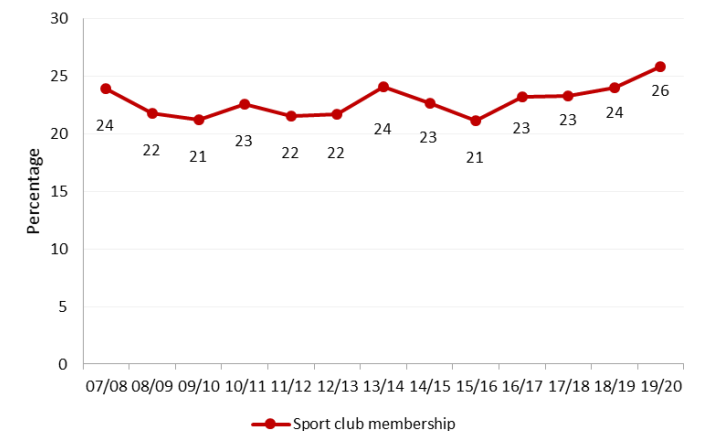
## Most popular sports



Swimming or diving remained the most popular sport amongst adults (22%) participating at least once within the previous year. Keepfit, aerobics, yoga, dance exercise (17%), jogging (15%), weight training/lifting or bodybuilding and cycling (both 11%) remain the next most popular sports.

## Sports club membership

No change from previous year's figures



Around one quarter of adults were members of a sports club within the last year. This was similar to the previous year's figures and in keeping with the longer term trend.

# Contents

## Page

Sport trends	3
Gender and sport participation	4
Age and sport participation	5
Disability and sport participation	6
Deprivation and sport participation	7
Regular participation in sport	8
Sport club membership / Benefits of participating in sport	9
Walking for recreation	10
Attendance at live sporting events / Popular live sports events	11
Definitions and technical notes	12

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## Introduction

The Department for Communities (DfC) has responsibility for the development of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland. DfC provides funding for sport, develops sport policy and supports sports initiatives. DfC promotes sport in the context of the strategy for sport, 'Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-2019'. Sport Matters was developed by the former Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in partnership with Sport Northern Ireland and approved by the Northern Ireland Executive in December 2009. Critical to the fabric of the strategy is the inherent vision of 'a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport' and this vision is underpinned by actions and key steps that will demonstrate what success looks like.

Sport Matters also contains a number of high level targets designed to improve levels and frequency of participation in sport and physical recreation across the Northern Ireland population. The targets which are aimed at adults and particular groups of people who are currently known to have lower participation rates in sport and physical recreation are set out below:

- To have stopped the decline of adult participation rates in sport and physical recreation by 2013.

By 2019, from the 2011 baseline, the following will be targeted.

- A minimum increase of 3 percentage points in adult participation rates in sport and physical recreation.
- A minimum increase of 6 percentage points in the participation rates of women, socio-economically disadvantaged groups, people with a disability and with older people in sport and physical recreation.

An action plan has also been developed to improve health and wellbeing through participation in sport and active recreation for people with a disability in Northern Ireland. The vision of 'Active Living: No Limits 2021' is to afford everyone with a disability an equal opportunity to access sport and active recreation. The vision will be delivered through encouraging and facilitating a collaborative approach to increasing participation in sport and active recreation by people with a disability leading to healthier and more active lifestyles.

## Continuous Household Survey

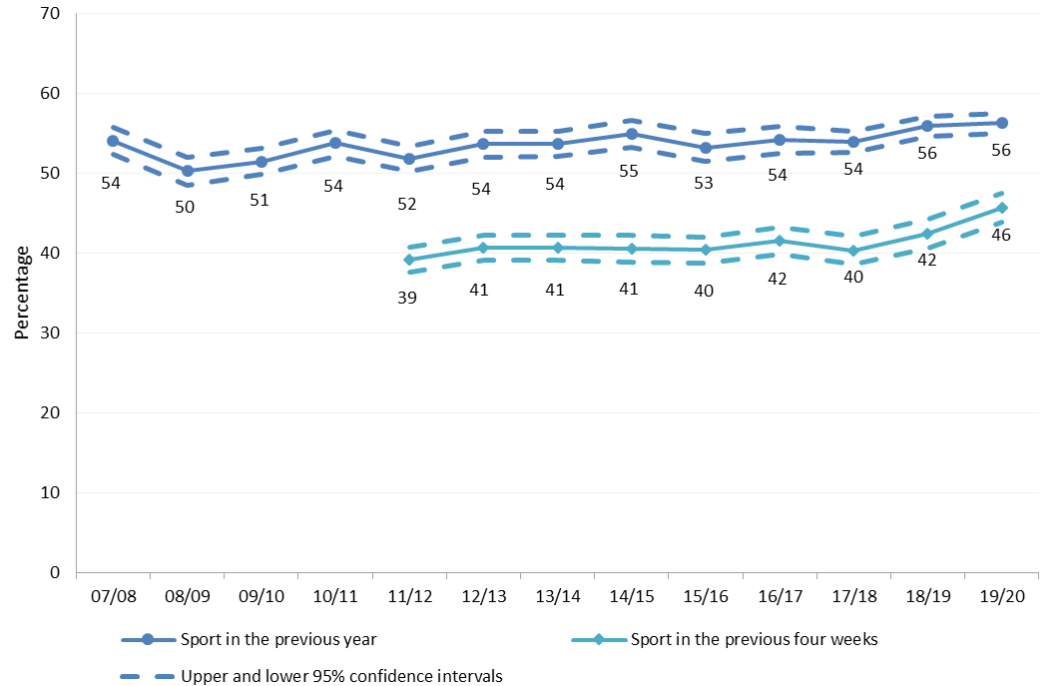
This report presents the findings from the 2019/20 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) in relation to sport participation by the adult population in Northern Ireland. This information will be used in the monitoring of targets in Sport Matters. More information relating to the CHS methodology and the interpretation of the figures can be found in the definitions and technical notes section. Data tables are available in [Excel](#) and [ODS format](#). The sport participation questions which were asked in the CHS 2019/20 are available [here](#).

# Sport trends

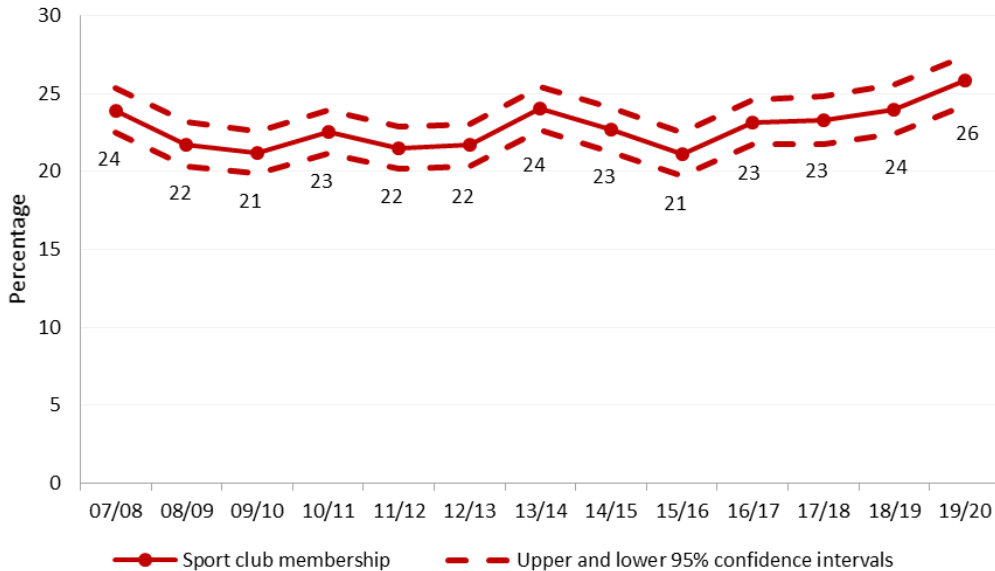
## Sport participation

More than half of adults (56%) participated in sport at least once within the last year, similar to the proportion in 2018/19 (56%). The sport participation rate has remained fairly stable over the previous nine years, following an initial decline between 2007/08 and 2008/09.

Since first recorded in the 2011/12 Continuous Household Survey (CHS), around four out of every ten adults have taken part in sport at least once within the previous four weeks. The proportion in 2019/20 has seen an increase on this trend with 46% participating in sport over the last four weeks, the highest proportion of participation recorded over the trend period.



## Sport club membership



Just over one quarter (26%) of adults were a member of a sports club or organisation within the previous year. This proportion is unchanged when compared with the 2018/19 figure (24%), although is an increase on the longer term trend.

Since 2007/08 sports club membership has remained fairly consistent between a fifth and a quarter of the adult population.

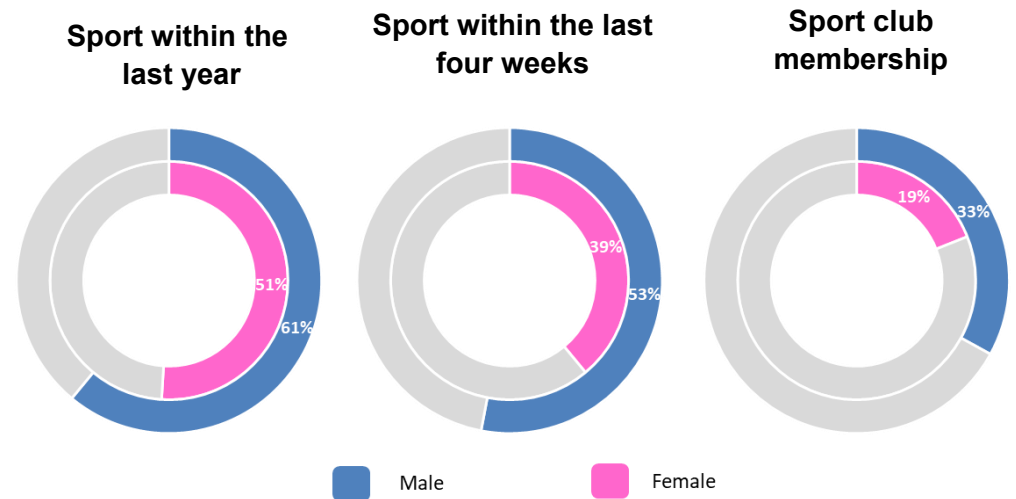
# Gender and sport participation

## Women less likely to participate in sport

Females aged 16 and over were less likely to have taken part in sport at least once within the last year (51%) than males (61%). Similarly when looking at participation rates over the previous four weeks, just under a fifth of females (39%) stated that they had taken part in sport compared to over half of all males (53%).

Males were also more likely to be a member of a sports club (33%) than females (19%). Since 2007/08 the gap between adult male and female participation rates has remained broadly consistent.

Since 2011/12 (45%), the proportion of females participating has remained fairly consistent at just under a half of all female adults, although showing a slight increase over the period to a peak of 51% in 2019/20.

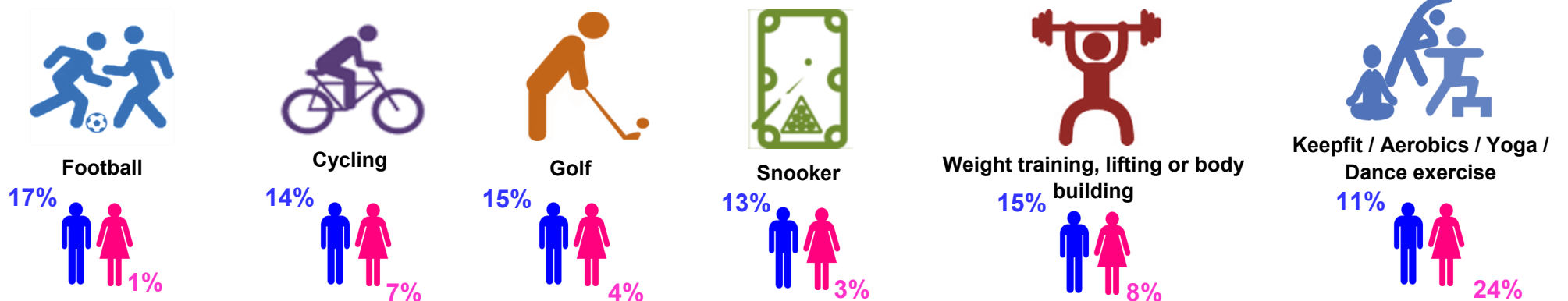


## Sport preferences amongst males and females

There were differences in the types of sports males and females participated in within the last year. Compared with females, a higher proportion of males participated in 24 of the 38 sports listed in the survey. Some of the most notable differences where a higher proportion of males participated include 'football', 'cycling for recreation', 'golf', 'snooker' and 'weight training / lifting or bodybuilding'.

Women were more likely than men to have participated in six of the 38 sports listed. These were 'Swimming or diving', 'Keepfit / Aerobics / Yoga / Dance exercise', 'Ice skating', 'Horse riding', 'Hockey' and 'Netball'.

Some of the sports where no differences between males and females were observed include; 'Tenpin bowling', 'Bowls, indoor or outdoor', 'canoeing/kayaking', 'camogie or hurling', 'track and field athletics', 'gymnastics', 'rowing', and 'ice hockey.'



# Age and sport participation

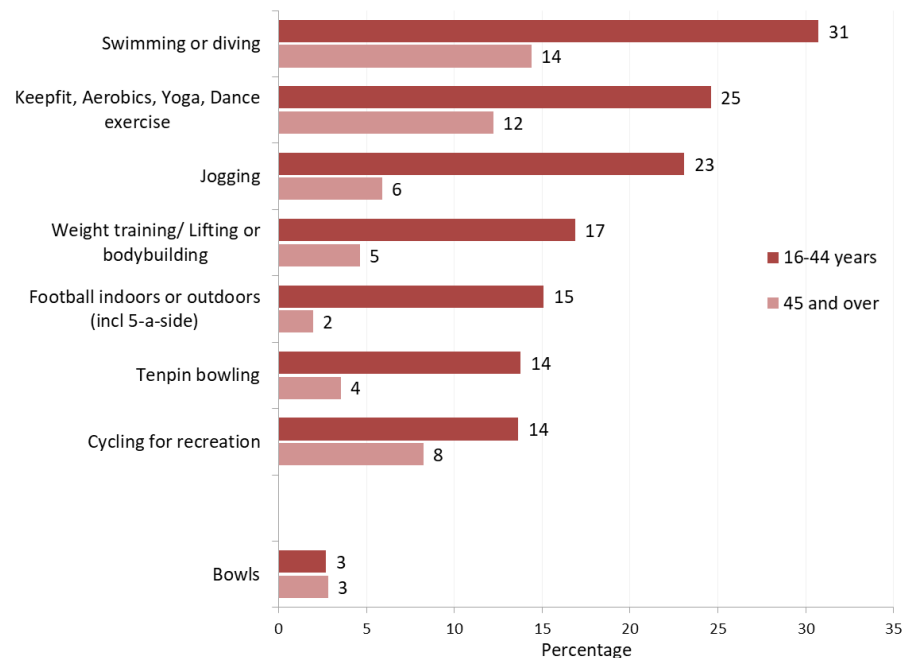
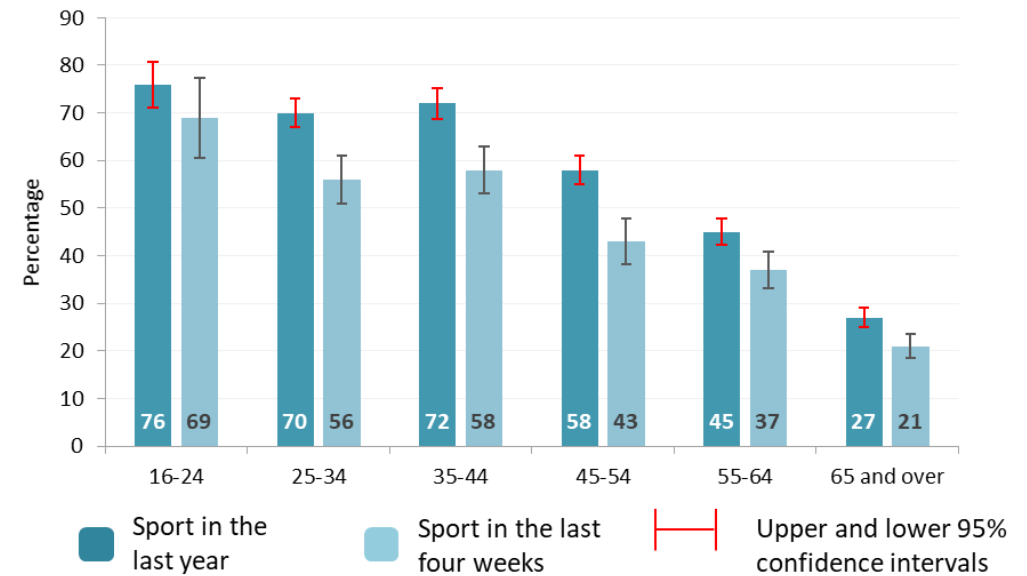
## Older people less likely to participate in sport

Sport participation declines with age among adults. Those aged 45 and over were less likely to have participated in any sport within the last year (41%) or within the last 4 weeks (32%) compared to younger adults aged 16-44 years (72% and 58% respectively).

More detailed analysis of sport participation in the last year by age group shows that there is no difference in the sport participation rate for 16-24 year olds and those aged 25-34 years. Similarly, there is no difference between 25-34 year olds and 35-44 year olds. The participation rate then decreases with each subsequent age group to 27% of those aged 65 and over.

Similarly, when looking at participation rates over the last 4 weeks, over two out of every three adults aged 16-24 (69%) had taken part in sport compared to around one fifth of adults aged 65 and over (21%).

From 2011/12, participation rates for adults aged 65 and over have steadily increased from 22% reaching 27% in 2019/20.



## Sport preferences amongst younger and older adults

Comparison of participation in particular sports by those aged under 45 and those aged 45 and over shows that adults in the latter age category were less likely to have participated in the majority of sports in the last year. The only sport where there was no significant difference in participation between the age groups were bowls, yachting or dinghy sailing and windsurfing or boardsailing, although participation rates for both age groups were low across these three sports.

When looking at participation in sport over the last 4 weeks, the results were similar. However there was a higher proportion of adults aged 45 and over who had participated in 'bowls' in the last 4 weeks (2%) compared to those aged under 45 (1%).

# Disability and sport participation

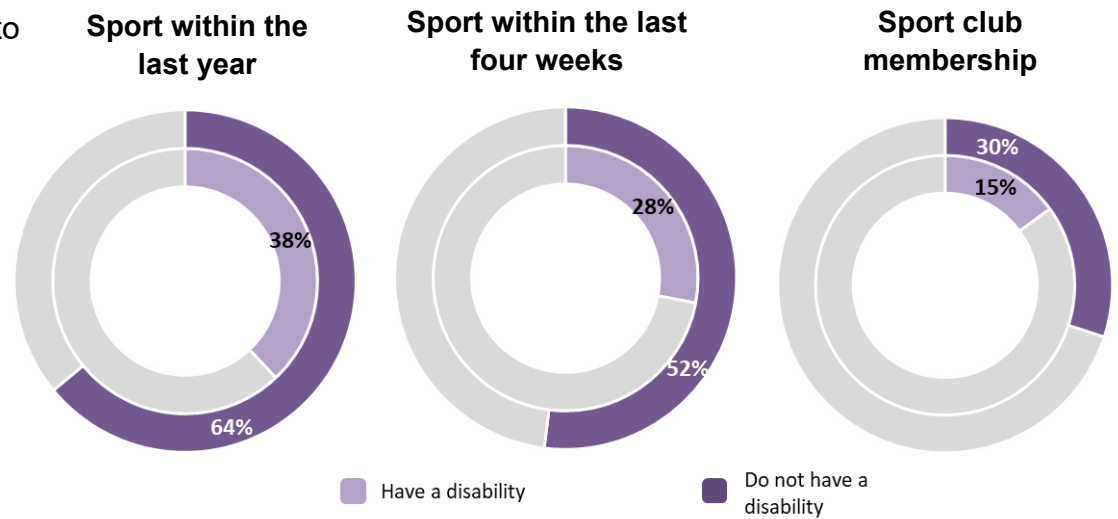
## Those who have a disability less likely to participate in sport

Those aged 16 and over who have a disability were less likely to have taken part in sport at least once within the last year (38%) compared with those who do not have a disability (64%).

A similar disparity was found when participation rates over the last four weeks were considered, where over a quarter of those with a disability (28%) were found to have taken part in sport compared to over half of adults who do not have a disability (52%).

Fifteen per cent of adults with a disability were members of a sports club, a lower proportion than the 30% of those who do not have a disability.

Rates of participation in sport for adults who have a disability have remained fairly consistent at around a third of adults since 2011/12 (32%), aside from a slight decrease to 26% in 2012/13.

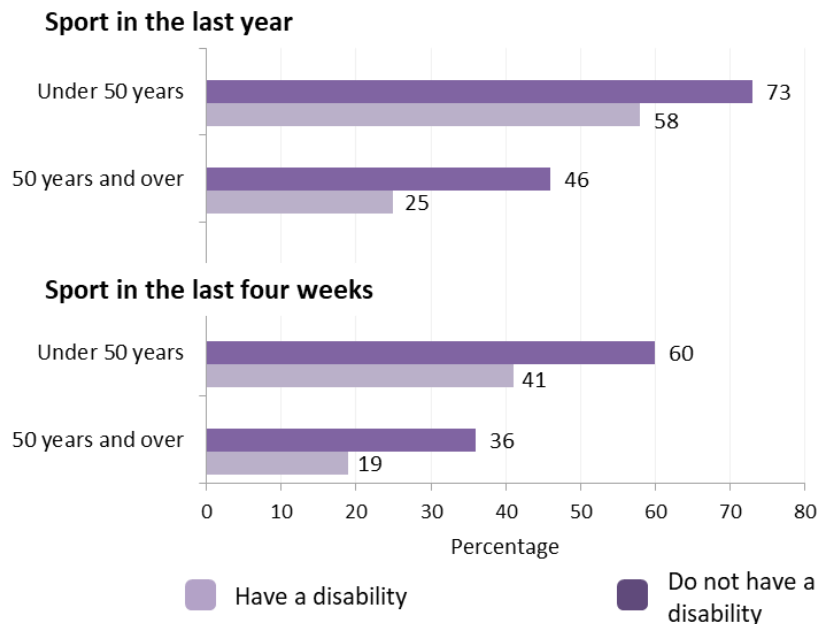


## Disability and age

Disability and age are closely related. On balance, the older we become the more likely we are to have a disability. Results have also shown that age and sport participation are negatively correlated, as we get older, the less likely we are to participate in sport.

Considering age and disability, analysis was conducted on broad age groups under 50 years and 50 years and over. The results show that both younger and older adults who have a disability were less likely to participate in sport within the previous year than those who do not have a disability. This suggests that irrespective of age, disability negatively affects the likelihood of adults participating in sport, although there is a bigger differential among older adults

When participation rates over the last four weeks were considered, the results were similar.

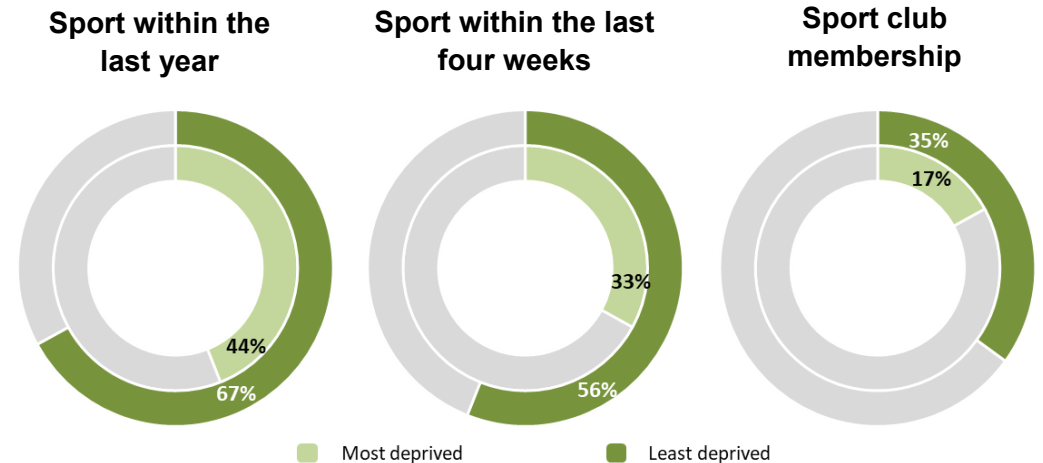


# Deprivation and sport participation

## Adults living in the most deprived areas less likely to participate in sport

Adults living in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland were less likely to have participated in sport within the previous year (44%) or within the last 4 weeks (33%) than those adults living in the least deprived areas (67% and 56%, respectively). Similarly, those living in the most deprived areas were less likely to be a member of a sports club (17%) than those living in the least deprived areas (35%).

Participation rates for adults who live in the most deprived areas have remained fairly consistent at around four of every ten adults over the period 2011/12 (44%) to 2019/20 (44%).



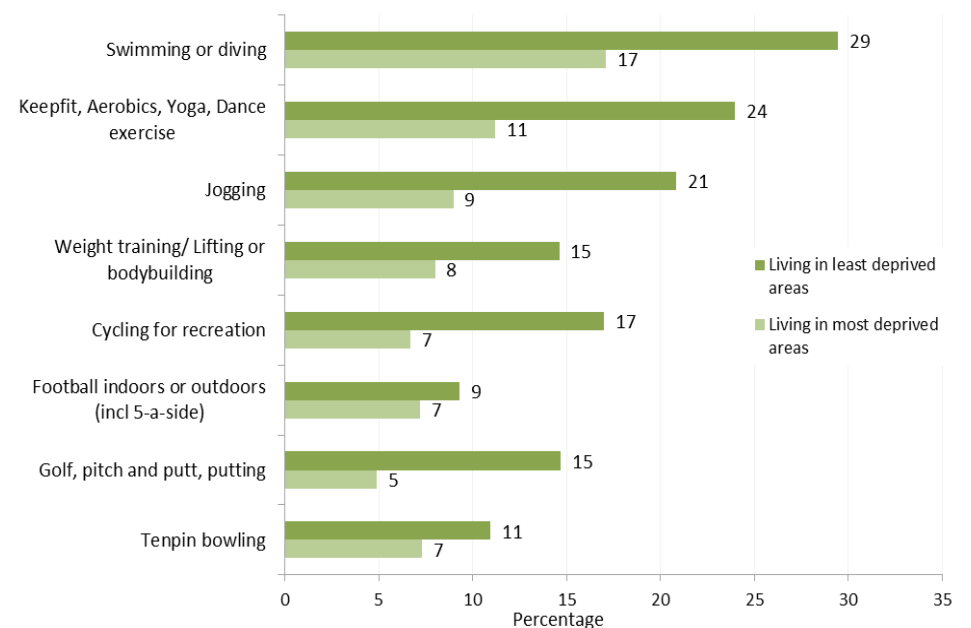
## Differences in sport preferences by deprivation

Differences in sport preferences were examined amongst those living in the most and least deprived areas in Northern Ireland. Those living in the least deprived areas were more likely to have participated in 24 of the 38 sports listed within the previous year.

Some of the sports showing significant differences between the two groups were 'Swimming or diving' (29% v 17%), 'Keepfit, Aerobics, Yoga, Dance Exercise' (24% v 11%), 'Jogging' (21% v 9%) and 'Weight training/lifting or bodybuilding' (15% v 8%).

Considering participation rates over the previous 4 weeks shows that adults living in the least deprived areas were more likely to have taken part in nineteen of the sports listed compared to those who lived in the most deprived areas. Adults who lived in the most deprived areas were more likely to have participated in 'darts', 'gaelic football', 'camogie or hurling' or 'squash' than those in the least deprived areas over the previous 4 weeks.

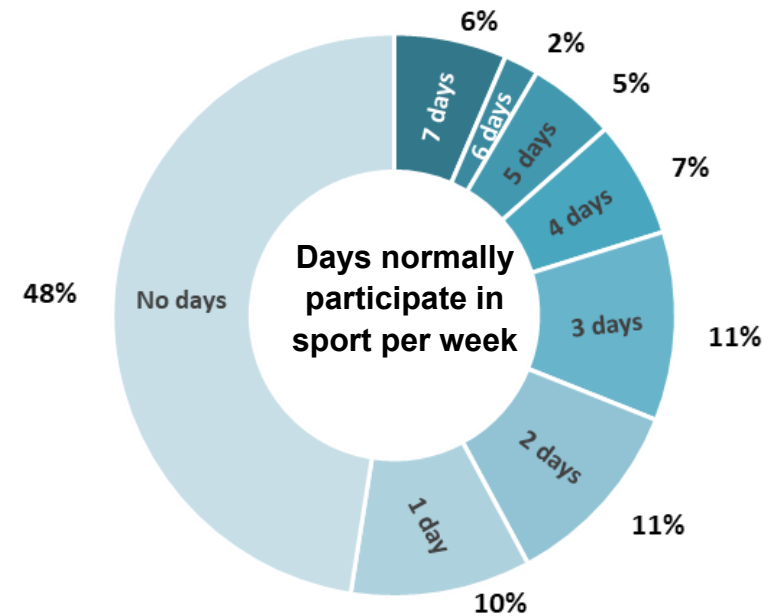
## Sport within the year



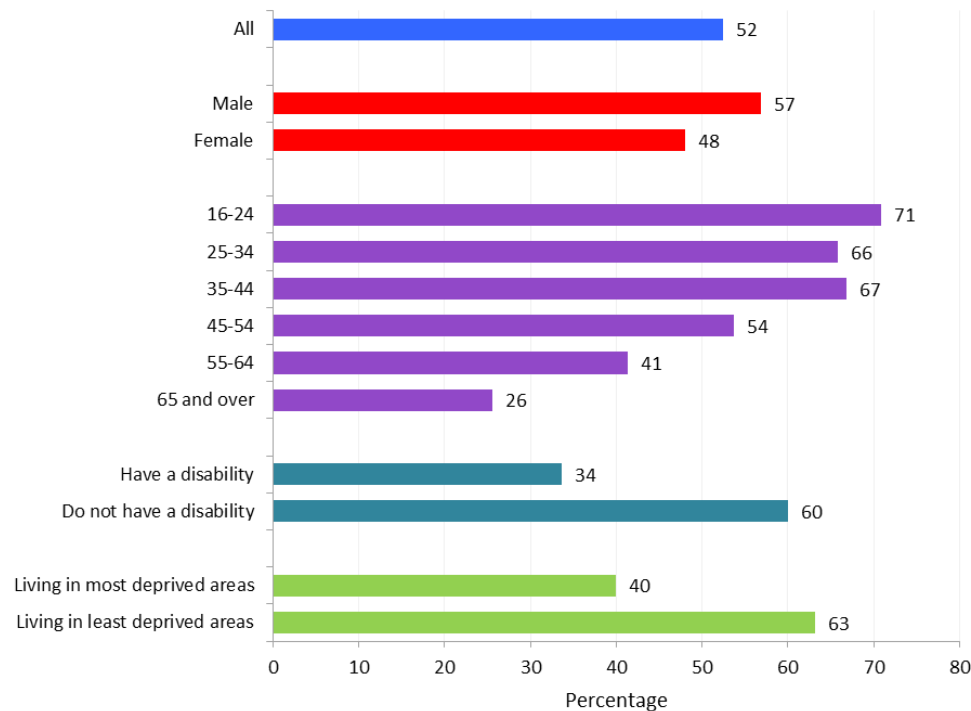
# Regular participation in sport

Adults in Northern Ireland were asked how many days per week do they normally take part in sport. Whilst over half of all adults (56%) had participated in sport at least once within the previous year, 52% normally participated in sport at least one day per week, with a fifth (20%) normally participating on 4 or more days per week.

The proportion who had participated in sport at least one day per week, in 2019/20 (52%) is similar to the proportion in 2018/19 (51%).



## Participating in sport at least one day per week

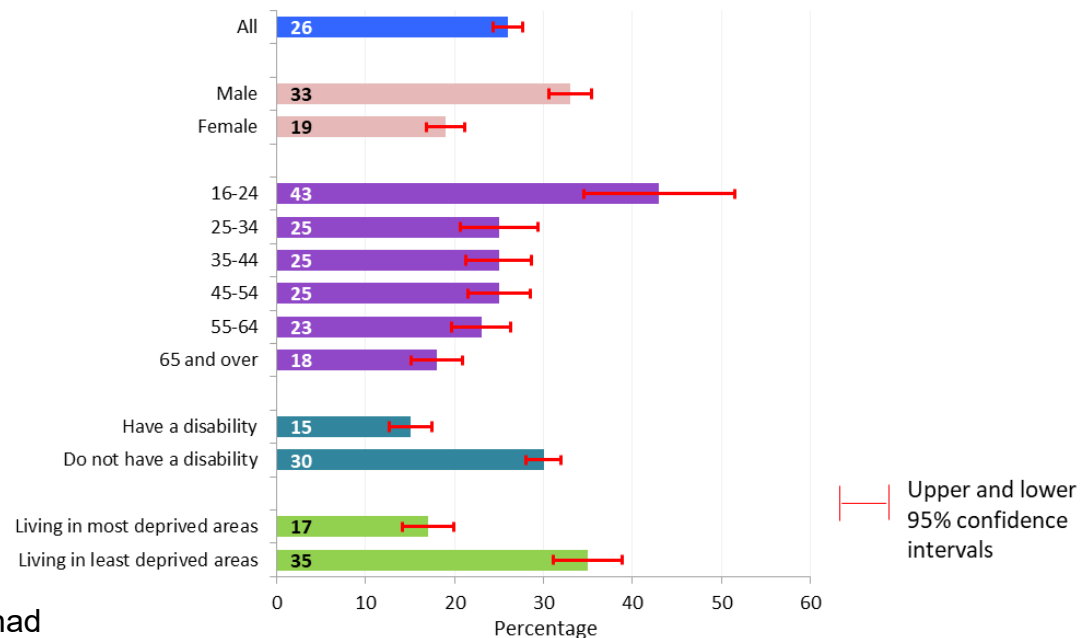


There are similar differences by gender, age, disability and deprivation as for other indicators of sport participation. Those normally participating on one or more days per week was lower for women, older adults, adults with a disability and adults living in the most deprived areas.



## Sports club membership

Adults were asked if they were a member of a sports club or organisation within the previous year. Just over a quarter (26%) of adults stated that they were. As with sport participation rates, males (33%) were more likely to have been a member of a sports club or organisation than females (19%). Adults with a disability (15%) and those living in the most deprived areas (17%) were also less likely to have been a member of a sports club or organisation than those who do not have a disability (30%) or live in the least deprived areas (35%).



## Benefits of participating in sport

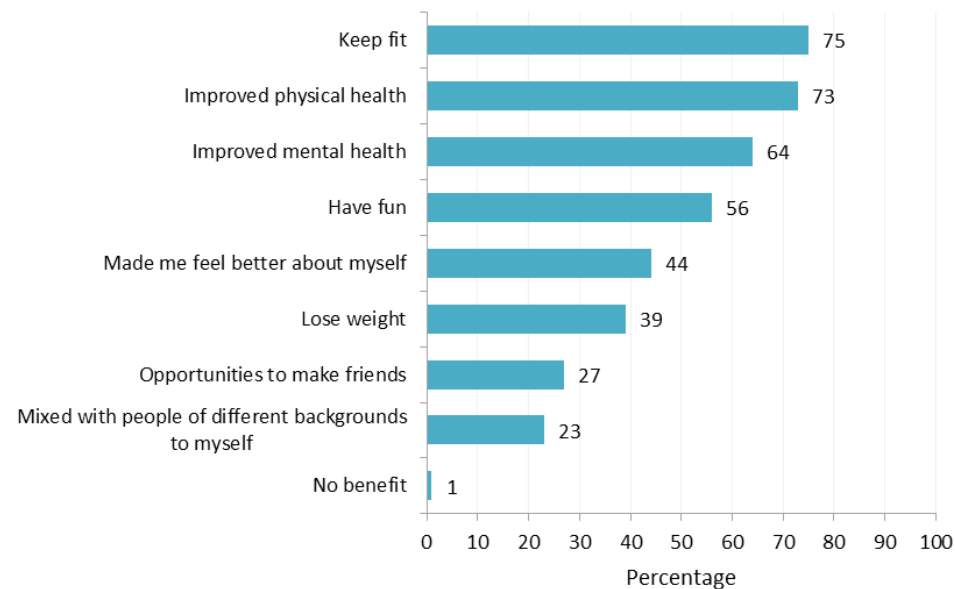
Three quarters (75%) of all adults in Northern Ireland who had participated in sport over the last year cited “Keep fit” as a benefit.

Over seven out of every ten adults (73%) who had participated in sport cited “improved physical health” as a benefit of participating. Other benefits of participating that were stated by respondents include “improved mental health” (64%) “have fun” (56%), “made me feel better about myself” (44%) and “lose weight” (39%).

One per cent of all adults who had participated stated that they had experienced no benefits as a result of participating in sport over the past year.

Considering benefits of participation in sport by gender, females were more likely than males to have stated “improved mental health”, “made me feel better about myself” and “lose weight” as the main benefits of participating. Males, on the other hand, were more likely than females to cite “have fun”, “opportunities to make friends” and “mixed with people with different backgrounds to myself” as benefits they experience from participation in sport.

## Main benefits of sport participation

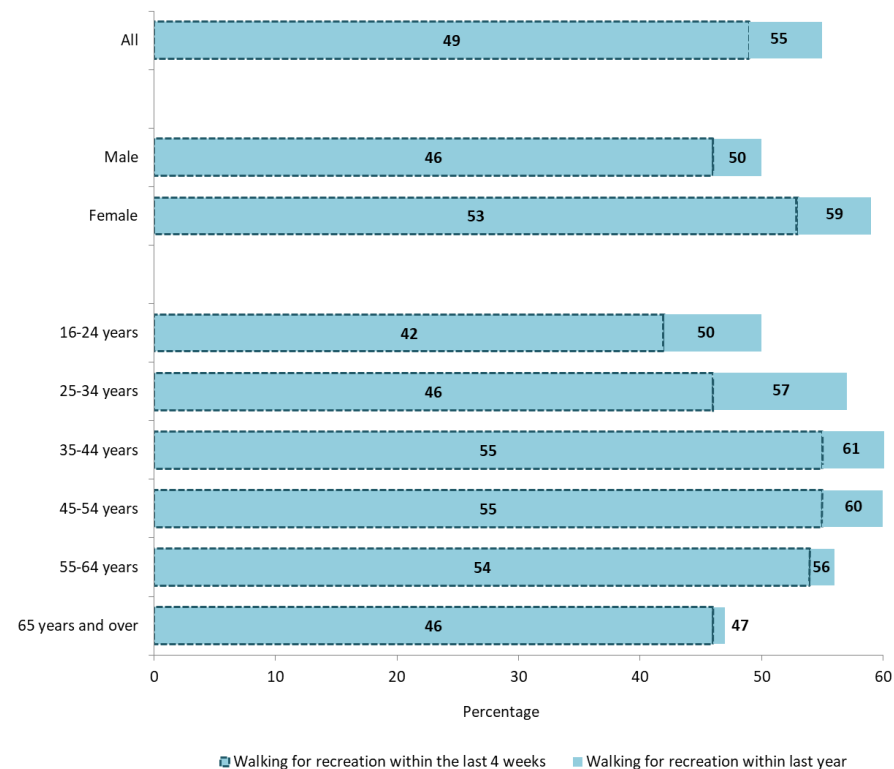
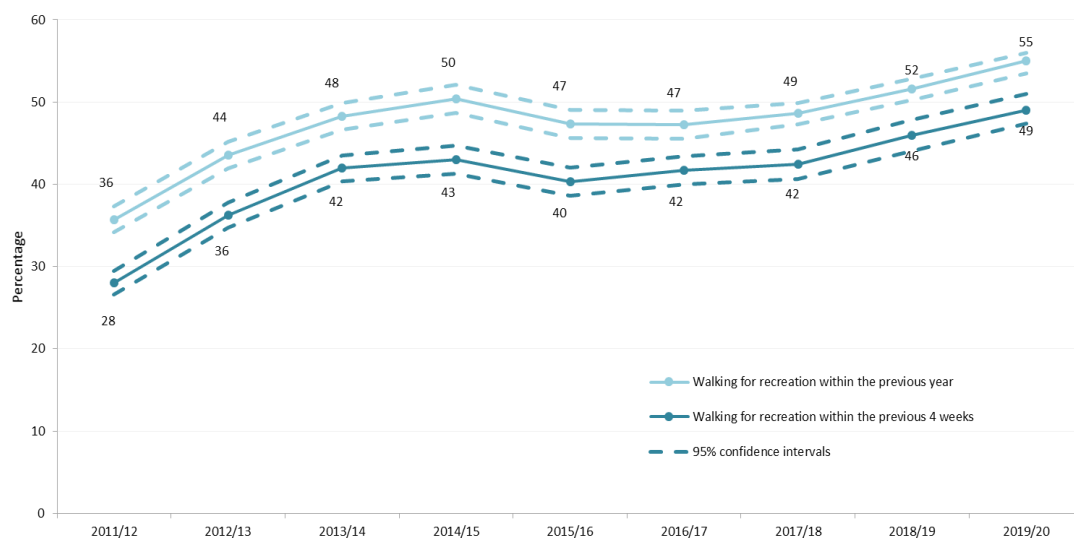


# Walking for recreation

'Walking for recreation' is not included in the overall sport participation figures. Over half of adults (55%) had walked for recreation within the previous year. In contrast to the demographic pattern seen with the overall sport participation rates, a higher proportion of females (59%) than males (50%) had walked for recreation.

Almost a fifth of adults (19%) had not participated in sport but had walked for recreation within the previous year. As with the previous results a higher proportion of non-sport participating females (23%) had walked for recreation than non-sport participating males (15%). When considering age groups, the pattern is also somewhat different than that seen when analysing sport participation. Walking for recreation rates peak among the 35-44 year age groups (61%), whilst rates for 65 years and over are similar to those for the youngest adult age group 16-24 years.

However, analysis by disability and deprivation shows that relatively fewer adults with a disability and adults living in the most deprived areas walk for recreation.



## Longer term trend

Over the last six years, the proportion of adults who indicated that they walked for recreation within the previous year has increased from 36% in 2011/12 to a peak of 55% of adults in 2019/20.

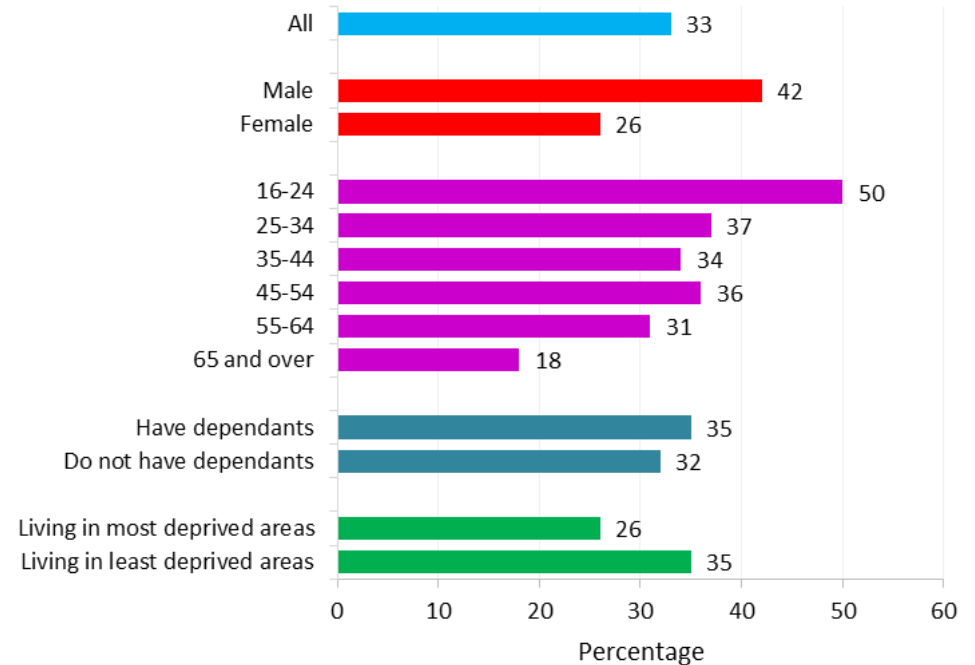
Similarly, within the same time frame, the proportion of adults who had walked for recreation within the previous 4 weeks increased from 28% in 2011/12 to a peak of 49% in 2019/20.

## Attendance at live sports events

One third of all adults (33%) had attended a live organised sporting event as a spectator within the last year. Males (42%) were more likely to have attended a live organised sporting event than females (26%).

Analysis by age shows that as age increases the proportion of adults who spectate at a live sporting event generally decreases particularly from age 55 onwards.

Analysis by disability and deprivation shows lower levels of attendance among adults with a disability and those living in the most deprived areas.

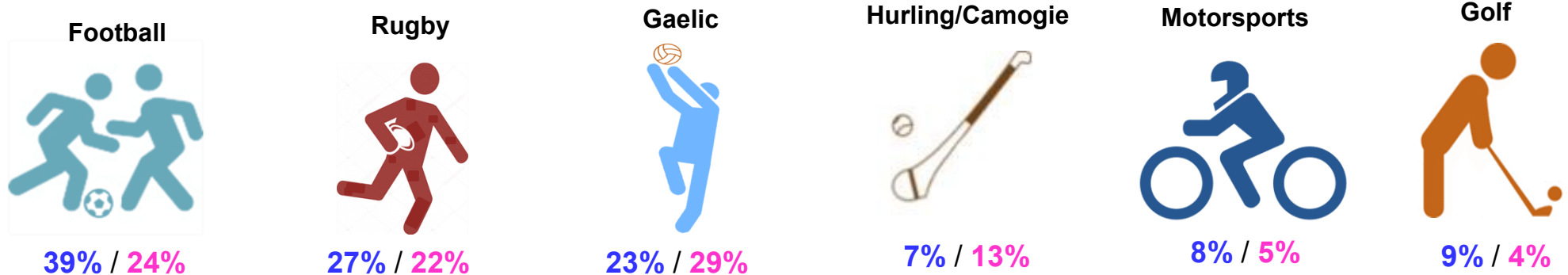


## Popular live sports events

Adults who indicated that they had attended a live sporting event, at any level, in Northern Ireland as a spectator were then asked which sports they had watched as live events. The most popular sports were 'Football' (34%), 'Rugby' (25%), 'Gaelic' (25%), followed by 'Hurling/Camogie' (9%), 'Motorsports' (7%), and 'Golf' (7%).

When analysed by gender the most popular sports watched live were:

Male / Female



## Definitions and technical notes

### Continuous Household Survey

The Continuous Household Survey is a Northern Ireland wide household survey administered by Central Survey Unit, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The sample for this survey consists of a systematic random sample of 9,000 addresses selected from the Land and Property Service's list of private addresses. The findings reported for 2019/20 are based on 5,918 respondents, aged 16 and over, who answered the key questions required to measure progress against the Programme for Government indicator (arts, libraries, museums and PRONI questions) as well as the sport participation question on the survey.

### Weighting the Continuous Household Survey

Analysis of the culture, arts and sport modules of the CHS have been weighted for non-response. A chi square goodness-of-fit test showed that the CHS sample (5,918) was not representative of the population by age and sex when compared with the 2019 Mid Year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland ([NISRA 6 May 2020](#)). As a result, separate weights were produced for age, sex and age and sex combined.

Non-response weighting sometimes increases standard errors, although the impact tends to be fairly small, i.e. the adjustment may be less or greater than 1, but will generally be reasonably close to 1. In the case of the culture, arts and sport modules of CHS, the values of the adjustment for all three weighting systems are so close to one, it is not necessary to take account of this in the calculation of standard error and confidence intervals.

While weighting for non-response (also called post-stratification) should reduce bias, it must be acknowledged that it will not eliminate bias. The reasons individuals choose to take part in surveys are complex and depend on lots of factors specific to the individual. As a result, the non-response biases in surveys are likely to be complex. Post-stratification works on the assumption that, by aligning the survey to the population along a small number of dimensions such as age and gender, many of these complex biases will reduce. However, it would be misleading to suggest that they will be eliminated.

**Sport participation (Adults)** - Participated in at least one of the following activities within the 12 months prior, or 4 weeks prior to the CHS. Does not include 'walking for recreation'.

- Rugby union or league
- Football, indoors or outdoors (Inc. 5-a-side)
- Gaelic football
- Camogie or Hurling
- Cricket
- Hockey
- Ice hockey
- Netball
- Tennis
- Badminton
- Squash
- Basketball
- Table tennis
- Track and field athletics
- Jogging
- Cycling for recreation
- Walking for recreation
- Climbing
- Bowls, indoor or outdoor (lawn)
- Tenpin bowling
- Swimming or diving
- Angling/fishing
- Yachting or dinghy sailing
- Canoeing, kayaking
- Rowing
- Windsurfing/boardsailing
- Keepfit, aerobics, yoga, dance exercise
- Martial Arts (include self defence)
- Weight training/lifting/body building
- Gymnastics
- Snooker, pool, billiards
- Ice skating
- Darts
- Golf, pitch and putt, putting
- Skiing
- Horse riding
- Motor sports
- Shooting
- Boxing
- Other

**Member of a sports club** - Member of a sports club or organisation.

**Deprivation** – The data have been analysed by whether respondents are living in the 20% most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) or in the 20% least deprived SOAs. This is estimated using the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 which is a weighted combination of seven domains of deprivation. Rank 1 indicates the most deprived SOA, while rank 890 denotes the least deprived SOA.

<sup>1</sup> [Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Report 2017](#)

**Disability** – The questions used to ascertain whether or not a person has a disability are harmonised with the definition of disability in the Equality Act 2010. This states that a disabled population is classified on the basis of having a long-lasting physical or mental health condition or illness which restricts day-to-day activities. The disabled population in this report are those who have answered yes to both the questions below:

Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?

Does your condition or illness /do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day to day activities?

### **Statistical significance in this report**

Any statements in this report regarding differences between groups such as males and females, different age groups, religion, etc., are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% confident that the differences between groups are actual differences and have not just arisen by chance. Both the base numbers and the sizes of the percentages have an effect on statistical significance. Therefore on occasion, a difference between two groups may be statistically significant while the same difference in percentage points between two other groups may not be statistically significant. The reason for this is because the larger the base numbers or the closer the percentages are to 0 or 100, the smaller the standard errors. This leads to increased precision of the estimates which increases the likelihood that the difference between the proportions is actually significant and did not just arise by chance.

### **Other notes**

The following should be noted when interpreting figures and tables:

- Percentages less than 0.5% are denoted by '0' and where there are no responses, they are denoted by '-'.
- Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.
- Percentages may not add to 100% for questions where multiple responses are allowed.
- Detailed tabulations are not provided where the number of respondents is too small to allow meaningful analysis.