



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Research Paper

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# Female participation in sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland

**NIAR 305-20**

This research paper explores key issues relating to female participation in sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland and compares findings with neighbouring jurisdictions. The paper also includes a summary of different strategies and policies to increase female participation.

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## Key Points

- Almost half of the female population in Northern Ireland (NI) did not participate in sport during the year 2019/20, according to NISRA's Continuous Household Survey.
- Children in NI are reported as having the lowest rates of physical activity in the UK. According to the 2019/20 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey, the proportion of girls who said they enjoyed sport and physical activity a lot, dropped from 65% in Year 9 to 43% by Year 12, compared with 65% of Year 12 boys.
- Each year, physical inactivity accounts for approximately 2500 deaths in NI. Globally, the death rate from physical inactivity is on a par with deaths attributed to smoking. According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), the estimated direct cost of physical inactivity to the NHS across the UK is approximately £1 billion per year. Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) estimates that the benefits of outdoor recreation in NI generates an income of £83m.
- The Chief Medical Officer recommends accumulating at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week. According to 2017 figures, NI had proportionately more physically inactive adults compared to England, Scotland or Wales. In 2019/20, female adults in NI were less likely to have taken part in sport 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%). The percentage point difference between female and male sport participation levels has remained static over the past decade.
- Sport England has identified two sets of barriers to women's participation in sport. First, practical/lifestyle barriers such as having children, changing jobs, moving house; time and cost. Second, personal/emotional barriers, such as not knowing anyone or wanting to exercise with a friend; a belief that muscular and sporty bodies are not feminine and not wanting to look silly.
- Sport NI's Active, Fit and Sporty initiative aims to increase female participation. Its sport participation programmes focus on more visible female role models, increased media representation for female sports, more females in leadership roles and more female focused research.
- The gender gap in funding for female elite athletes reflects the difference in market share of female medals at the top levels of sport, compared to males. More than twice as many male sports clubs (10%) applied for SNI's COVID-19 Hardship grant than female sports clubs (4%) in 2020.
- Sport NI recommends that the sporting clubs it supports ensure their boards comprise at least 25% women. In 2020, three out of 36 boardroom level positions were held by women in the Irish Football Association, Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby.
- A recent BBC Sport survey of elite athletes found that 93% felt that the media's coverage of female sport had improved over the past five years.
- According to UK Coaching, Northern Ireland has the lowest proportion of female coaches (5%) in the population compared to England, Scotland or Wales.



## Executive Summary

The first part of this paper provides an overview of the different definitions of sport and physical activity used in various government surveys and statistical analyses. This examination is to support a comparison of the available statistics in Northern Ireland with other jurisdictions. The two key observations include; fewer women than men participate in sport in Northern Ireland and despite a 6 percentage point increase in female participation since 2010/11, the gender gap has remained fairly consistent. Second, the difference in participation rates between boys and girls starts to emerge in Year 8. Research has shown that attitudes to physical activity and sport started in youth tend to remain into adulthood.

The second part of this paper examines why participation in sport and physical activity is important and the barriers to female participation, identified by recent research studies. According to the UK's Chief Medical Officers, participation in regular sport and physical activity is associated with preventing cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, depression and obesity. Regular activity is associated with improved cognitive function and academic achievement. The recommended amount of physical activity for adults is 30 minutes of physical activity per day over the course of five days in each week. Children are recommended to undertake at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day. It is estimated that in Northern Ireland physical inactivity is responsible for approximately 2500 deaths per year. Globally, deaths attributed to physical inactivity are on a par with smoking.

Barriers to female participation include lack of confidence, poor health and injury, cost, access to facilities and time. According to the World Health Organisation, disparities of participation in physical activity tend to be affected by gender, age, socioeconomic status, disability and pregnancy.

Knowledge of how much physical activity should be completed, has been shown to be an important first step towards regular physical activity. However, studies have demonstrated that 8% of adults in Northern Ireland are aware of how much physical activity is recommended for health benefits. Females who were younger and reported poor health were more likely to be unaware of the guidelines. Females who report poor health are significantly more likely to do no physical activity.

A 2014 House of Commons Inquiry called 'Women and Sport' addressed why fewer female sporting role models are represented in the media and in the boardroom, compared with men. The former Culture, Media and Sport Committee identified these gender disparities as challenges to be tackled by sports councils and sports governing bodies.

The final part of the paper provides an overview of local initiatives and international strategies and policy interventions. These were developed to increase the participation of females in sport and physical activity at both the grassroots and elite level.



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## 1 Context - Definitions and statistics

It is widely recognised that participation in sport and physical activity has a significant positive impact on people's health and quality of life. Sport can take two different forms: professional sport and sport as a leisure activity.<sup>1</sup>

### Box 1 Defining Sport and Physical Activity

#### 1.1 Sport

The definition of sport provided by the Council of Europe is:

*'Sport means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competitions at all levels.'*<sup>2</sup>

This definition is ambiguous and open to interpretation. All sports involve physical activity but not all kinds of physical activity involve sport.

#### 1.2 Physical activity (PA)

Physical Activity can be accumulated from four areas. These include;

- competitive and recreational sport;
- occupational sources or at work;
- domestic or home-based activity; and
- personal transport (or getting about), for example through walking and cycling.

#### 1.3 Chief Medical Officers Physical Activity Recommendations

In 2019, the UK's four Chief Medical Officers updated the guidelines for sport and physical activity participation.<sup>3</sup>

The new physical activity guidelines for adults included;

<sup>1</sup> Eurostat Statistics Explained <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/68718.pdf> Page last accessed 17.12.2020

<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe, 1992. European Sports Charter. R (92) 13 Rev. Strasbourg: Council of Europe

<sup>3</sup> UK Chief Medical Officers Physical Activity Guidelines 2019  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/832868/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/832868/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf) Page last accessed 20.01.2021

- For good physical and mental health, adults should aim to be physically active every day. Any activity is better than none, and more is better still.
- Adults should do activities to develop or maintain strength in the major muscle groups. These could include heavy gardening, carrying heavy shopping, or resistance exercise. Muscle strengthening activities should be done at least two days a week, but any strengthening activity is better than none.
- Each week, adults should accumulate at least 150 minutes (2 1/2 hours) of moderate intensity activity (such as brisk walking or cycling); or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity (such as running); or even shorter durations of very vigorous intensity activity (such as sprinting or stair climbing); or a combination of moderate, vigorous and very vigorous intensity activity.
- Adults should aim to minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary, and when physically possible should break up long periods of inactivity with at least light physical activity.

## 1.4 NISRA Continuous Household Survey

The first target in the eighth review of 'Sport Matters – The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity 2009 – 2019' (published in February 2019), suggested that a business case was currently being developed to repeat the Northern Ireland Sport and Physical Activity Survey (SAPAS) for the period 2017-2019. However, Sport Northern Ireland have confirmed in January 2021, that there are no current plans to repeat this survey. This survey was last commissioned by Sport Northern Ireland in 2010. Since 2013, the Continuous Household Survey has been used as the main source for monitoring progress against 'Sports Matters' targets.

Sport and physical activity related questions in NI's Continuous Household survey include;

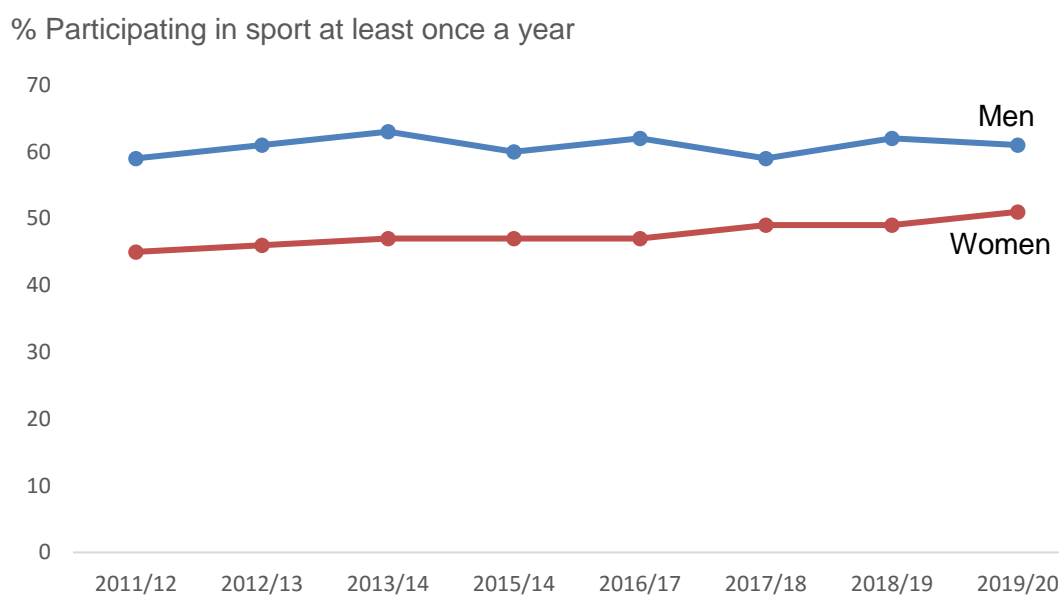
- sport / physical activities participated in within the previous year, the previous 4 weeks and the number of days respondents normally participate in sport each week;
- walking for recreation within the previous year;
- sport club membership and sports played in clubs / organisations; and
- benefits experienced and live events attended.

Sport statistics take account of non-work related physical activities only. These include sport, fitness and recreational (leisure) physical activities (that cause at least a small increase in breathing or heart rate)

## 2 Factors affecting female participation in sport

In 2010, the NI Sport and Physical Activity Survey (SAPAS) reported that 30% of the female adult population had participated in physical activity in the past week. By 2019/20, 48% of females had participated in sport and physical activity in the past week, compared to 57% of males.

**Figure 1 Percentage participating in sport at least once a year 2011 - 2020**



Source: NISRA <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/experience-sport-by-adults-northern-ireland-201920>

Although there has been a 6 percentage point improvement of female sport participation rates since 2011/12, 49% of women in Northern Ireland reported that they did not participate in sport and physical activity during the year of 2019/20 and the gap between male and female participation levels has remained largely static over the past ten years. However, when recreational walking was included, the figure for participation increased to 74% of women and 76% of men during 2019/20.

According to the Chief Medical Officers' Guidelines,

*'...regular physical activity is an important element in contributing to maintaining a healthy weight and can help keep your thinking, learning and judgement skills sharp as you age. It can also reduce your risk of depression and may help you sleep better.'*

Each year, physical inactivity accounts for approximately 2500 deaths in Northern Ireland. Globally, the amount of deaths per year from physical inactivity are on a par

with smoking. The Chief Medical Officer recommends a minimum of 30 minutes of physical activity five times per week. According to the British Heart Foundation, in Northern Ireland almost half of the adult population (650,000 people) do not meet this target. And in 2017, NI had proportionately more physically inactive adults compared to England, Scotland or Wales.

Also, in 2017/18, the Department of Health recorded that 57% of women were either overweight or obese in Northern Ireland. This figure has increased by 4 percentage points since 2010/11.

**Table 1 % Obese and Overweight Combined**

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2017/18 Unweighted base
<b>Female</b>	53%	56%	57%	57%	56%	57%	59%	57%	1,297

Source <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/tables-health-survey-northern-ireland>

In the 2019/20 Continuous Household Survey, 43% of women said one of the benefits of participating in sport was to lose weight, while 74% said it improved their physical health and 68% said it improved their mental health.

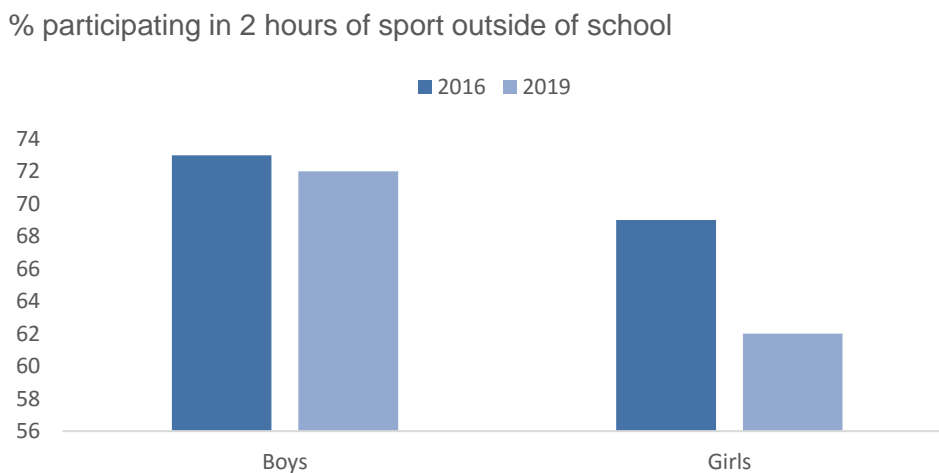
According to the World Health Organisation, disparities of participation in physical activity tend to be affected by gender, age, socioeconomic status, disability and pregnancy.

## 2.1 Age

### 2.1.1 Children

Children aged 10 -18 in Northern Ireland are reported as having the lowest rates of physical activity in the UK.<sup>4</sup> Although 59% of girls were aware of the recommendation to partake in 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day, only 7% reported involvement in sport of physical activity every day of the previous week. As Figure 2 highlights, the gender gap has increased between 2016 and 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Sinead Connolly et al. 2020 Physical Activity, Sport and Physical Education in Northern Ireland School Children: A Cross-Sectional Study <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/17/18/6849> Page last accessed 22.12.2020

**Figure 2 Percentage participating in 2 hours of sport outside of school 2016 vs 2019**

Source: NISRA <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/experience-sport-by-young-people-northern-ireland-2019>

When analysing the change in participation rates from Year 8 to Year 12 pupils, 72% report taking part in Physical Education (P.E.) at school for 2 hours or more each week, compared with 39% in Year 12. Also, boys were more likely (66%) than girls (57%) to participate in weekly P.E. activities. The enjoyment of sport or physical activity diminishes more rapidly for girls between Year 8 (61%) to Year 12 (43%) than for boys (71% to 67%). Comparing this study with findings from the 2015 Young Life and Times survey, gender was the main variable to impact on respondents' experiences of and attitudes to sport and physical activity.<sup>5</sup> Thirteen percent of 16 year old males were achieving the recommended levels of 60 minutes or more of physical activity each day, compared with 5% of females.

Factors influencing participation in physical activity include support from friends and significant others, such as parents. Barriers include; cost, access to resources and changing priorities, particularly during the transition from primary to post-primary education<sup>6</sup>. In younger females, PA in 7-8 year olds indicates that Northern Ireland has the lowest proportion of children meeting the current guidelines in the UK, with stark differences between the proportion of boys and girls.<sup>7</sup>

For young women, the transition from primary to secondary school and the post-16 transition, are times when the gap between male and female participation widens. A 2014 House of Commons (HoC) inquiry into Women and Sport also noted specific

<sup>5</sup> Dick Schubotz et al. 2016 KESS Policy Briefing

[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge\\_exchange/briefing\\_papers/series6/schubotz141216.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series6/schubotz141216.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Experience of sport by young people in NI. 2019. <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/experience-sport-by-young-people-northern-ireland-2019.pdf> Page last accessed 17.12.2020

<sup>7</sup> Teenage girls heading for a lifetime of ill-health. KESS NI Assembly RaiSe February 2018

[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge\\_exchange/briefing\\_papers/series7/gallagher140218.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series7/gallagher140218.pdf)

concerns about younger females. At the age of 18, twice the proportion of women as men take part in no sport at all each month.<sup>8</sup>

A recommendation repeatedly highlighted in female sport participation research is to focus policy interventions on key life transitions, including; children moving from primary school to post-primary, young people leaving education, having a family, or retiring from work.

### 2.1.2 Student Sport Participation

Ulster University's Professor Marie Murphy, led a team of researchers to complete the first study of sporting activity and physical activity behaviours of third level students on the island of Ireland, in 2016.<sup>9</sup> As well as an audit of sport and physical activity provisions, the study surveyed over 9,000 students from 36 colleges. Previous research has shown that lifelong habits are established at times of transition, hence the study's aim was to understand how to increase participation at this juncture.

Key findings included;

- 71% of male students were highly active, in comparison to 58% of females;
- more female students (39%) than males (26%) knew the national physical activity guidelines;
- 35% of students did not participate in any sport in the previous 4 weeks;
- cheaper admission rates and having someone to go with, were cited as the top encouragements to participate;
- 1 in 7 students were members of sports clubs; and
- participation levels were 57% lower, if a student felt that s/he did not have anyone to do physical activity with.

### 2.1.3 Older Females

Sport participation also 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).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> HOC inquiry. Culture, Media and Sport Committee. 2014.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmcomeds/740/740.pdf> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>9</sup> Marie Murphy et al. Student Sport and Activity Survey 2016 <http://www.studentsport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/SASSI-Full-Report-Without-Appendices..pdf> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>10</sup> Experience of sport by adults in NI. DfC. NISRA. 2019/20 <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/experience-sport-by-adults-northern-ireland-201920.pdf> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

### 3 Socio-economic factors

Analysis of witness statements from the HoC Women and Sport inquiry showed that women's participation was significantly lower among lower socio-economic groups. According to the NISRA Continuous Household survey for 2019/20, 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%).<sup>11</sup>

For young people, pupils who are entitled to free school meals were less likely to have normally taken part in at least 2 hours of P.E. per week, than those pupils who are not entitled (57% and 63% respectively).

### 4 Impact of COVID-19

In September 2020, Sport England and the Youth Sport Trust, reported that after six months of lockdown restrictions, a quarter of women were remaining regularly active. Also, although 93% of children under the age of 16 have continued to do something to stay active during the COVID-19 restrictions, the amount of activity has fallen. The number of children meeting the guidelines of 60 minutes of sport or physical activity each day has dropped from 47% to 19%.<sup>12</sup>

In response to COVID-19, Sport NI have distributed hardship grants to sporting organisations affected by the government restrictions. In December 2020, their Sports Hardship Fund dashboard<sup>13</sup> highlighted that of the 792 sports clubs in receipt of funding, 4% (50) were described as 'female', 10% (111) were 'male' and 86% (991) were 'male and female'.

A Sport Wales article<sup>14</sup> highlighted the widening of a gender gap in the safe return of elite sports. Premier League and Championship football have the ability to fund expensive and complex protocols at each stadium, mainly from TV rights and secondary income streams. Whereas, women's professional and semi-professional team sports are more reliant on match day revenue and hence face significant financial consequences as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Youth Sport Trust COVID-19 Impact on Children and Young People. 2020. <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/evidence-paper-impact-covid-19-restrictions-children-and-young-people> Page last accessed 17.12.2020

<sup>13</sup> COVID-19 Hardship Grant Dashboard. Sport NI. 2020. <http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SHF-Dashboard-18.12.20.pdf> Page last accessed 21.12.2020

<sup>14</sup> Sport Wales. Impact of COVID-19 on women's sports. 2020. <https://www.sport.wales/media-centre/latest-news/03-07-20-womens-team-sports-must-not-be-left-behind-in-lockdown/> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

## 5 How does NI compare with other jurisdictions?

Across most countries in Europe women are less physically active and report lower levels of participation in sport than men. In the 2010 Northern Ireland Sport and Physical Activity Survey (SAPAS), undertaken by Sport NI, 4623 respondents aged 16+ self-reported their PA across all 4 domains of activity including sport, domestic, occupational and personal transport.

PA participation declined with age but, at all ages, female participation was recorded as lower than males. Less than 40% of NI females met the PA guidelines, ranging from 52% of 20-40 year olds to only 15% of those over the age of 70. When surveyed, only 25% of women reported participating in sport compared to 43% of men.

Data for other UK jurisdictions are gathered and reported separately. Each jurisdiction presents its data in a different format and level of detail. Differences in the way the data is calculated (e.g. measured vs reported data) means that caution should be taken when comparing jurisdictions. Acknowledging differences in survey methods, sporting participation rates for women in Northern Ireland are lower than levels reported in Scotland and the rest of Europe. The Nordic countries, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, report the highest levels of participation in sport and PA and the smallest gender gap.

In the EU as a whole, in 2017, more women than men seldom or never took part in regular sport and physical activity. However, in Denmark and the Netherlands, female participation is high<sup>15</sup>

**Table 2 A comparison of sport participation levels in different jurisdictions**

Location	% Participation	
EU <sup>16</sup> Never or seldom participate in sport in 2017	Men	56
	Women	64
UK Never or seldom participate in sport in 2017	Men	49
	Women	58
<b>NI<sup>17</sup></b>		
Participated in sport within the last four weeks? (2019/2020)	Men	53
	<b>Women</b>	<b>39</b>
Scotland <sup>18</sup> Participated in physical activity or sport in past 4 weeks, excluding walking (2018/19)	Men	59
	Women	49
	Men	56

<sup>15</sup> N.F. Rowe. Sport Participation in Scotland. 2019 <https://secureservercdn.net/160.153.138.53/vme.906.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final-Revised-participation-report-for-publication28-05-2019.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> EU Barometer Sport and Physical Activity. 2017 [https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2164\\_88\\_4\\_472\\_ENG](https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2164_88_4_472_ENG)

<sup>17</sup> Experience of sport by adults in Northern Ireland. Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2019/20 <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/experience-sport-by-adults-northern-ireland-201920.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Scottish Household Survey. 2018. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2018-scottish-household-survey/pages/8/>



Wales <sup>19</sup>	Women	44
Participated in games, sport or exercise in last four weeks? (2019/2020)	Men	64
	Women	61
England	Men	48
Active for 150+ minutes in a week (2019/20)	Women	45
	Men	48
Ireland <sup>20</sup>	Men	48
Meet recommended activity levels	Women	45
	Men	48

## 6 Barriers to participation in sport and physical activity

In 2014, the House of Commons Committee for Culture, Media and Sport held an inquiry titled 'Women and Sport'. The inquiry examined the barriers to women's participation in sport and how to overcome these. The focus of the inquiry included;

- availability of facilities for training and playing sport, for both girls and women, at grassroots and elite levels;
- finance, including sponsorship and prize money;
- media coverage of women's sport;
- female role models, as elite sportswomen, managers and coaches; and
- variety of sports on offer to girls at school.

In 2017, the Scottish Parliament's Health and Sport committee published findings from a two part inquiry examining the barriers to sport participation and the Commonwealth Games legacy. Findings reported barriers to female participation as;

- caring/family commitments;
- feeling self-conscious;
- time;
- shortage of suitable facilities nearby;
- expense; and
- not enjoying P.E. at school.

In 2014, RaISe completed a research paper of potential issues regarding sport and female participation in Northern Ireland. Key issues highlighted included;

- poor body image and self-consciousness, particularly for teenage girls;
- a lack of visible role models in leadership positions and in the media; and
- low levels of children participating in physical activity per day.

<sup>19</sup> National Survey Wales. 2020 <https://gov.wales/national-survey-wales-results-viewer>

<sup>20</sup> Sport Ireland. Irish Sports Monitor. 2019. <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-09/irish-sports-monitor-2019-report-lower-res.pdf>

The following subsections summarise some of the research available to support the lists of barriers to female participation included above.

## 6.1 Confidence

A 2019 survey of 1,057 female respondents by Sport NI, noted that 70% of participants reported a lack of confidence as well as poor health and well-being as barriers to participating in sports and physical activity.<sup>21</sup> However, 80% of all respondents agreed that feeling better after exercise was an important reason for staying active. The results suggest that respondents are aware of the benefits of sport and physical activity, but a lack of confidence may be preventing participation.

69% of respondents agreed that role models to promote female sport and physical activity would encourage increased participation. Also, 67% agreed that more opportunities for social and recreational sport and physical activity would encourage increased participation, as having no one to go with was a barrier to taking part in sport and physical activity.

Research suggests interventions to support increased participation of young females should provide more opportunities to be active with friends. Also, the provision of 'non-traditional' types of physical activity within the school setting.<sup>22</sup>

## 6.2 Awareness of physical activity guidelines

Knowledge of how much physical activity should be completed, has been shown to be an important first step to regular physical activity.<sup>23</sup> However, studies have demonstrated that 8% of adults in Northern Ireland are aware of how much physical activity is recommended for health benefits. Females who were younger and reported poor health were more likely to be unaware of the guidelines. Females who report poor health are significantly more likely to do no physical activity.

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<sup>21</sup> The Women and Girls; Active, Fit and Sporty Participation Survey Insights Report. 2019. [http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SportNi-Participation-in-Sport-doc\\_web.pdf](http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SportNi-Participation-in-Sport-doc_web.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Alison Gallagher et al. 2018. Teenage Girls Heading for a Lifetime of Ill Health. [http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge\\_exchange/briefing\\_papers/series7/gallagher140218.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series7/gallagher140218.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Hunter RF, Tully MA, Donnelly P, Stevenson M, Kee F. Knowledge of UK physical activity guidelines: Implications for better targeted health promotion. *Prev Med* 2014; 65: 33-39

## 6.3 Role models

The 2014 House of Commons inquiry into Women and Sport<sup>24</sup>, noted that traditionally, women's sport has not been as prevalent as men's sport. Exceptions include; when women's competitions have been held at the same time as the men's equivalent e.g. tennis and athletics meetings, or where women compete directly with men e.g. horseracing and triathlon.

Studies have suggested that sports journalism has been largely by men, for men and that this has perhaps resulted in fewer female sports journalists being featured in the media.<sup>25</sup>

Further studies have suggested that the lack of female sporting role models has contributed to the perception that sport is unfeminine, resulting in the tendency for girls and women to drop out of sport and physical activity, reinforcing a lack of interest in women's elite sport.<sup>26</sup>

One of the key areas of focus for NI's Active, Fit and Sporty initiative<sup>27</sup> was to make female role models more visible at all levels of participation. The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation lists '*Create a society in which being active is attractive*' as the second objective in its framework for creating a nation of active women.<sup>28</sup> The WSFF also calls for

*'a new ideal of female beauty, where fit and healthy women and girls are celebrated and held up as role models to increase confidence levels and boost female participation'*.

Sport England's 'This Girl Can' campaign, launched in 2015, has attempted to address these gender stereotypes.<sup>29</sup>

## 6.4 Media representation of female sport

A recent BBC Sport survey of elite athletes<sup>30</sup> found that 93% felt that the media's coverage of female sport had improved over the past five years. A 2018 report by Women in Sport<sup>31</sup> highlighted that women made up between 4% and 10% of sports media coverage in the UK. Women's football, netball and cricket were televised in 2018

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<sup>24</sup> HOC inquiry. Culture, Media and Sport Committee. 2014.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmcmums/740/740.pdf> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>25</sup> O'Neill, D. and Mulready, M. (2014) 'The Invisible woman? Women's sports coverage in the UK press before and after the 2012 Olympics', *Journalism Practice*.

<sup>26</sup> Petty, K., & Pope, S. (2019). A New Age for Media Coverage of Women's Sport? An Analysis of English Media Coverage of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup. *Sociology*, 53(3), 486–502

<sup>27</sup> Sport NI Active, Fit and Sporty Report 2018/19 <http://www.sportni.net/news/active-fit-sporty-report/>

<sup>28</sup> Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation [https://www.wsff.org.uk/documents/active\\_women.pdf](https://www.wsff.org.uk/documents/active_women.pdf) Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>29</sup> Sport England This Girl Can <https://www.thisgirlcan.co.uk/> Page accessed 26.01.2021

<sup>30</sup> BBC Elite Sportswomen Survey Aug. 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/53593459> Page accessed 26.01.2021

<sup>31</sup> Women in Sport 'Where are all the women?' 2018 <https://www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Where-are-all-the-Women-1.pdf>

and 2019. In 2019, 28 million people watched the BBC's coverage of the FIFA Women's World Cup and 18 December was named 'Super Saturday' in Ireland with RTE broadcasting over ten hours of women's sports.

A recent article on the Royal Society of Television's website<sup>32</sup> noted that the traditional macho culture of sports media is breaking down. However, BT Sport's TV Commissioners want women's sports organisations to work more coherently to help the broadcasters;

*'Women's sports need to stop acting unilaterally and co-ordinate more across a calendar that has a narrative that the press can follow in a constructive way. That would make it easier for women's sports to get attention and allow the involvement of broadcasters to be constructive and realistic.'*<sup>33</sup>

Following England's gold at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, fortnightly participation in netball increased to 320,000 before COVID-19 restrictions began in March 2020.<sup>34</sup> Although, a Women in Sport survey of 2,000 sports fans, found that 69% of respondents felt there was a risk of women's sports suffering more than men's as a result of the pandemic.<sup>35</sup>

## 6.5 Coaches and leaders

According to UK Coaching<sup>36</sup>, Northern Ireland has the lowest proportion of female coaches (5%) in the population compared to England, Scotland and Wales. The proportion of female coaches in Scotland is higher than that of male coaches (8% and 6% respectively). Of the 92,000 active coaches in Northern Ireland, 40% are female, compared to 46% of active coaches being female in the UK.

In 2019, the NI Female Sports Forum commissioned an impact report to analyse courses and workshops they had supported. Between 2016 and 2019, NIFSF ran four sports leaders UK courses, and one female leadership development course. It also ran two conferences. Participants ranged in age from 15-58 and from 19 different locations across NI. And 24 different sports were represented. Over 50% of respondents had completed additional training or qualifications in sport, following participation in NIFSF workshops. And over 45% indicated that their respective sports clubs had greater female representation in leadership roles, following participation on NIFSF leadership

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<sup>32</sup> Royal Television Society. Is TV's coverage of female sport finally heading into the mainstream? 2017

<https://rts.org.uk/article/year-female-sporting-events-enter-tv-mainstream>

<sup>33</sup> Royal Television Society. Is TV's coverage of female sport finally heading into the mainstream? 2017

<https://rts.org.uk/article/year-female-sporting-events-enter-tv-mainstream>

<sup>34</sup> Netball England 'Staggering new netball participation figures revealed' 2019 <https://www.englandnetball.co.uk/netball-participation-figures-revealed/>

<sup>35</sup> Sport England COVID-19 Survey <https://indd.adobe.com/view/793b48d5-bbcd-4de3-a50f-11d241a506b3> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>36</sup> UK Coaching. State of the Nation Sport and Physical Activity. 2017.

<https://www.ukcoaching.org/resources/topics/research/the-state-of-the-nation-fact-sheets-on-physical-ac> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

courses. Lastly, over a third of respondents identified that their club was delivering more programmes for females, as a result of their participation<sup>37</sup>.

However, according to a BBC report<sup>38</sup>, three out of 36 boardroom level positions are held by women in the Irish Football Association, Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby. Gender inequality on the board of sporting organisations was identified as a key issue at the start of Sport NI's 'Sporting Winners and Sporting Clubs 2017 – 2021' investment cycle. With a related Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for sporting clubs to ensure boards comprise of at least 25% women or men.

## 6.6 Volunteers

According to the 2010 Sport and Physical Activity Survey (SAPAS)<sup>39</sup>, men are twice as likely as women to volunteer (12% compared to 6%). As much sports voluntary work is carried out in a club context, this gender gap is consistent with the Continuous Household Survey findings that women are less likely than men to be members of a sports club. Coaching as a typical club voluntary activity is more popular among men than women (51% of male volunteers coach compared to 33% of females). Among women, fundraising is the most popular volunteering activity.

The 2019 Active, Fit and Sporty (AFS) female participation survey<sup>40</sup> found that 20% of respondents took part in physical challenges for charity. Also, the 2019 impact report for the Female Sports Forum included survey results that highlighted that 42% of respondents agreed that as a result of their attendance at the AFS Building Momentum conference, they volunteered more at sporting events. The NI Female Sports Forum also held five upskilling female volunteer workshops in 2016/17.

## 6.7 Members of sports clubs

Research has shown that membership of a sports club encouraged participation in sport and physical. <sup>41</sup> In 2010, 23% of adults reported membership of a sports or physical activity club in Northern Ireland. In 2019/20, 26% reported membership. However, the gender gap was significant, with 33% of males surveyed reporting sports club membership, versus 19% of females. Also, sports club membership decreases with age.

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<sup>37</sup> Active, Fit and Sport Report. 2018/19. <http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Final-Report-1819July.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> BBC Gender imbalance in top football, GAA and rugby committees. Aug, 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/northern-ireland/53666001> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>39</sup> Sport NI. NI Sport And Physical Activity Survey. 2010 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/73014459/The-Northern-Ireland-Sport-and-Physical-Activity-Survey-2010-SAPAS> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>40</sup> The Women and Girls; Active, Fit and Sporty Participation Survey Insights Report. 2019. [http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SportNi-Participation-in-Sport-doc\\_web.pdf](http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SportNi-Participation-in-Sport-doc_web.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.sportni.net/news/active-fit-sporty-participation-survey-2019-insight-report/>

## 6.8 Female focused research

Most of the evidence regarding the association between physical activity and health has been derived from studies of men.<sup>42</sup> The Northern Ireland Female Sports Forum includes a goal to increase levels of female focused research through the Active, Fit and Sporty initiative.<sup>43</sup>

## 7 Barriers to female elite athletes

A 2013 study commissioned by Sport NI analysed the performance of Northern Ireland athletes at the Commonwealth Games between 1954 and 2010<sup>44</sup>. A comparison of the number of medals won by men and women demonstrated a long term disparity, where men had outperformed women on 11 out of 15 occasions. The third strategic objective in Sport NI's (SNI) 2015 – 2020 Corporate Plan was 'to help more Northern Ireland athletes to win at the highest levels'.

The SNI 2019 annual report noted that 31 medals were won by athletes from NI at international games. Bethany Firth won five medals in the European Para Swimming Championships and Kirsty Barr won 3 medals across the European and Commonwealth Championships and World Shooting Championships. In the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, Northern Ireland won 12 medals, an increase of two since the 2010 Games in Delhi. Women competed in 71 of the 152 sporting events listed, with four of the 12 medals won by female athletes.<sup>45</sup>

### Box 2 Definition of an elite athlete (Sport NI)

Elite athlete<sup>46</sup> means an individual who;

- derives a living from competing in a sport;
- plays in a professional league or competition;
- is a senior representative nominated by a relevant sporting body;
- is a member of the senior training squad for a relevant sporting body; or
- is aged 16 or above and on an elite development pathway.

<sup>42</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/832868/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/832868/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid Ref 29

<sup>44</sup> Sport NI. An Analysis of Northern Ireland's Performance in the Commonwealth Games 2013.

[http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SNI\\_Comm\\_Games\\_singles.pdf](http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SNI_Comm_Games_singles.pdf) Page last accessed 21.01.2021

<sup>45</sup> Commonwealth Games Federation 2020 <https://thecgf.com/results/games/3052/48/all> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>46</sup> SNI Guidance for Sports Organisations Oct 2020 <http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FAQ-Guidance-for-sports-for-new-regulations-19-Oct-2020.pdf> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

Table 3 lists the funding awarded through Sport NI's 'Sporting Winners' 2017-21 investment cycle. A breakdown of the split between female and male recipients is not currently available.

The SNI COVID-19 Hardship Funding dashboard, mentioned previously, suggests the majority of funding goes to 'mixed sports' (86%), although 'male' sports (10%) received twice as much as 'female' sports (4%).

**Table 3 Sporting Winners Funding 2017 – 21**

Sport	Organisation Name	Total Sporting Winners Funding For 2017-21 £
Archery	Archery GB	196,000.00
Athletics	Athletics Northern Ireland	1,041,250.00
Bowling	Irish Bowls Federation	438,100.00
Boxing	Irish Athletic Boxing Association	861,882.00
Canoeing	Canoe Association of Northern Ireland	506,043.00
Cycling	Cycling Ireland	800,000.00
Disability Sport (Wheelchair B/Ball)	Disability Sport Northern Ireland (Wheelchair B/Ball)	350,301.00
Disability Sport (Boccia)	Disability Sport Northern Ireland (Boccia)	121,364.00
Disability Sport (Snow sport)	Disability Sport Northern Ireland (Snow sport)	166,000.00
Golf	Golfing Union of Ireland (UB)	620,000.00
Hockey	Hockey Ireland	1,266,879.00
Judo	Northern Ireland Judo Federation	445,859.00
NICGC	Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council	365,395.00
Netball	Netball Northern Ireland	353,547.00
Para Badminton	(UB) Badminton Union of Ireland	107,560
Rowing	Rowing Ireland	308,500.00
Sailing	Royal Yachting Association Northern Ireland	511,058.00
Shooting	Northern Ireland Federation of Shooting Sports	94,000.00
Swimming	Swim Ulster Ltd	392,979.00
Triathlon	Triathlon Ireland	660,824.00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9,607,541.00</b>

## 7.1 Student Scholarships

In 2016, Ulster University led the Student Sport Ireland survey<sup>47</sup>. This examined the 6,700 scholarships and bursaries available to high performance student athletes on the

<sup>47</sup> Marie Murphy et al. Student Sport and Activity Survey 2016 <http://www.studentsport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/SASSI-Full-Report-Without-Appendices..pdf> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

island of Ireland. The study found that 4,700 were awarded to males and 1,900 to females. In 2013, over €1.1million was invested in college sports scholarships, with €804,000 awarded to males versus females getting €335,000. The resulting policy recommendation asked colleges to review their scholarship programmes in the context of gender equality.

## 8 Initiatives designed to increase female participation

### 8.1 Northern Ireland

#### 8.1.1 Active, Fit and Sporty

In 2016, the Women and Girls: Active, Fit and Sporty (AFS) strategic framework was launched. The AFS framework targets the development of female focused activity in the areas of; media, leadership, role models as well as research and evaluation.

Active, Fit & Sporty is an initiative led by the Female Sports Forum with support from SNI. In May 2017, through DfC funding, SNI continued the investment with its six delivery partners. As well as the NI Female Sports Forum, these include; Women In Sport and Physical Activity (WISPA), Sported, Youth Sport Trust, Disability Sport NI and Ulster University.

Through the AFS initiative, SNI commissioned a consultation survey in 2019<sup>48</sup>, to understand how future participation of more females in sport can be supported. The results from this insight report can be summarised as follows;

**Table 4 Summary of 1,054 female respondents<sup>49</sup> of the Active, Fit and Sporty survey**

Issue	Stats
Participation in sport	94% and 65% active 3-5 days per week 62% participate in walking, mountaineering or running 49% attend exercise classes 49% attend a gym 27% swim/dive, 25% cycle, 12% Gaelic football and 10% athletics 33% take part in recreational activity e.g. parkrun events
Club Membership	71% are members of a sports club Highest percentages were members of athletics, triathlon, rugby, Gaelic, football, rowing, hockey, netball, cricket, gymnastics and camogie 71% of club members were active 3-5 days per week

<sup>48</sup> The Women and Girls Active, Fit and Sporty Participation Survey 2019 Insight Report. Nov 2019.

[http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SportNi-Participation-in-Sport-doc\\_web.pdf](http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SportNi-Participation-in-Sport-doc_web.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> 1,102 people responded to The Women and Girls: Active, Fit and Sporty Participation Insight survey. 96% (1,054) female, 3% (41) male and 1% (7) identified as other or prefer not to say.



Barriers	82% - lack of confidence 80% - lack of time 76% - cost 76% - poor health and well being 74% - injury and/or disability
Factors important so as to stay active	98% - feeling better after activity 98% - staying fit 91% - accessible and inclusive facilities 90% - meeting new people 90% - learning new skills
Factors encouraging participation	93% - more opportunities for social and recreational activities 90% - adapted programmes for all 89% - improved sports facilities 88% - better developed youth and sports clubs

A key finding from the survey was that respondents who were members of a sports club were 29% more likely to be active 3-5 days per week, compared with those who are not sport club members. Therefore, the resulting policy recommendations concluded from the survey responses and featured in the insight report included;

- Additional support to governing bodies on how to recruit and retain female members;
- Improvement of sports facilities for women and girls who participate in high performance sport;
- More development of inclusive and accessible facilities;
- More mental health and wellbeing/body image interventions;
- More visible role models at all levels of participation; and
- More opportunities for social and recreational activities.

### 8.1.2 Impacts of the Active, Fit and Sporty Initiative<sup>50</sup>

A total of 5,020 female participants were engaged in 2017/18. One fifth of female participants were initially inactive, over a quarter had a disability and 10% were aged 50+.

Further funding in May and September 2018 from DfC enabled continued investment for Active, Fit and Sporty's six delivery partners. A total of 2,468 inactive female participants were engaged from May to September 2018, with 10% being females with a disability and 4% were aged 50+<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> SNI Annual Progress Report 2018/19 <http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Final-Report-1819July.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> DfC Sport Matters Progress Report 2017/19 <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/sport-matters-implementation-group-progress-report-oct17-sept18.pdf>

In 2017/18, SNI supported the IFA, GAA and Ulster Rugby participation and legacy projects following the UEFA U19's women's football tournament, the Feile Peil na nOg and the World Rugby Women's Rugby World Cup. In addition, the Female Sports Forum assisted in the Active, Fit and Sporty Major Event Legacy Project. Key outcomes from the legacy projects included; 3,077 total participants, with 87% being female, 41% of women and girls engaged in active volunteering, 10% of females joined sports clubs, 27% were females with a disability and 54% females registered for leadership training.

### 8.1.3 Every Body Active<sup>52</sup>

Every Body Active is a four year lottery funded programme. It aims to increase participation across key life-course transitions, including; children moving from primary school to post-primary, young people leaving education, having a family, or retiring from work. It is specifically aimed at women, girls aged 14-15 and people with a disability.

Strand 1 (Opportunities) of the Every Body Active 2020 Programme links the delivery of sport and physical activity to a community plan. The 11 District Councils have received £6.2m of funding from Sport NI and are engaged in the delivery of Strand 1 of the Every Body Active Programme. Under this strand during 2017/18 84,864 participants were involved.

According to the Sport Matters Progress Report 2017/18<sup>53</sup>, 60.2% participants were women and girls; 14,139 participants were people with a disability (16.7%); and 21,077 participants came from the areas of greatest need across NI (24.8%).

Strand 4 (Capacity Building, Outreach and Small Grants) of the Every Body Active 2020 Programme is devolved to District Councils. It links the delivery of sport and physical activity to a community plan. Under this strand during 2017/18 37,428 participants were involved: 21,157 participants were women and girls (56.5%) and 4,532 participants were people with a disability (12.1%).

### 8.1.4 Engage HER 2016/17<sup>54</sup>

Sported ran a five-month pilot programme with Women in Sport with the aim to increase female membership of sporting clubs, as part of Sport NI's 'Women & Girls: Active, Fit and Sporty' programme. This was funded by the Department for Communities. Six workshops were delivered by Women in Sport to six Spotted members. The aim was to support sporting clubs to 'think differently' about ways to engage female participants.

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<sup>52</sup> SNI Everybody Active <http://www.sportni.net/get-active/every-body-active-2020/> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>53</sup> Ibid Ref 40

<sup>54</sup> Spotted EngageHER <https://spotted.org.uk/engage-her/> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

### 8.1.5 WISH – Walking In Schools Study

This study was an example intervention, highlighted by academics from Ulster University in a Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS) policy briefing in 2018. The intervention aimed to promote positive health related behaviours in adolescent girls. Participants were offered the opportunity to participate in a number of structured 10–15 min walks spread across the school week before the first ‘bell’, at mid-morning break and at lunch time. These walks were led by older pupils (aged 15–17 years) trained as walk leaders. The WISH study resulted in increased levels of light intensity physical activity across the school day by approximately 8 minutes/day and reduced levels of sedentary behaviour amongst adolescent girls.<sup>55</sup>

### 8.1.6 Electric Ireland #GameChangers Campaign<sup>56</sup>

Working with the Irish Football Association, Electric Ireland support the Game Changers initiative on an all-island basis, supporting the 10,000+ female footballers in NI who play every week. This promotional campaign offers club funding in return for new customers.

## 9 Future Initiatives

### 9.1 Department for Communities Sport and Physical Activity Strategy<sup>57</sup>

The Sport Matters strategy 2009-2019 continues to guide policy until a new strategy is agreed and put in place.

According to the DfC website;

*‘...the new strategy will be cross-Departmental and will focus on linkages between sport and physical activity and other policies of the Executive, such as physical and mental health and well-being, education, transport, urban and rural regeneration, good relations, community safety, social inclusion and economic and social equality.’*

Due to COVID-19, as of January 2021, the timescale for the development of this strategy is currently unclear. However, there is an expectation that the final outcome of the consultation process will conclude in early 2021.

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<sup>55</sup> Gallagher et al. KESS Policy Briefing. 2018.

[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge\\_exchange/briefing\\_papers/series7/gallagher140218.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series7/gallagher140218.pdf)  
Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>56</sup> Electric Ireland #GameChangers <https://www.electricireland.com/gamechangers/> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>57</sup> DfC ‘A new sports strategy’ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/new-sport-and-physical-activity-strategy> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

## 9.2 Sport Northern Ireland Draft Corporate Plan 2020 – 2025<sup>58</sup>

In November 2020, Sport NI launched the consultation process for its draft corporate plan. It included two strategic outcomes – 1. People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and recreation. 2. NI Athletes among the best in the world. Within the 20 actions listed, two mention inclusivity. These were; action 12 ‘support governing bodies of sport to embed a positive and inclusive culture in their clubs’ and action 14 ‘...delivering increased, inclusive and safe sustained participation in sport and physical recreation.’ None of the draft actions directly mentions targets to increase female participation.

## 10 Overview of strategy and policy in other jurisdictions

An overview of international strategies concerning the participation of females in sport and physical activity include;

### 10.1 World Health Organisation (WHO)<sup>59</sup>

WHO have developed guidelines to support the development of physical activity policies. These reflect the guidelines promoted by the Chief Medical Officers in NI, Scotland, Wales and England and include;

- Increase awareness of the benefits of regular physical activity;
- Provide safe access to places and spaces for physical activity;
- Create and promote opportunities and programmes for all ages and abilities to engage in regular physical activity;
- Create and strengthen leadership, governance, multi-sectoral partnerships, workforce capabilities, and advocacy and information systems across sectors to increase physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour.

### 10.2 UNESCO<sup>60</sup>

UNESCO adopted the International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport in 1978. The Charter affirms that;

*‘Equal opportunity to participate and be involved at all supervision and decision-making levels in physical education, physical activity and sport, whether for the purpose of recreation, health promotion or high*

<sup>58</sup> SNI Draft Corporate Plan 2020-2025 <http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Sport-NI-Draft-Corporate-Plan-2020-2025.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> W.H.O. Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018 - 2030 <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272722/9789241514187-eng.pdf> Page last accessed 17.12.2020

<sup>60</sup> UNESCO Sport and Physical Activity Charter <https://en.unesco.org/themes/sport-and-anti-doping/sport-charter> Page last accessed 17.12.2020

*performance, is the right of every girl and every woman and must be actively enforced’.*

In 2019, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Commission drafted a ‘Declaration on Sport and Human Rights’.<sup>61</sup> Five sports bodies in Northern Ireland adopted the Declaration: the Belfast Giants, Irish Football Association, Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council, Ulster GAA, and Ulster Rugby. In June 2019, the first meeting of the Northern Ireland Sport & Human Rights Forum took place and a work plan has been developed. The first point in the Declaration states ‘... *There should be equal access to sport regardless of gender...*’

### 10.3 Brighton plus Helsinki Declaration on Women and Sport

Like the UK and Ireland, Northern Ireland is a signatory of this declaration, through Sport NI<sup>62</sup>. In 1994, the International Working Group (IWG) on Women and Sport developed and established the Brighton Declaration. It is an international treaty and road map to support the development of a fair and equitable system of sport and physical activity that is inclusive of women and girls. The Charter includes 10 principles intended to support women and girls to participate, compete and build careers in sport and physical activity. On the 20th anniversary of its original establishment, the Brighton Declaration was updated by the IWG to become the Brighton plus Helsinki Declaration.

<sup>63</sup>

The updated 10 principles provided, guidance in the following policy areas;

- mainstream the values and principles of equity and diversity into all international, regional, national and local strategies for sport and physical activity;
- ensure that all women and girls have opportunity to participate in sport and physical activity in a safe and supportive environment which preserves the rights, dignity and respect of the individual;
- recognise the diversity of women’s and girls’ needs, especially those with disabilities through delivery of Article 30 of the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and those living and working in cultures and contexts which may be hostile to female participation and performance;
- increase and support the involvement of women in sport and physical activity, at all levels and in all functions and roles;

<sup>61</sup> NI Sport and Human Rights Forum. Declaration on Sport and Human Rights’ 2019

<https://www.declarationonsportandhumanrights.com/webedit/uploaded-files/All%20Files/document.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Marie Murphy and Kate Liston Knowledge Exchange Seminar. Females in Sport Briefing. 2015

[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge\\_exchange/briefing\\_papers/murphy--liston\\_females-in-sport-briefing.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/murphy--liston_females-in-sport-briefing.pdf) Page accessed 26.01.2021

<sup>63</sup> Brighton plus Helsinki Declaration. 2014. <https://iwgwomenandsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Brighton-plus-Helsinki-2014-Declaration-on-Women-and-Sport.pdf>

- ensure that the knowledge, experiences and values of women contribute to the development of sport and physical activity;
- promote the recognition of women's and girls' involvement in sport and physical activity as a contribution to public life, community development and in building healthy nations;
- promote the recognition by women of the intrinsic value of sport and physical activity and its contributions to personal development and healthy lifestyles.
- increase cooperation between women and men and ensure support of men in order to promote gender equality in sport and physical activity.

## 10.4 Toronto Charter for Physical Activity

Northern Ireland has adopted some of the sentiments from the Toronto Charter in its 'Fitter Future for All 2012-2022' strategy<sup>64</sup>, which aimed to address obesity levels in NI. The Toronto Charter called on countries to seek greater political commitment, resources and community action to support health enhancing physical activity for all. The Charter included seven 'best investments' to support policy makers, these were;<sup>65</sup>

- a 'whole of school' approach to physical activity involves prioritising: regular, highly-active, physical education classes; providing suitable physical environments and resources to support structured and unstructured physical activity throughout the day (e.g., play and recreation before, during and after school);
- transport policies and systems that prioritise walking, cycling and public transport;
- urban design regulations and infrastructure that provide for equitable and safe access for recreational physical activity, and recreational and transport-related walking and cycling across the life course;
- physical activity integrated into primary health care systems;
- public education, including mass media to raise awareness and change social norms on physical activity;
- community-wide programmes involving multiple settings and sectors and that mobilise and integrate community engagement and resources;
- sports systems and programmes that promote 'sport for all' and encourage participation across the life span.

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<sup>64</sup> DHSSPSNI. A fitter future for all; 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Toronto Charter for Physical Activity <http://www.paha.org.uk/Resource/toronto-charter-for-physical-activity-a-global-call-for-action> Page last accessed 17.12.2020

## 11 Neighbouring Jurisdictions

### 11.1 England

*Sporting Future*<sup>66</sup> is the UK's cross government strategy for equalising the levels of sport participation and physical inactivity across differing demographics. It focuses on five key outcomes – physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development as well as economic development.

Twenty five key performance indicators aim to increase physical activity participation levels measured through Sport England's *Active Lives Survey*<sup>67</sup>. Sport England's research backs the insight that barriers to female participation include a lack of confidence and time. They launched the 'This Girl Can' campaign<sup>68</sup> in 2015 with the aim of challenging the conventional idea of what exercise looks like. Their strategy 'Towards an Active Nation, 2016 – 2021', included actions to increase diversity in the leadership of sports organisations, volunteers as well as improved inclusion in talent development.

### 11.2 Scotland

In 2018/19 the Scottish Government increased *sportscotland's* core funding by £2m. This was invested in communities, clubs and schools with a special focus on equality. The Scottish physical activity delivery plan<sup>69</sup> aligns with the WHO Global Action Plan on Physical Activity and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The 'More Active Scotland' physical activity delivery plan was launched in 2018 and mentions the establishment of a 'Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board' to increase female sport participation. Actions included;

- supporting the Board to provide a culture change for women and girls to have opportunities and feel empowered to be physically active and stay active;
- improve the visibility of role models for women and girls at all stages of life and aspiration; and
- address barriers to leadership and participation in sport for girls through the Active Girls programme, with a focus on body image and confidence.

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<sup>66</sup> UK Government Sporting Future Strategy 2015

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/486622/Sporting\\_Future\\_AC\\_CESSIBLE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622/Sporting_Future_AC_CESSIBLE.pdf) Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>67</sup> Sport England Active Lives Survey <https://www.sportengland.org/know-your-audience/data/active-lives> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>68</sup> Sport England This Girl Can 2015 <https://www.sportengland.org/campaigns-and-our-work/this-girl-can> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>69</sup> Active Scotland Delivery Plan 2018 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/active-scotland-delivery-plan/> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

Scotland's *Active Schools* initiative<sup>70</sup> received £50m in funding between 2015 and 2019. Female participation exceeded male participation levels, across the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation areas. Also, 99% of schools had met the target of two hours of PE per week by 2018, rising from 10% in 2004/5. Scotland also runs a Women and Girls in Sport Week, to support females to overcome the known barriers to sport participation. This was first launched in 2018.

### 11.3 Wales

Wales' '*Climbing Higher*' sports policy<sup>71</sup> was launched in 2005 and updated in 2015. By 2025, it has set targets to address gender disparity in elite sports. Target 13 mentions that '*medallists will be broadly comparable across genders*' and in targets 14, 15 and 16, Wales men's and women's rugby, football and golfing teams are both to achieve positions in the world's top rankings, in each sport. .

Wales' physical activity action plan was launched in 2010 and its 'Healthy & Active' fund was launched in 2018.

### 11.4 Ireland

Ireland's National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027<sup>72</sup> included actions relating to increasing female participation in both recreational and high performance sports. Key performance indicators included;

- elimination of the 4.5% active sport participation gradient between men and women;
- progress towards greater gender balance in Board membership of funded sports bodies, with a 30% minimum on each Board.

The 2018 implementation report for Ireland's National Physical Activity Plan noted the support of the Federation of Irish Sport's 20x20 campaign 'If She Can't See It, She Can't Be It'. The aim of this initiative was to increase the profile of women in sport as well as female participation in sport.

Sport Ireland also has a 'Women in Sport' policy which aligns with the National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027. Since 2005, Sport Ireland has invested €20m through National Governing Bodies and local sports partnerships<sup>73</sup>. The gender gradient in sports participation closed from 15.7% to 3.4% according to the 2019 Irish Sports Monitor. Sport Ireland also has a responsibility to ensure that national governing bodies set gender diversity targets and develop equality plans. With assistance from the Dormant Accounts fund, Sport Ireland's objectives include;

<sup>70</sup> SportScotland Active Schools Initiative <https://sportscotland.org.uk/schools/active-schools/> Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>71</sup> Sport Wales 'Climbing Higher' 2015 – 2025 <https://gov.wales/sport-and-physical-activity-strategy-climbing-higher>

<sup>72</sup> Sport Ireland National Sports Policy 2018-2027 [https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/national-sports-policy-2018-2027\\_0.pdf](https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/national-sports-policy-2018-2027_0.pdf) Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>73</sup> Sport Ireland *Women in Sport 2019* <https://www.sportireland.ie/women-in-sport/women-in-sport-policy>



- Develop an enhanced understanding of the current landscape for women's involvement in all areas of sport;
- Identify common barriers and opportunities for women in sport;
- Make recommendations to inform the development of future policies and programmes relating to strengthening women's involvement in sport.

These objectives are in the areas of – coaching and officiating, active participation, leadership and governance and visibility.

#### **11.4.1 Federation of Irish Sport and KPMG 20 x 20 Campaign**

In 2018, Nielsen Sports<sup>74</sup> reported that 59% of Irish people believed that the media should do more to promote female sport. Supported by KPMG and the Federation of Irish Sport, the 20x20 campaign aimed to increase participation, media coverage and attendance in women's sport by 20% by the end of 2020. By the end of December 2019, participation had increased by 17%, attendance by 34% and an increase of 50% in online and print media coverage.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Nielsen's Sport The Rise of Women's Sports 2018 <https://niensports.com/reports/global-interest-womens-sports-rise/>  
Page last accessed 20.01.2021

<sup>75</sup> KPMG 20x20 Campaign <https://home.kpmg/ie/en/home/insights/2020/09/20x20.html> Page last accessed 20.01.2021