

# IRISH SPORTS MONITOR 2015/16 MID-YEAR REPORT

## Introduction

This report provides an interim update on data collected during the first six months of fieldwork on the Irish Sports Monitor in 2015. The Irish Sports Monitor is a large scale population based survey designed to measure physical and social participation in sport and other forms of exercise in Ireland.

This report presents data from 4,292 telephone interviews conducted between May and October 2015. As data collection is still in progress, the results provided should be interpreted with caution as they could change<sup>1</sup> once data collection is completed (April 2016) and data weighting is finalised. For the purposes of presenting data in this report, the data has been weighted by age, gender, region and education to reflect the profile of the Irish population. Data is also presented for previous years, and to facilitate accurate comparisons these only include data collected between May and October during those years.

## Summary

Following a number of years of increasing levels of participation in sport, the 2015 study identifies that participation – both physical and social – has declined slightly since 2013. However, despite this decline the numbers of adults involved in sport in its variety of forms remains higher than it was when this series of studies commenced almost 10 years ago. Approximately 1.7 million Irish adults participate in sport on a weekly basis, and a similar number take part on a social basis (through volunteering for sport, club membership or attending sporting events).

In addressing the decline in sporting activity, the challenges remain the same as identified previously. Notable gender, social and age gradients exist in sport, with males, those who are working and more highly educated and those who are younger all more likely to participate in sport than other groups. Understanding the nature of these differences and how they arise are key outputs from the Irish Sports Monitor. The new National Sports Policy that is currently being developed will need to take account of these issues and consider them within the initiatives that are developed from this policy framework.

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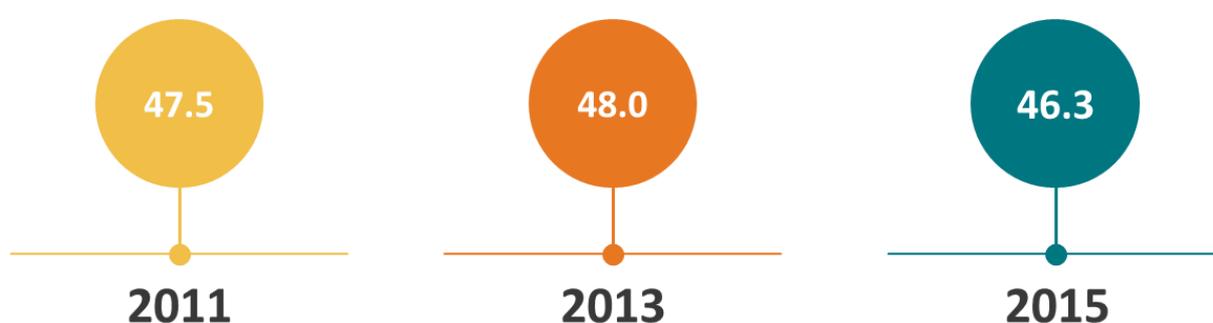
<sup>1</sup> Results may change for a number of reasons, most notably seasonal factors which can impact on levels of sports participation



## Physical Participation in Sport

The past three waves of this study have each demonstrated an increase in sports participation when compared with the previous wave. The 2013 Annual Irish Sports Monitor Report indicated that 47.2% of the population had participated in sport in the previous seven days, an increase from 32.9% in 2007. A variety of factors have been suggested as contributing to this increase including various programmes encouraging greater physical activity particularly among inactive groups, and long-term secular trends of increasing leisure time physical activity in developed countries.<sup>2</sup> Additionally many individuals had more free time as a result of the economic downturn in recent years, and there was a greater availability of individual activities that could be fitted in around other time commitments.

**Figure 1: Participation in sport (%)**



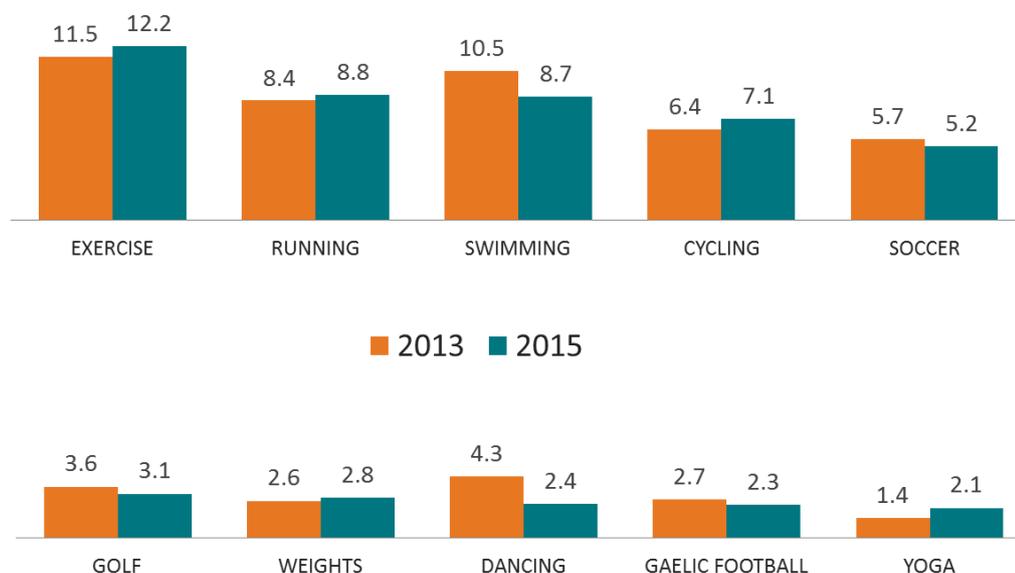
Interim results from the 2015 Monitor suggest that participation in sport has declined slightly over the past two years. Between May and October 2015 46.3% of the population indicated that they had participated in sports in the previous seven days. Comparing this with the same period in 2013 suggests that this is a decline from 48.0%. However, large numbers still participate in sport with almost 1.7 million Irish people doing so on a weekly basis.

Further context on this decline is outlined throughout this report. Understanding the factors behind the decline will be important in focussing attention on specific groups that may be reducing their activity levels. In previous reports it was hypothesised that the economic downturn might have contributed to increased levels of physical activity. With improvements in the economic situation more recently, and increasing levels of employment, the converse may now apply with those returning to work, and leading busier lifestyles, possibly sacrificing some of their sporting activity.

<sup>2</sup> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-789X.2011.00982.x/abstract>



**Figure 2: Most popular forms of sporting activity (%)**



The ten most popular forms of sporting activity contain a diverse range of activities, from personal exercise (predominantly gym based activities) participated in by 12.2% of the population, through to Gaelic Football (2.3%) and Yoga (2.1%). A range of other activities are just outside the ten most popular forms – including hurling/camogie (1.7%), rugby (1.0%) and tennis (0.9%).

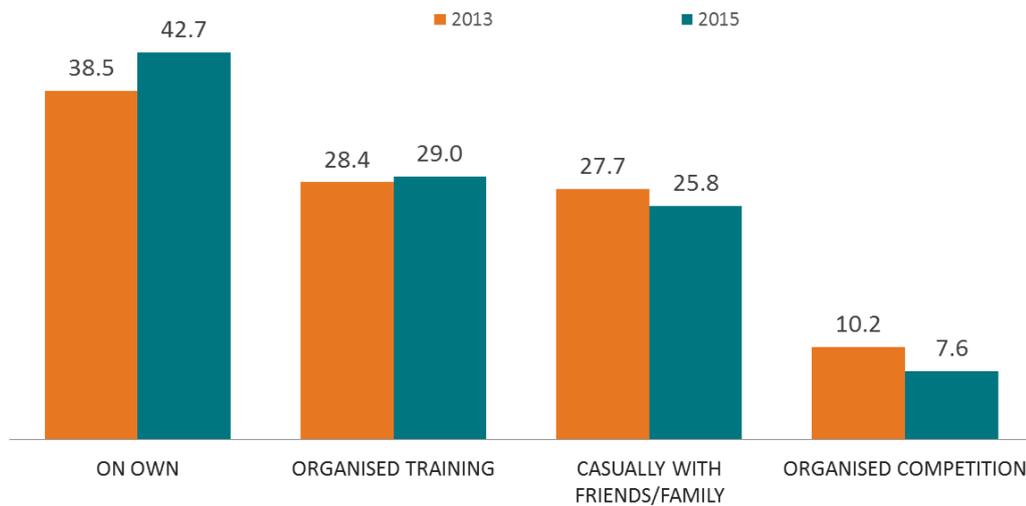
Personal exercise remains the most popular form of activity with 12.2% participating in this in the previous seven days. It is the most popular activity for both genders, as well as across most age groups. Participation is highest amongst those aged under 35 where 1 in 5 (19.9%) have undertaken this activity within the previous seven days.

Whilst the changes across the most popular forms of sporting activity are mainly marginal, the cumulative effect of these changes is an overall decline in activity. The ten most popular forms of sporting activity remain the same as in 2013, with the exception of Yoga becoming the tenth most popular form of activity. A further change is also evident with the proportion participating in cycling increasing from 6.4% to 7.1%.

Sports that are typically participated in on an individual basis remain more popular than those participated in a team basis, although both categories have declined slightly since 2013. Just over 4 in 10 (40.9%) participated in an “individual” sport in the past 7 days, compared with 10.2% participating in a team sport. However, realistically many of these “individual” sports (for example, running and cycling) will have been participated in with other people.



**Figure 3: Context for participation (%)**

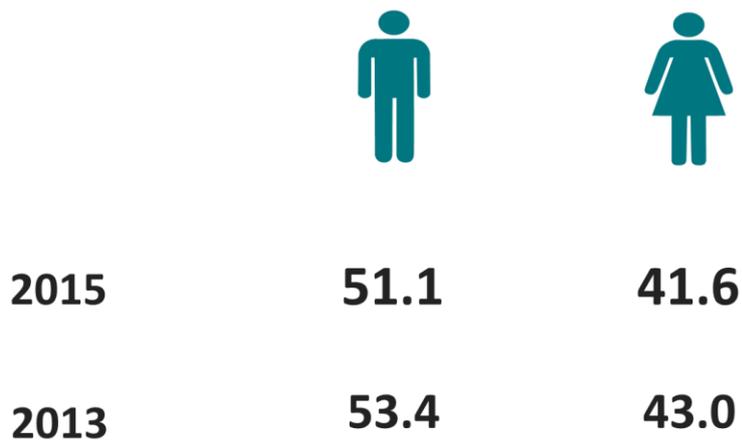


Just over 4 in 10 (42.7%) participated in an activity alone. This is a slight increase from 38.5% during the same time period in 2013, and continues a trend observed in previous years of the study. This is compatible with the types of sports which have seen the largest increases in participation in recent years (e.g. personal exercise, swimming, running and cycling). Organised training sessions (29.0%) and participation casually with friends/family (25.8%) are the next most popular ways of participating in sport. 7.6% participated in an organised competition in the past 7 days.

Analysis of participation in specific sports by gender and age does not indicate any noteworthy changes. The one exception in this regard is Yoga, where the increased participation is particularly evident amongst females aged 35 to 44, 5.1% of whom have participated in Yoga in the past seven days making it the fourth most popular sporting activity amongst this group.

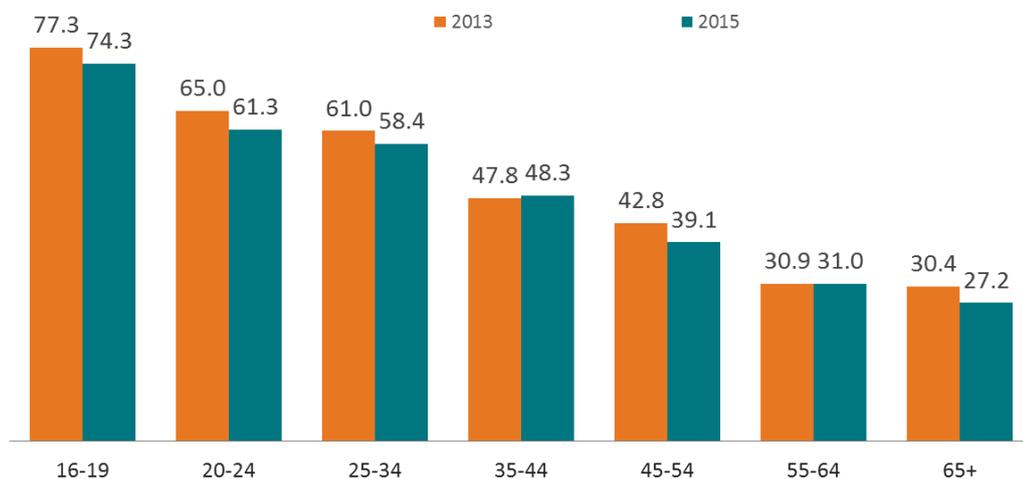


Figure 4: Participation in sport by gender (%)



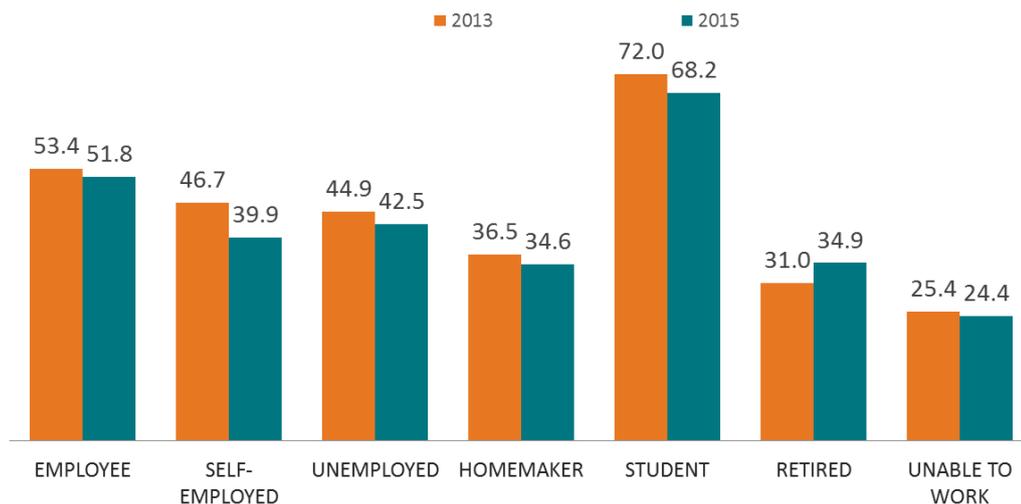
Males are more likely to participate in sport than women. Just over half of all males (51.1%) participated in sport in the previous seven days, compared with 41.6% of females. Whilst participation amongst both genders has declined slightly, the gender gap (9.5%) is equivalent to that measured during the same period in 2013 (10.4%). Importantly it is narrower than that in previous studies (for example, the 12% gap in 2011).

Figure 5: Participation in sport by age (%)



The strongest decline in participation is in the 16 to 24 age group (declining from 70.0% to 66.9%), with similar declines seen for both males and females in this age group. These are still the most active of all age groups, with three-quarters of males aged 25 or under participating in sport in the past week. However, the decline in participation levels among younger individuals is of concern following on as it does a similar decline between the 2011 and 2013 studies. Further data to be gathered for the 2015 Annual ISM report later in the year will permit a more in-depth exploration of any trend in this respect, in particular any gender differences that might exist.

**Figure 6: Participation in sport by working status (%)**



The resilient social gradient continues in the 2015 study, with sporting participation higher amongst more affluent upmarket groups. Exploring sports participation by working status demonstrates this clearly, with higher levels of participation amongst those in employment compared to those who are not in paid employment. The only exception to this is among students, where participation levels are considerably higher due to their age and indeed flexibility of time commitments and access to resources.

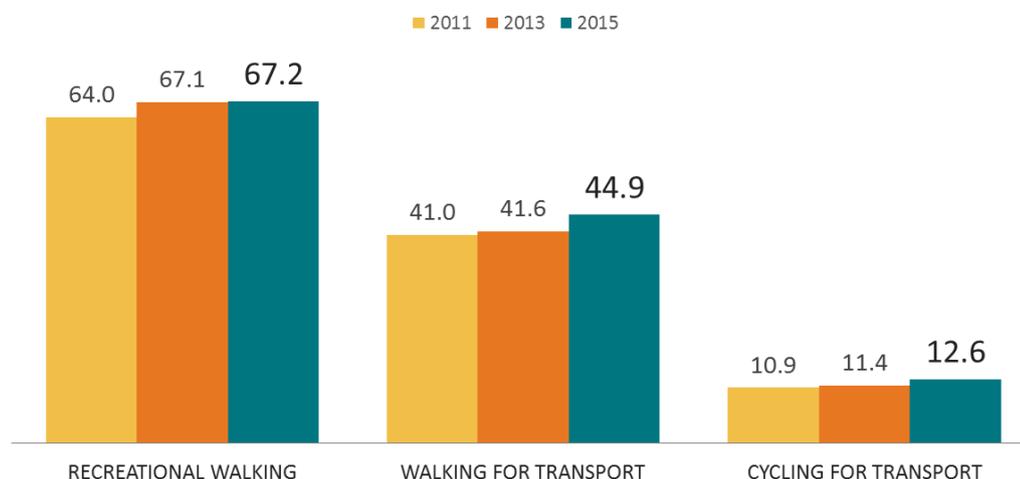
A notable decline in activity levels amongst the self-employed may provide further evidence of the impact of the economic upturn on sporting activity. Due to the nature of their work responsibilities, this group are possibly more likely to be subject to increased time pressures as a result of an upturn and are curtailing their sporting activity.



## Other Forms of Physical Activity

In addition to measuring participation in sporting activities, the Irish Sports Monitor also considers other forms of physical activity – specifically recreational walking, walking for transport and cycling for transport.

**Figure 7: Participation in other forms of physical activity (%)**



Over the past number of waves of this study the proportion that is participating in recreational walking has increased slowly each year. Data collected so far in 2015 shows that 67.2% have participated in recreational walking. As measured in previous waves, females are more likely to participate in recreational walking than males (72.3% and 61.9% respectively). However, due to a slight rise in male participation and a slight fall in female participation the gap between the genders has narrowed slightly from 12.2% to 10.4%. Analysis by age also shows that participation among those aged under 25 has risen from 57.9% to 64.5%, while participation amongst those older than this has fallen slightly.

Contrary to other forms of activity the proportion walking for transport had declined between 2008 and 2011. This was explained as being likely due to economic conditions with declining employment levels meaning that fewer having to travel to work. As economic conditions improved the proportion walking for transport has increased: from 41.0% in 2011 to 44.9% in 2015.

As with walking for transport, the numbers cycling for transport have also increased since 2013. Across the first six months of data collection, 12.6% have cycled for transport: a slight increase from 10.7% during the same period in 2013. This follows an increase in this form of activity between 2011 and 2013 – following a number of years of declining activity – and corresponds with the increased levels of cycling generally for physical activity. As identified in previous waves of this study, this form of activity is heavily male-dominated, with males accounting for 71% of those that have cycled for transport within the previous seven days.



In order to examine activity levels across a variety of contexts a classification of activity levels is utilised. This categorisation is based around participation in sport and recreational walking and defines individuals as being highly active, fairly active, just active or sedentary based on their combined level of activity across these forms of exercise. Those who are highly active are considered to be meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines.

**Figure 8: Activity classification (%)**



The trend in previous years of this study was an increase in the proportion that is highly active and a decline in the proportion that is sedentary. Between the 2007 and 2013 studies the proportion that was highly active rose from 23.9% to 31.3%, and the proportion that is sedentary declined from 18.2% to 12.6%. At this midway point through this wave of the ISM the proportions are broadly the same as in 2013 with 33.4% highly active and 10.8% sedentary.

As was the case in previous waves of this study, females are more likely to be highly active than males. Overall, 33.9% of females meet the criteria to be classified as highly active, compared with 33.0% of males.



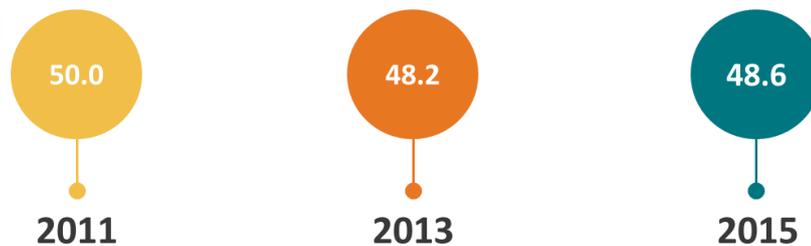
## Social Participation in Sport

In addition to measuring physical activity in sport, the ISM also measures social participation in three forms – volunteering, club membership and attendance at events. The first six months of data collection shows only minor changes in these forms of activity when compared with the same period in 2013. The change in levels of volunteering is most noteworthy (declining from 14.1% to 12.7%), with smaller changes for both club membership (slightly higher at 36.3%, compared with 35.3% in 2013) and attendance at events (21.8%, compared to 22.3% in 2013).

**Figure 6: Social participation in sport (%)**



### Any form of social participation in sport



Despite these changes in various forms of social participation, the overall levels of social participation are 48.6%. The 2013 study estimated that the higher bound estimate of the value of time invested by individuals into volunteering for sport was over €1.3 billion per year, highlighting the importance of these roles not just in terms of supporting sport but also in maintaining the social fabric in Irish communities.

