



Active Lives Adult Survey November 2018/19 Report

Published April 2020

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Key information

This report presents data from the Active Lives Adult Survey for the period mid-November 2018 to mid-November 2019. Data is presented for adults aged 16+ in England.

Release dates

This release: 23 April 2020
Next release: 22 October 2020

Find out more

For more information on the data presented in this report, please visit the [Active Lives section](#) of our website.

Welcome



This Active Lives Adult Survey is an unusual release. Covering the 12 months from November 2018 to November 2019, this report provides a picture of physical activity behaviours of adults in England prior to the current coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and the subsequent social distancing guidelines.

We know this is causing significant disruption to our lives, and our engagement in sport and physical activity. The impact of that disruption will be reflected in our next report, due to be published in October 2020.

In this report, we reveal what the picture was looking like up to November 2019 – and it shows there was an increase of just over 400,000 regularly active adults in England, taking us to a record high of 28.6 million taking part in at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a week. During this period, there was also a drop in the number of inactive adults of 159,500.

The results also show the continued growth we were seeing in the numbers of regularly active adults with a disability or long-term health condition, a further reduction in the gender gap, and the strong growth in participation for people aged 55+.

However, although this hasn't changed in the last 12 months, it remains the case that activity levels amongst adults from less affluent families are still stubbornly low, and activity levels differ significantly when comparing adults from different ethnic backgrounds.

Finally, this report provides the latest picture of volunteering and the continued positive association between engaging in sport and physical activity and mental wellbeing, individual and community development. It also, for the first time, looks at loneliness and its relationship to how active we are.

Lisa O'Keefe Insight Director

Levels of activity

Definition

This chapter presents information on three levels of activity:

- **Active** (at least 150 minutes a week)
- **Fairly active** (an average of 30-149 minutes a week)
- **Inactive** (less than 30 minutes a week).

What do we mean by physical activity?



At least moderate intensity *

Bouts of **10 minutes** or more that add up to one of the three levels of activity

* Vigorous intensity counts as double

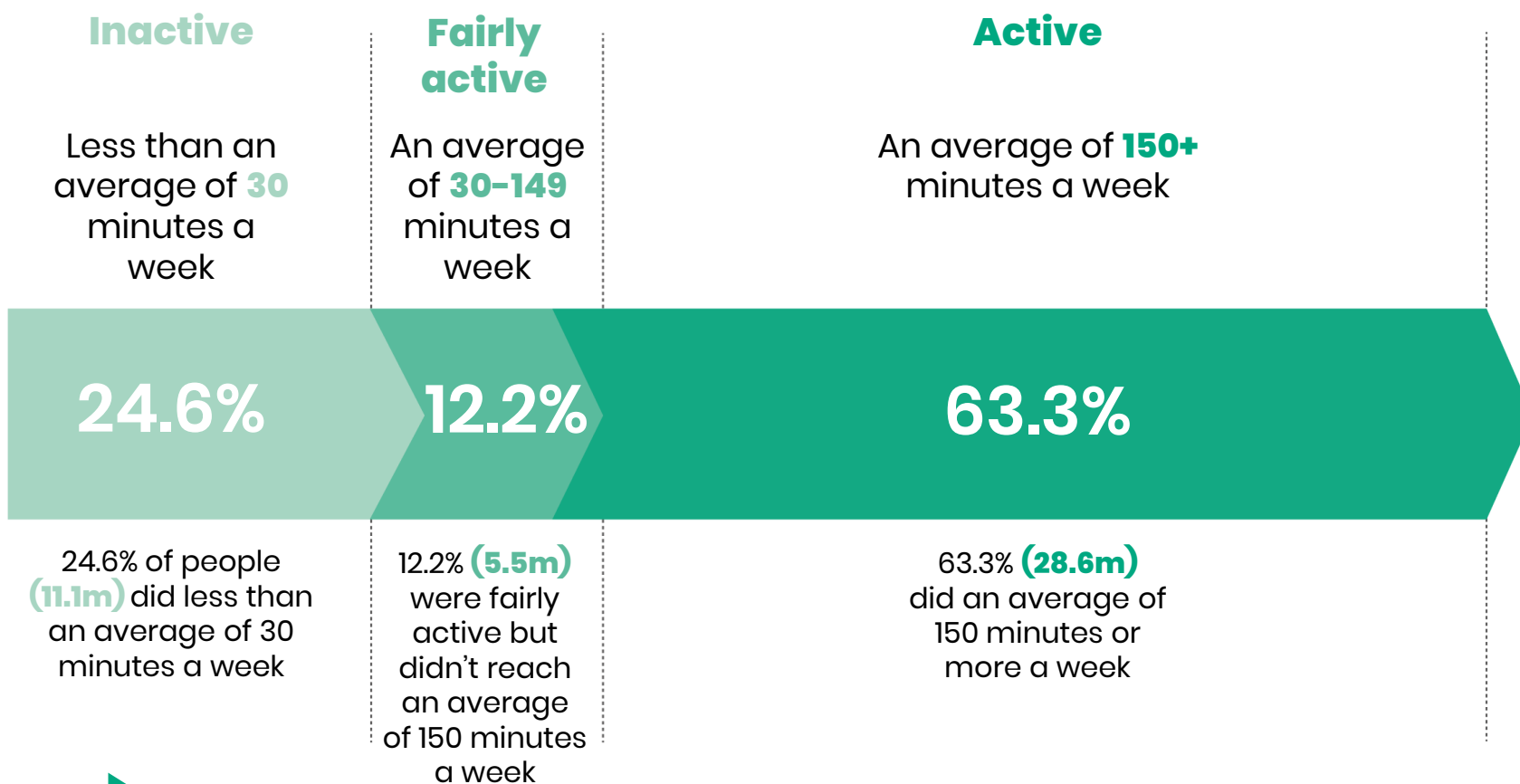
Note: We count most sport and physical activity, but exclude gardening. However, Public Health England does include gardening in its local level physical activity data. You can view the PHE data [here](#).

Levels of activity



Headlines

Our data shows that between mid-November 2018 and mid-November 2019, just over six in 10 adults (28.6m) achieved 150+ minutes of activity a week.



[Link to data tables](#)



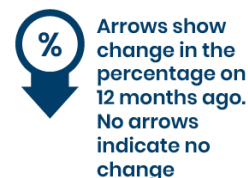
Levels of activity

Summary of change

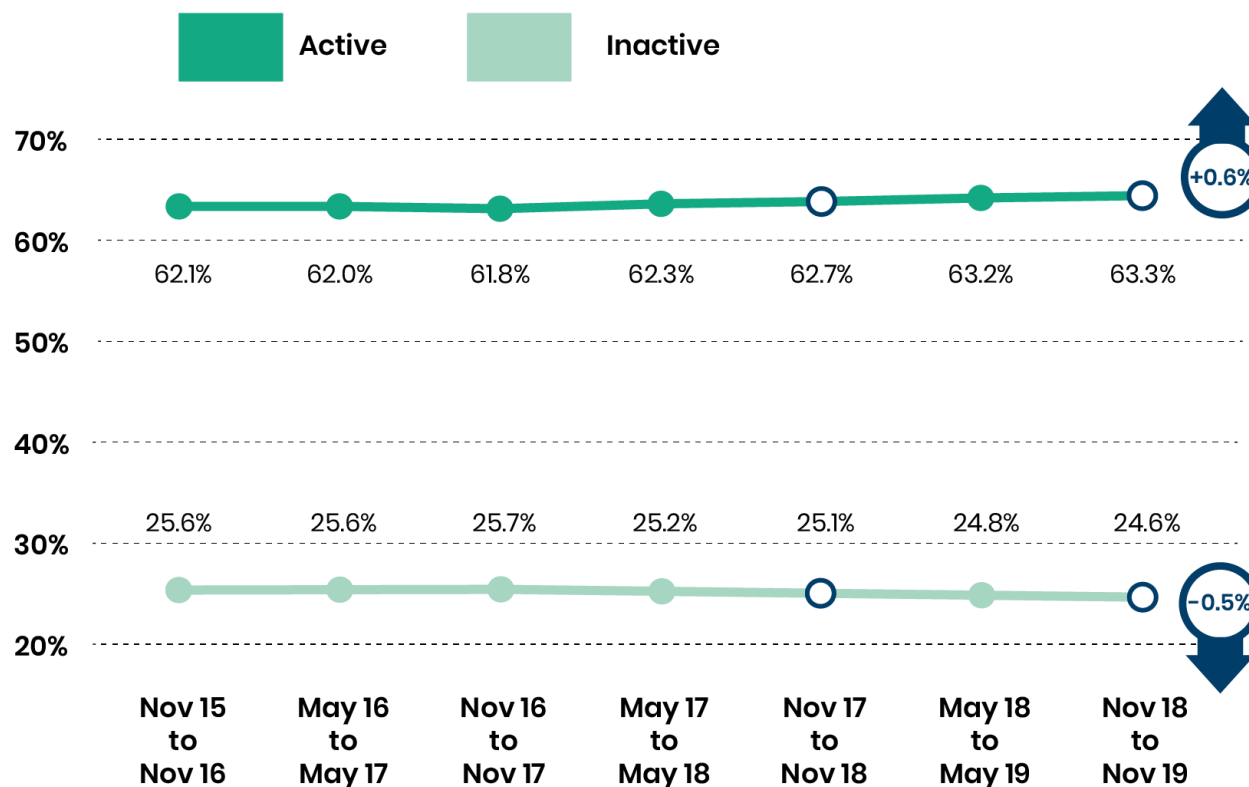
Over the past 12 months, there's been an increase of 404,600 (+0.6%) active adults in England – up from 28.2m (62.7%) to 28.6m (63.3%).

Similarly, there are now 159,500 fewer (-0.5%) inactive adults.

These improved results reflect increased activity levels amongst women, older adults and those with a disability or long-term health condition.



All adults (aged 16+)



Levels of activity

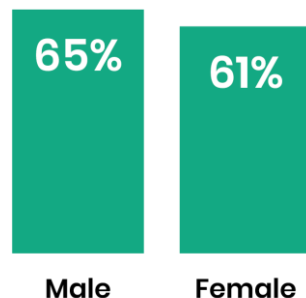


Summary of demographic differences

Our data shows there are significant inequalities:

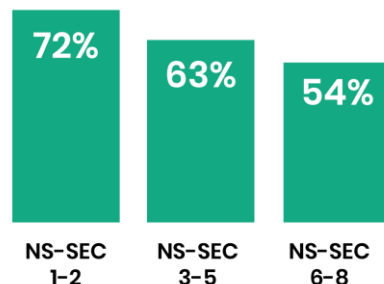
1 Gender

Men (65% or 14.4m) are more likely to be active than women (61% or 14.2m).



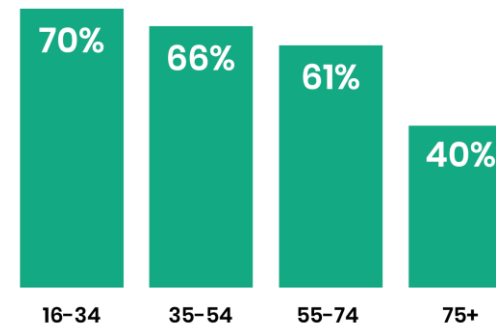
2 Socio-economic groups

Those in routine/semi-routine jobs and those who are long-term unemployed or have never worked (NS-SEC 6-8) are the least likely to be active (54%) and most likely to be inactive (33%).



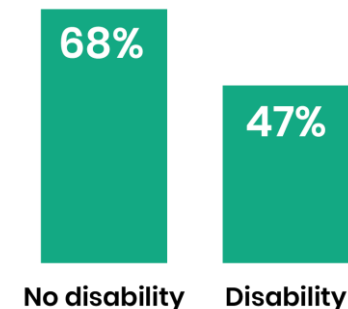
3 Age

Activity levels generally decrease with age, with the sharpest decrease coming at age 75+ (to 40%).



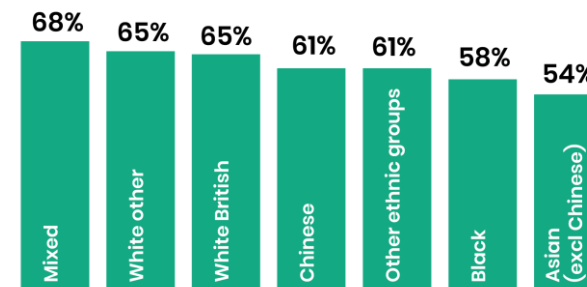
4 Disability and long-term health conditions

Activity is less common for disabled people or those with a long-term health condition* (47%) than those without (68%).



5 Ethnicity

There are differences observed in activity levels based on ethnic background.



Levels of activity

Gender



We've seen growth in activity levels for both men and women since the start of our strategy period (November 2015 to November 2016).

Compared to 12 months ago:

- More women are active (+0.7%, up over 210,000)
- Male participation is unchanged.

As such, the gender gap has reduced to 210,900 (3.9%) – down 145,200 (0.7%) since the start of the strategy period.

Current figures stand at:

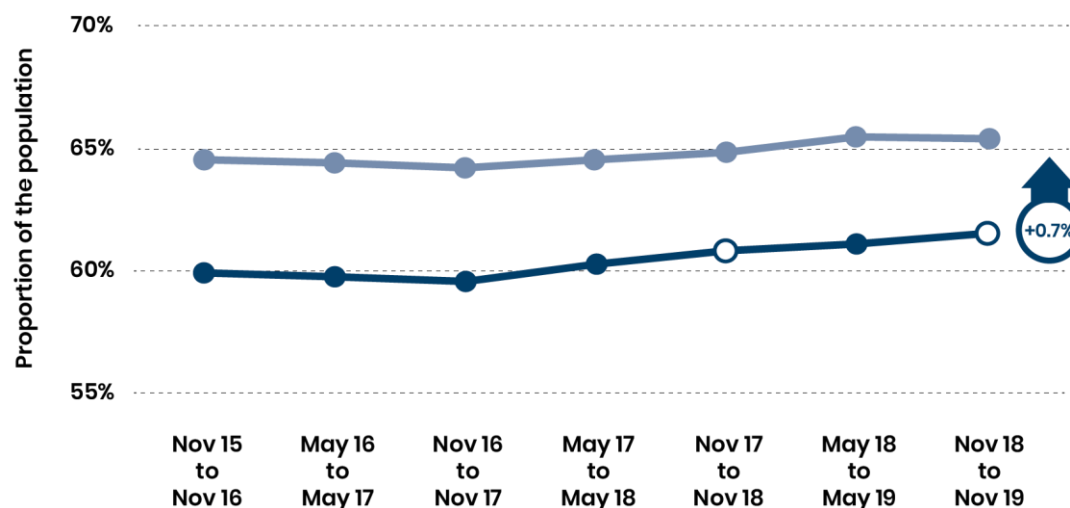
Active

- Men: 65% / 14.4m
- Women: 61% / 14.2m

Inactive

- Men 24% / 5.2m
- Women: 25% / 5.9m

Active



%
Arrows show change in the percentage on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

Levels of activity

Socio-economic groups



Activity levels fall as we move from managerial, administrative and professional occupations (NS-SEC 1-2) to routine/semi-routine jobs and those who are long-term unemployed or have never worked (NS-SEC 6-8).

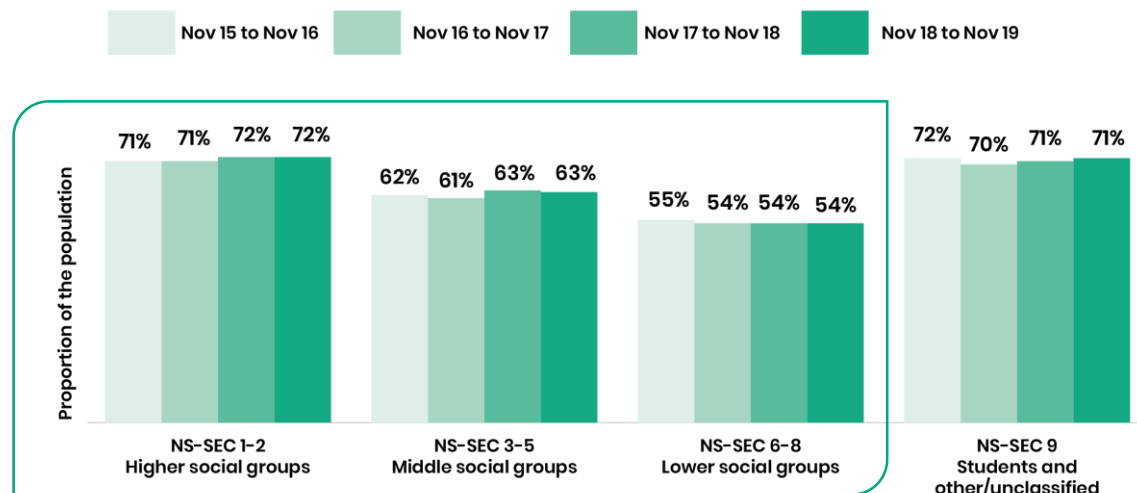
Since November 2015-16 we've seen:

- A gradual increase in those who are active from NS-SEC 1-2 – up 0.9% between Nov 15-Nov 16 and Nov 18-Nov 19
- No change in activity levels for those in NS-SEC 6-8.

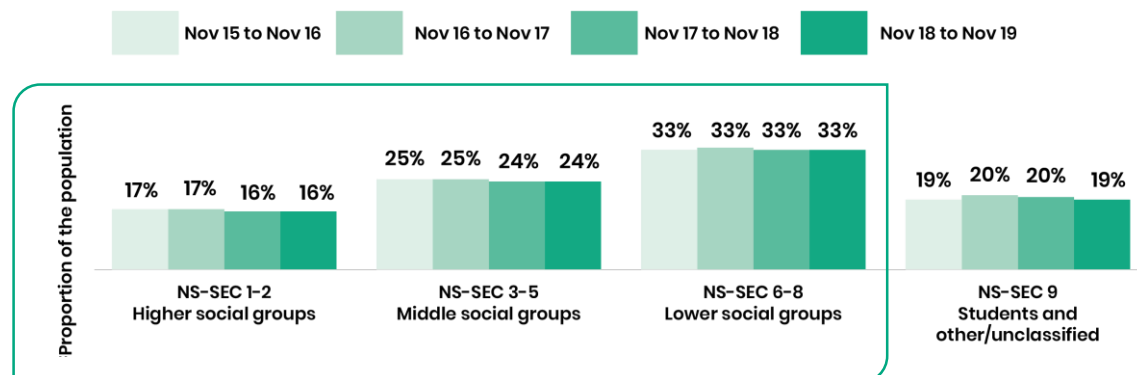
As a result, the gap remains the same, with 18% fewer people from lower social groups being active compared to higher social groups.

Note: NS-SEC classifications refer to ages 16-74 only. Full details of what the NS-SEC categories mean can be found on the [definitions](#) page.

Active



Inactive



Levels of activity

Age

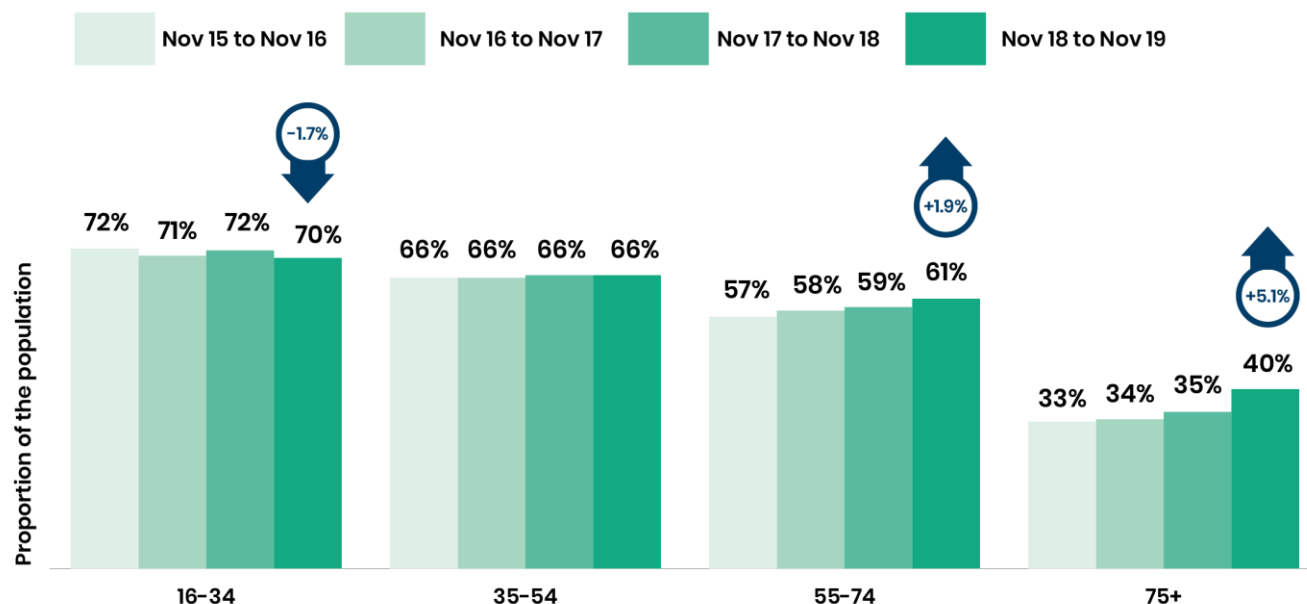


 Arrows show change in the percentage on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

There's strong growth in activity levels amongst the 55-74 and 75+ age groups – as seen when you compare these figures with 12 months ago. Amongst the 75+ age group, we've seen an increase of 250,100 (5.1%) in those who are active compared to this time last year.

Activity levels are unchanged for the 35-54 age group. However, the 16-34 age group has seen a decline with those who are active falling by 1.7%, or over 260,000 people, compared to 12 months ago.

Active



Levels of activity

Disability and long-term health conditions



Arrows show change in the percentage on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

Activity levels decrease sharply the more impairments an individual has – and just 39% of those with three or more impairments are active.

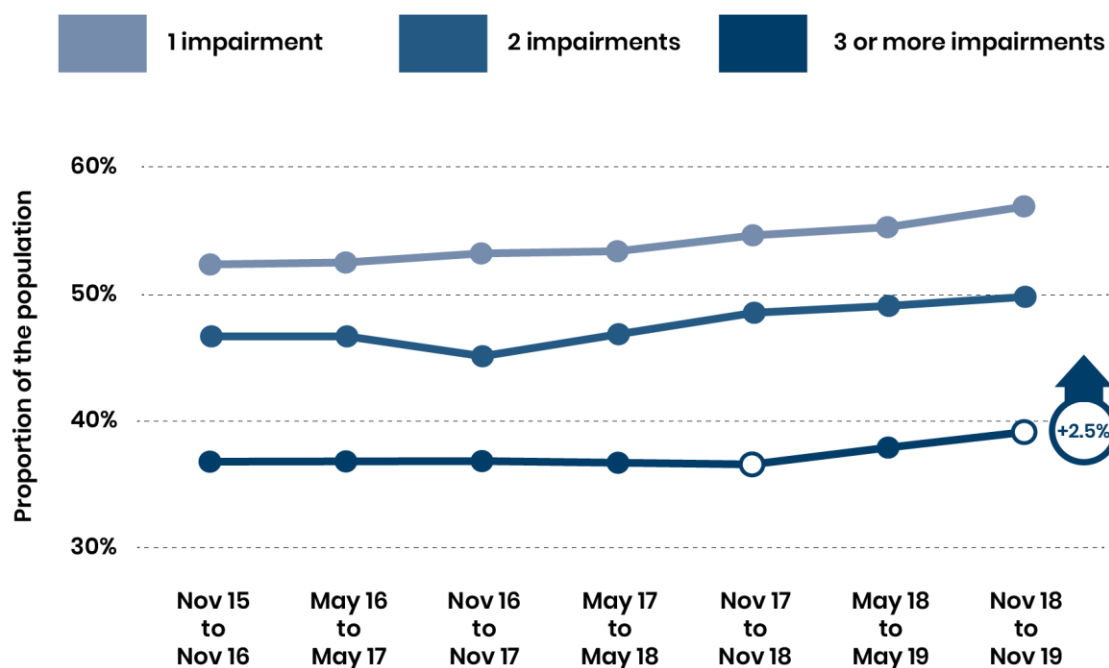
Amongst adults with a disability or long-term health condition, there's been a steady increase in activity levels amongst those with one or two impairments over the last two years.

The latest results also include a 2.5% increase in the proportion of people with three or more impairments who are active compared with 12 months ago.

Current figures for 'active' stand at:

- Disability: 47%
- No Disability: 68%
- 1 impairment: 57%
- 2 impairments: 50%
- 3+ impairments: 39%

Active



Levels of activity

Ethnicity



%
Arrows show change in the percentage on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

We continue to see persistent difference in activity levels between adults from different ethnic backgrounds.

Current figures for 'active' stand at:

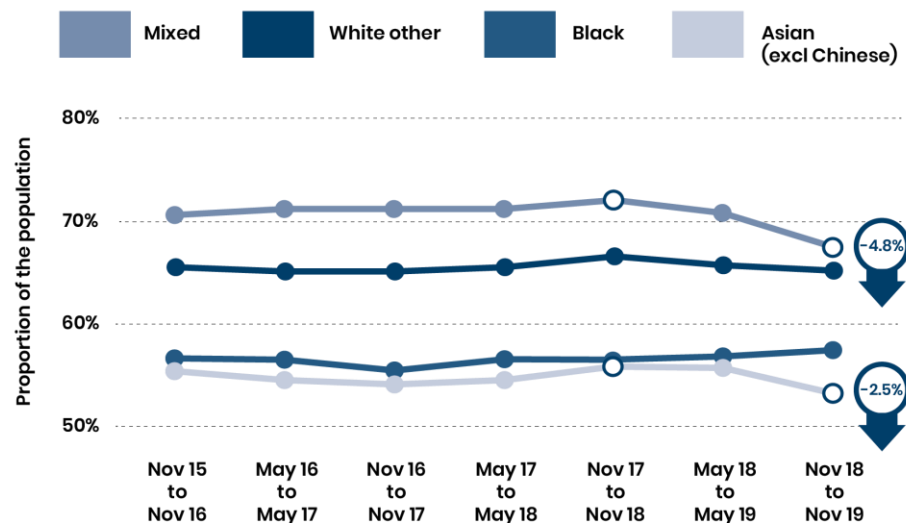
- Mixed: 68%
- White Other: 65%
- White British: 65%
- Chinese: 61%
- Other ethnic group: 61%
- Black: 58%
- Asian (excl Chinese): 54%

Activity levels for White British adults are showing a steady increase, but for most ethnic backgrounds there's an underlying flat trend.

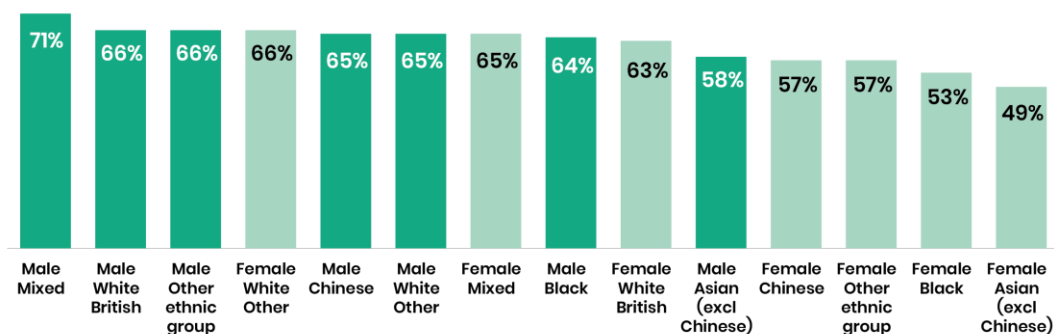
- Asian (excluding Chinese) adults have an underlying flat trend despite a drop compared to 12 months ago (-2.5%)
- Adults from Mixed ethnic backgrounds have seen a larger drop compared to 12 months ago (-4.8%) which indicates a potential reduction in the proportion who are active.

Other factors intersect with ethnic background to influence activity. For example, when ethnicity and gender are considered, Black and Asian (excluding Chinese) women are the least active.

Active amongst selected ethnic groups



Active



[Link to data tables](#)

Types of activity

Definition

This chapter presents data broken down by activity group and looks at those who have participated at least twice in the last 28 days.

Looking at participation at least twice in the last 28 days provides:

- an entry level view of participation overall
- a useful measure of engagement in different sports and physical activities
- an understanding of the contribution of activities to achieving 150+ minutes a week.



We measure sport and physical activity if it's done...



at least **twice in the last **28** days**

At least
moderate
intensity

Types of activity

Activity groups



Arrows show change over the last 12 months. No arrows indicate no change

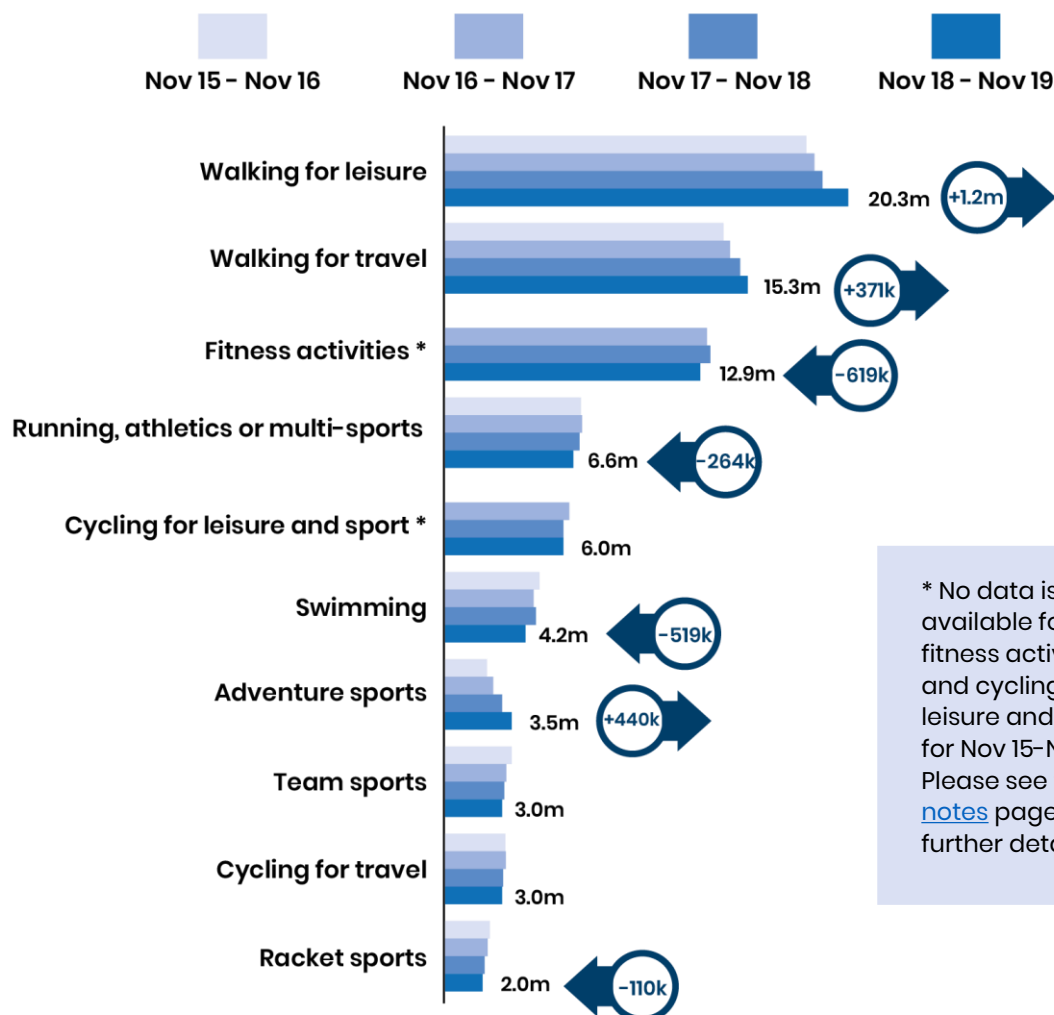
Adults achieving 150+ minutes of activity a week do so through a blend of activities

The overall growth in numbers continue to be driven by strong upward trends in walking and adventure sports (a category which includes hill and mountain walking, climbing and orienteering).

Additionally:

- Fitness activities have dropped by 619,100 (-1.5%) compared to 12 months ago.
- Running, athletics or multi-sports have dropped by 264,400 (-0.7%) compared to 12 months ago.
- Swimming activities have dropped by 518,800 (-1.2%) compared to 12 months ago.
- Racket sports have seen a drop compared to 12 months ago.

Taken part at least twice in the last 28 days (age 16+) for selected activity groups



* No data is available for fitness activities and cycling for leisure and sport for Nov 15-Nov 16. Please see the [notes](#) page for further details.

A volunteer makes all the difference. Volunteering benefits both the volunteer and the person receiving the support. Whether it's serving refreshments, coaching a player or assisting disabled people to take part, the sport and activity sector needs people to give their time.

Capturing volunteering at its broadest level, we count a person as having volunteered if:



They have taken part in a volunteering role to support sport/physical activity

(A full list of roles can be found in our definitions at the end of this report on [page 31](#)).



A person has volunteered at least twice in the last 12 months



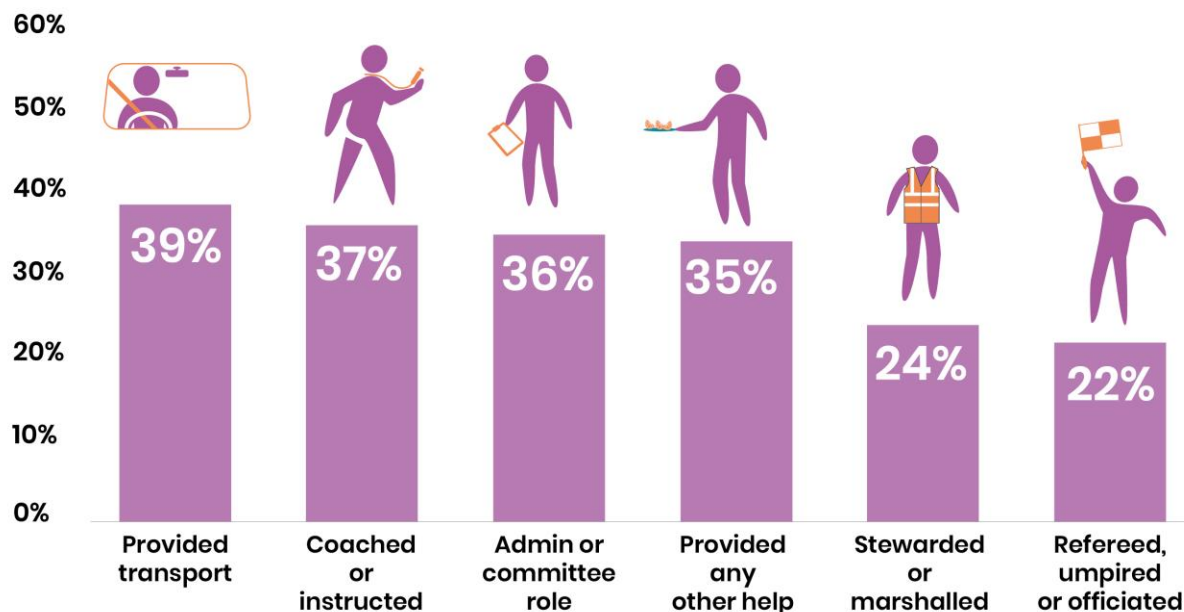
Volunteering



Headlines

Our data shows that 13% of adults (6.0m) are giving their time to support sport and physical activity. Many undertake more than one role, with providing transport and coaching being the most common.

Roles undertaken among adults (aged 16+) who volunteered at least twice in the last year (November 18 to November 19)



13.4%

6.0m adults volunteered

At least twice in the last year to support sport and physical activity

Volunteering



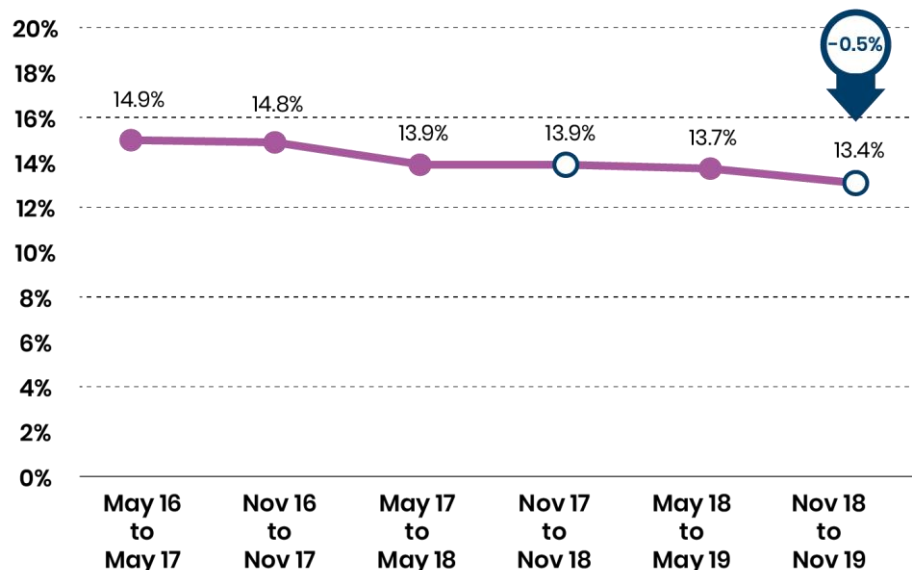
Summary of change

Overall

Measured through this broad definition of volunteering, levels are gradually declining, with a drop of 0.5% (197,700) adults doing so compared to 12 months ago and 1.6% (629,500) fewer than in May 16-17.

Decreases have been driven by drops for men and those aged 16-24.

Volunteering levels

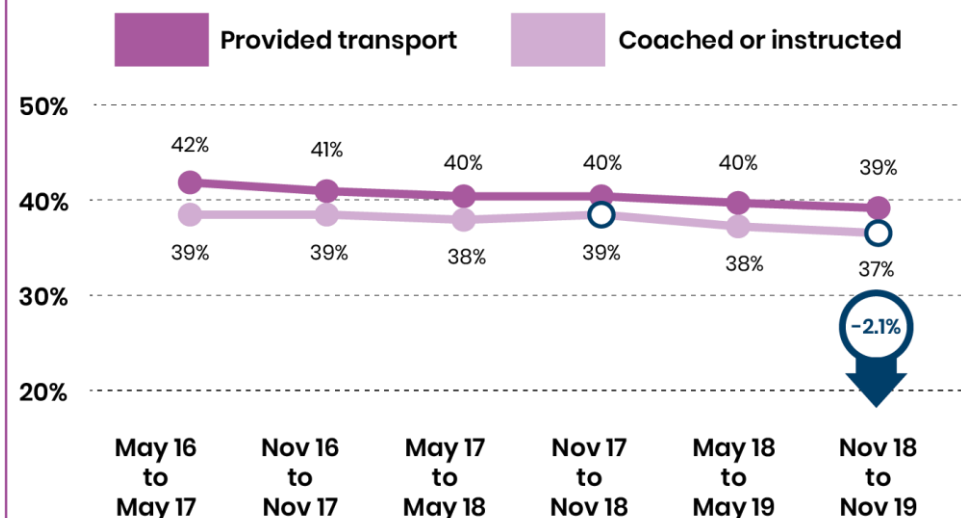


By volunteer role

We continue to see a steady drop in the proportion of volunteers who provide transport, down 2.4% (407,400) since May 16-17.

Coaching has seen a drop of 2.0% (200,000) compared to 12 months ago, having been stable to that point.

Volunteering role



Volunteering



Volunteers

Population

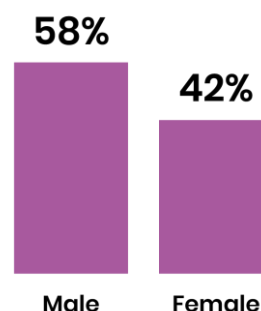


Summary of demographic profile

Our data shows there are significant inequalities:

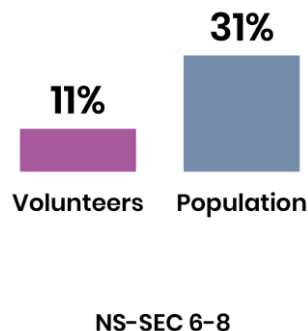
1 Gender

Men are more likely to volunteer to support sport and physical activity than women, comprising 58% of all volunteers.



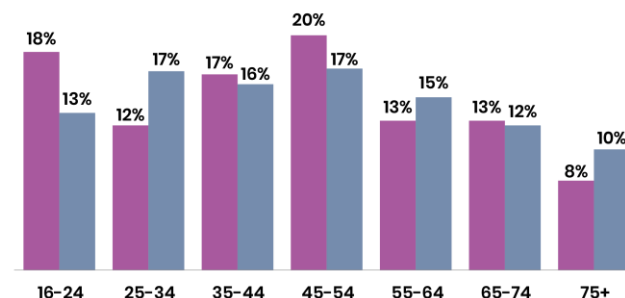
2 Socio-economic groups

People from lower socio-economic backgrounds (NS-SEC 6-8) are under-represented in volunteering, comprising just 11% of all sport volunteers but 31% of the adult population.



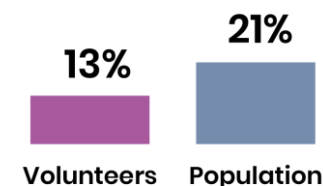
3 Age

Volunteering is more popular with the 16-24 and 45-54 age groups, and under-represented amongst the 25-34, 55-64 and 75+ age groups.



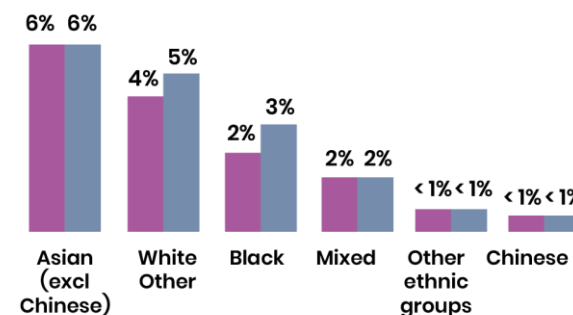
4 Disability and long-term health conditions

Disabled people or those with a long-term health condition* account for 13% of volunteers, despite accounting for 21% of the population as a whole.



5 Ethnicity

The volunteer profile across ethnic groups is generally reflective of the wider population with the exception of White Other and Black adults, who are slightly under-represented.



[Link to data tables](#)

* See our [definitions](#) page for the full definition of each demographic group.

Volunteering

Gender



Arrows show change in the percentage on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

There's been a decline in the number of men and women who volunteer to support sport and physical activity.

The scale of drop is greater in men, although they're still more likely to volunteer than women.

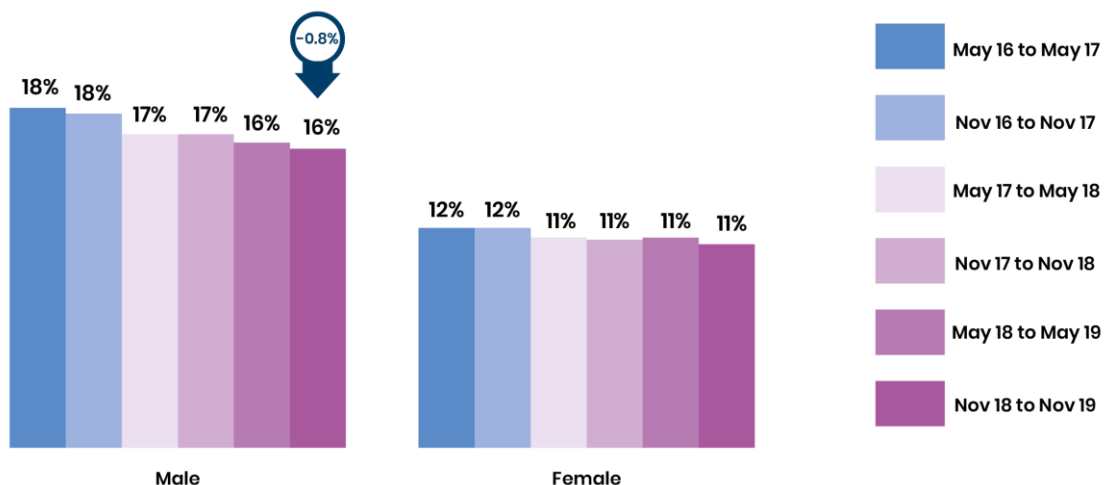
Overall, since May 16–May 17, there are:

- 2.2% or 481,400 fewer men volunteering
- 0.9% or 163,800 fewer women volunteering.

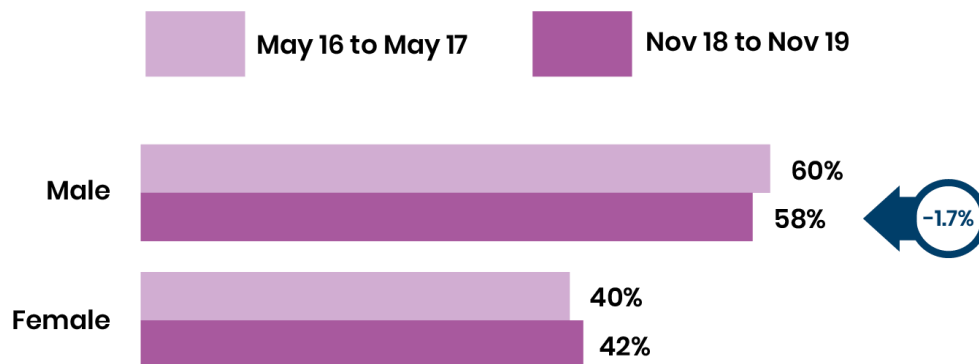
The proportion of volunteers who are men has decreased slightly since May 16–17 (–1.7%).

There remains clear under representation of women, specifically in refereeing or umpiring (28%), coaching or instructing (33%) and providing transport (39%).

Volunteering levels



Profile of volunteers



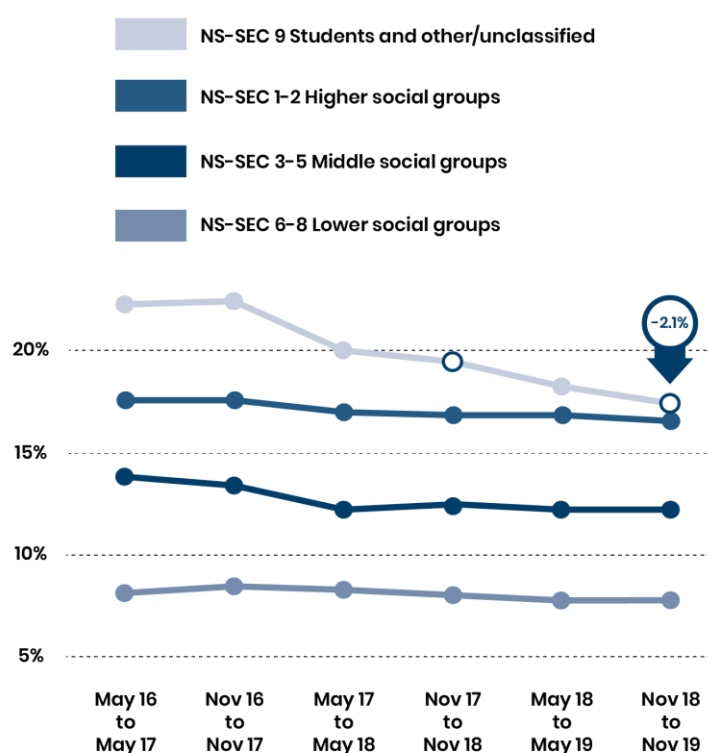
Volunteering

Socio-economic groups



The reduction in volunteering has come largely amongst students and other (NS-SEC 9) with a drop of 2.1% (74,600) compared to 12 months ago.

Volunteering levels



Current figures stand at:

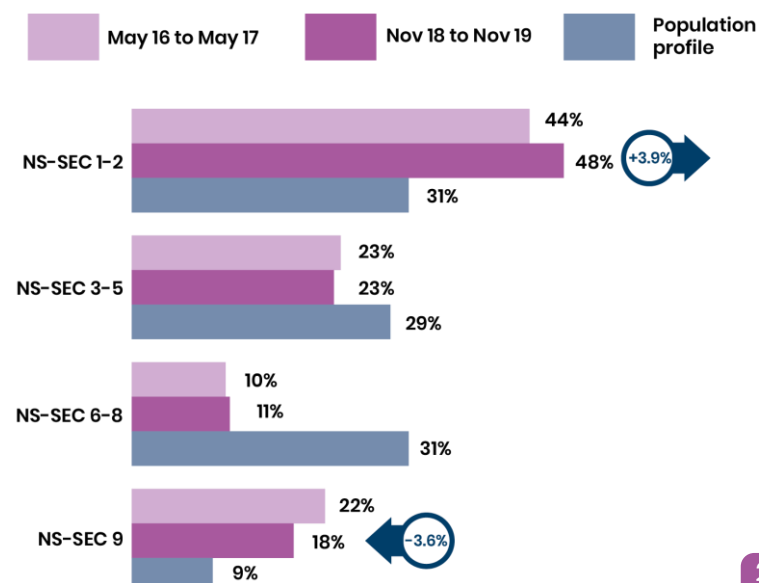
- NS-SEC 1-2: **16%**
- NS-SEC 3-5: **12%**
- NS-SEC 6-8: **8%**
- NS-SEC 9: **17%**

Volunteering is significantly skewed toward those in managerial and professional occupations (NS-SEC 1-2), and this has extended over time with the share by this group increasing by 3.9% compared to May 16-17.

People from lower socio-economic backgrounds (NS-SEC 6-8) remain under-represented in volunteering – comprising just 11% of all sport volunteers but 31% of the adult population.

Students and other (NS-SEC 9) are also over-represented amongst volunteers, however, their share has fallen slightly and is down by 3.6% over this time period.

Profile of volunteers



Volunteering

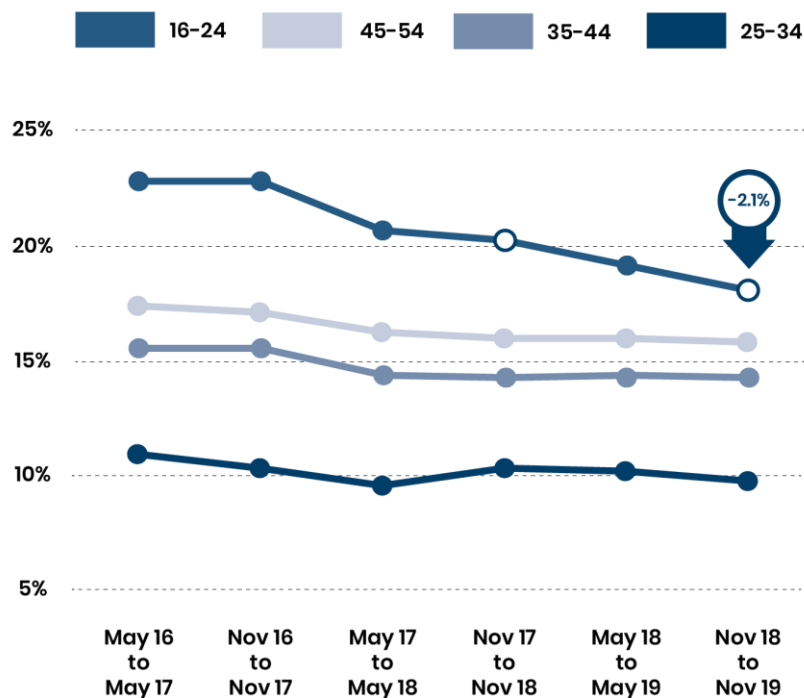
Age



All age groups from 16-54 have seen a small drop in volunteering since May 16-17. However, it's amongst the 16-24 age group that we're seeing a continued decline – down 2.1% (139,300) compared to 12 months ago.

Whilst the 16-24 age group has reduced as a proportion of all volunteers, the 55-64, 65-74 and 75+ age groups have seen an increase. As a result there's been an improvement in the representativeness of these age groups.

Volunteering levels for selected age groups

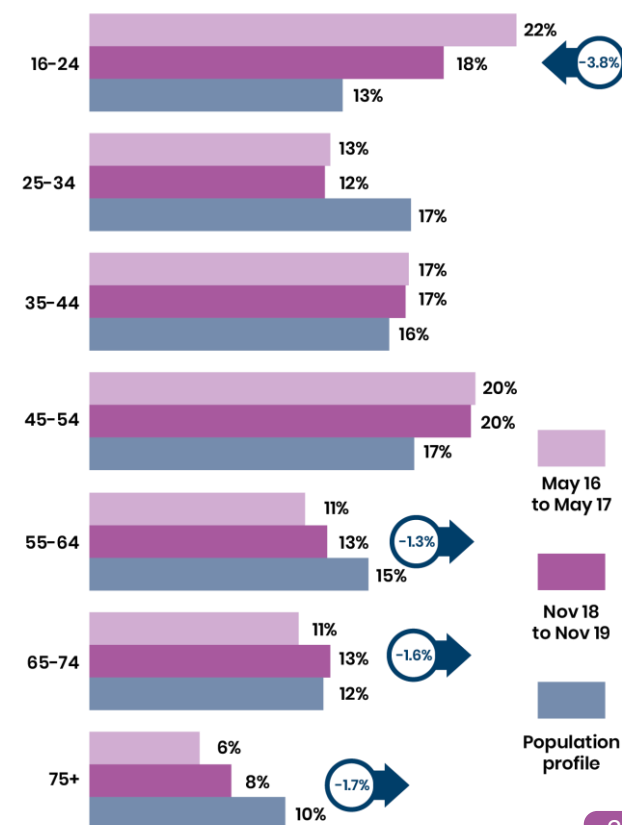


Arrows show change in the percentage on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

Current figures stand at:

- Age 16-24: **18%**
- Age 25-34: **10%**
- Age 35-44: **14%**
- Age 45-54: **16%**

Profile of volunteers



Volunteering

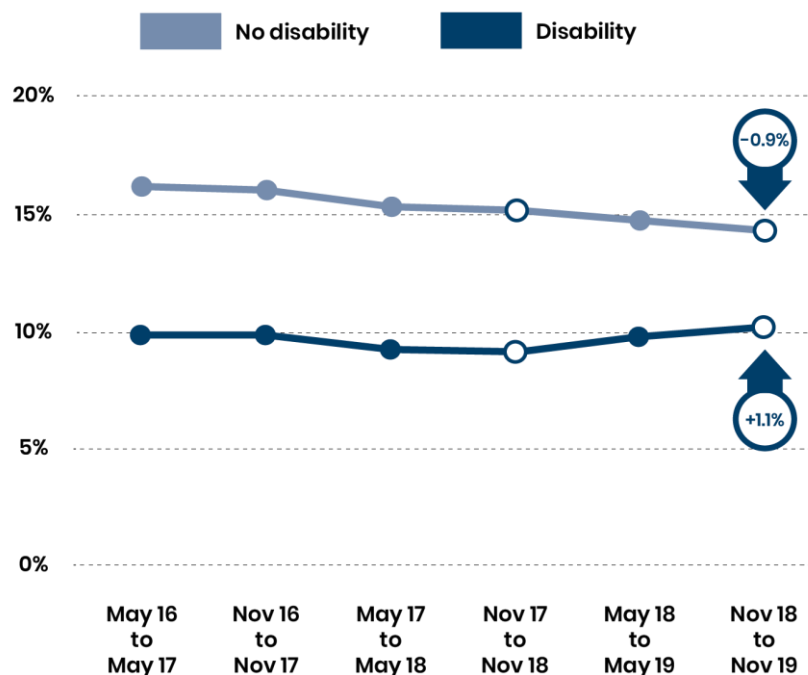
Disability and long-term health conditions



Whilst there's been an increase in the proportion of people with a disability or long-term health condition volunteering compared to 12 months ago (up 1.1% or 107,00 people), there remains an underlying flat trend.

Adults with a disability or long-term health condition remain under-represented – making up just 13% of volunteers compared to a 21% population share. This inequality is even more stark when we consider the number of impairments individuals have. Amongst volunteers with a disability or long-term health condition, just 36% have three or more impairments (compared to 52% of the disabled population).

Volunteering levels

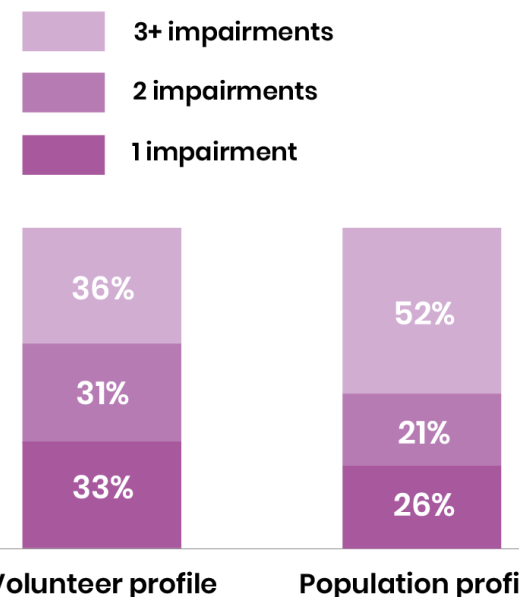


Arrows show change in the percentage on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

Current figures stand at:

- No disability: **14%**
- Disability: **10%**

Profile of volunteers with a disability or long-term health condition

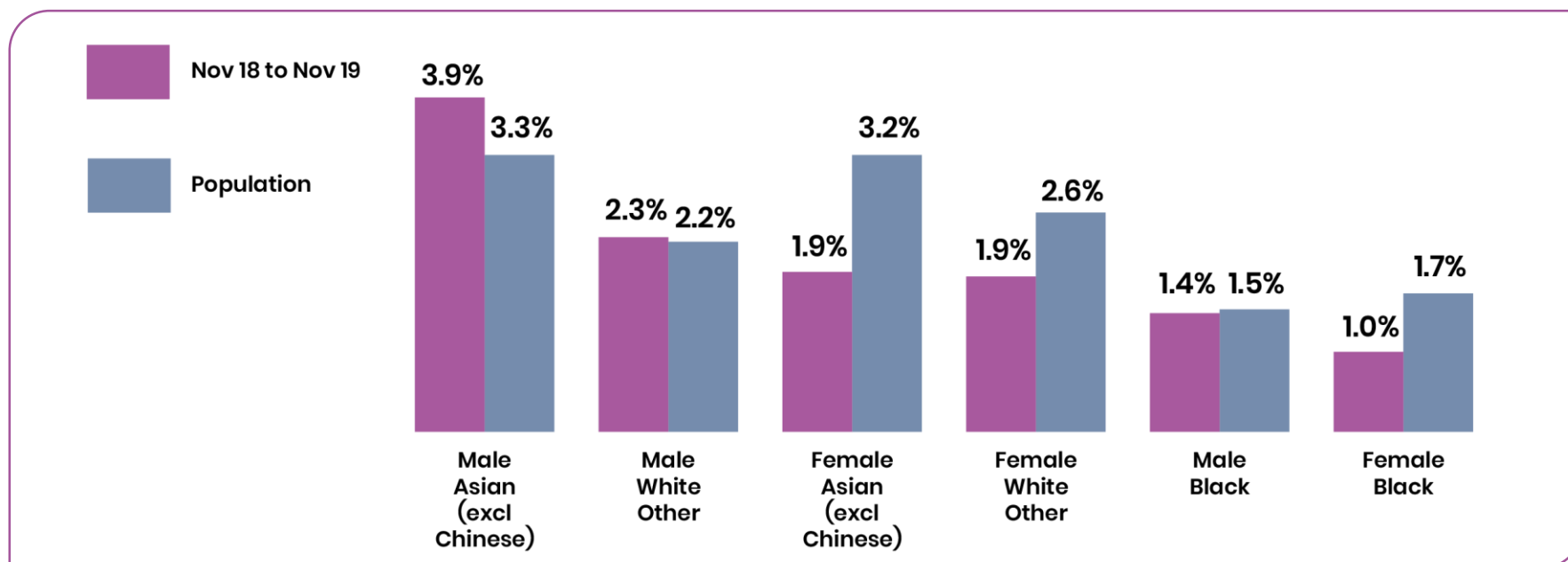


There's been no change in volunteering levels amongst most ethnic backgrounds.

The exception is adults from a White British background (who account for 85% of all volunteers), where there's been a drop.

However, we continue to observe inequalities within the following groups.

- Women from Asian (excluding Chinese) backgrounds are under-represented, accounting for 3.2% of the population but just 1.9% of volunteers.
- Women from Black and White Other backgrounds are also under-represented.



Mental wellbeing and individual & community development

Definition

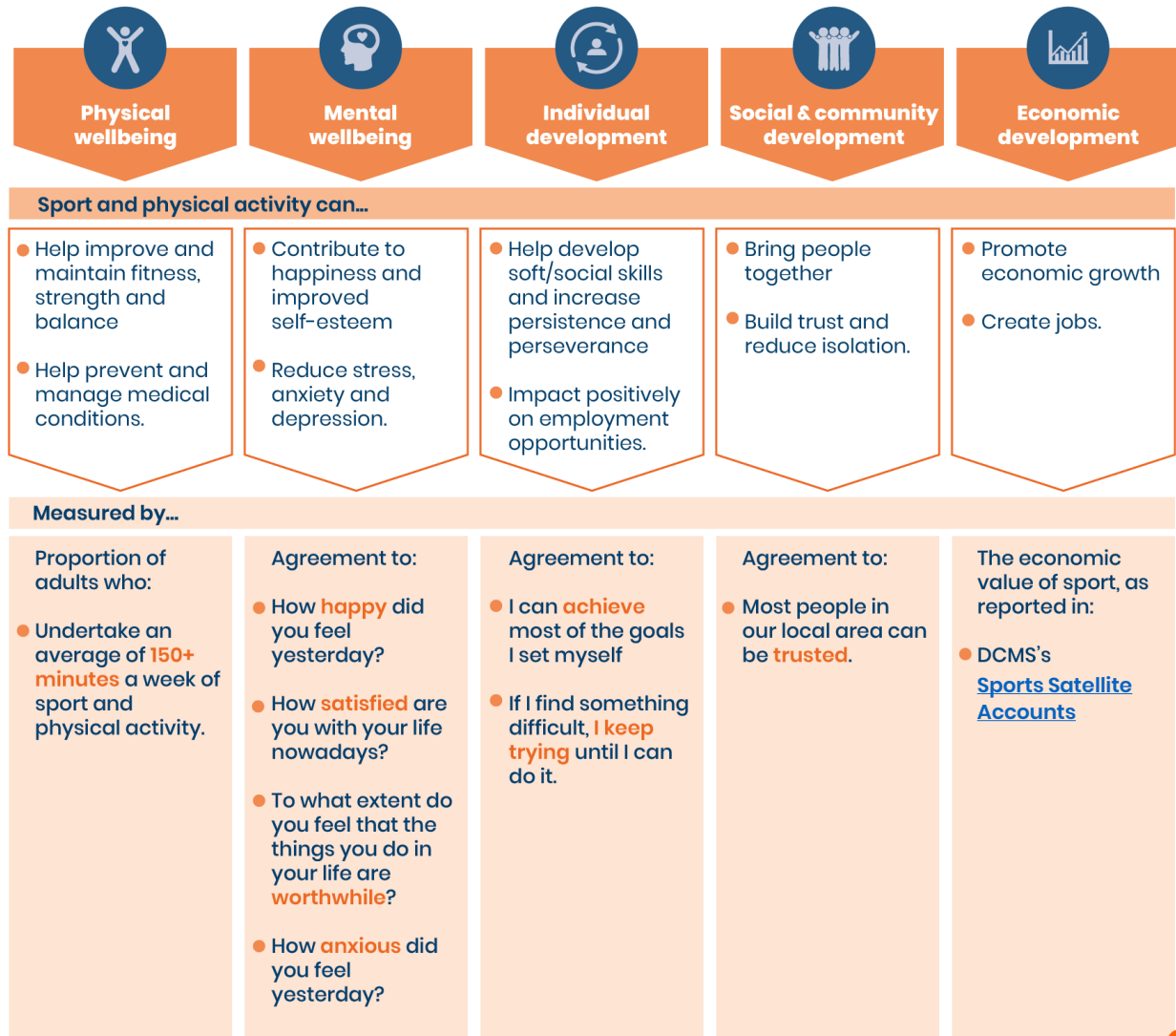


Sport and physical activity – and volunteering to support it – has the power to improve lives.

In addition to capturing the behaviour of adults when it comes to sport and physical activity, Active Lives also captures data designed to better understand impact against four of the five social outcomes identified within the government's sport and physical activity strategy – Sporting Future.

Chapter one of this report covered the first of those outcomes – physical wellbeing. This chapter will focus on mental wellbeing, individual development and social & community development.

For further details on the outcomes, see our evidence review.



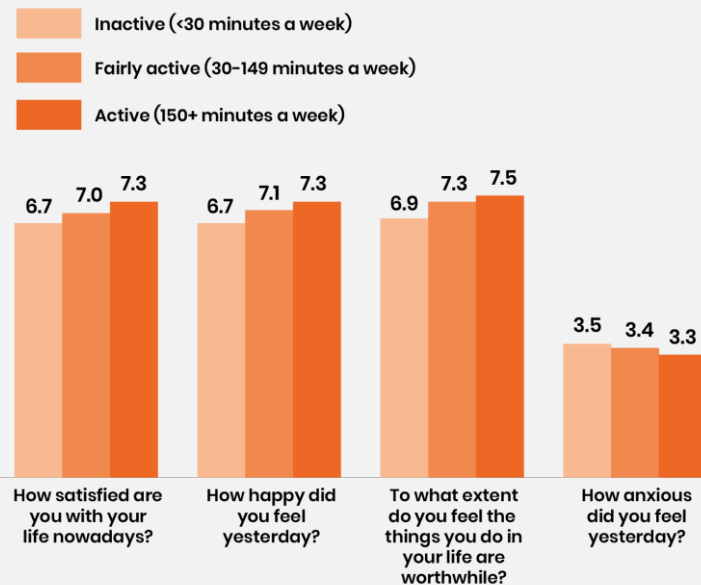
Mental wellbeing and individual & community development

Mental wellbeing



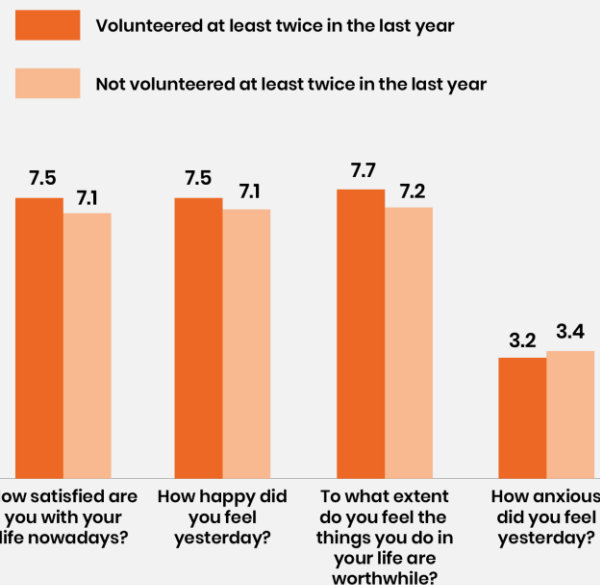
There's a positive association between activity levels and mental wellbeing – some activity is good, more is better

As activity levels continue to increase (see [page 6](#)), we're seeing more people getting the benefits with regards to mental wellbeing.



Adults who volunteer have higher mental wellbeing scores than those who don't

With volunteering levels falling (see [page 17](#)) fewer people are benefiting from this.

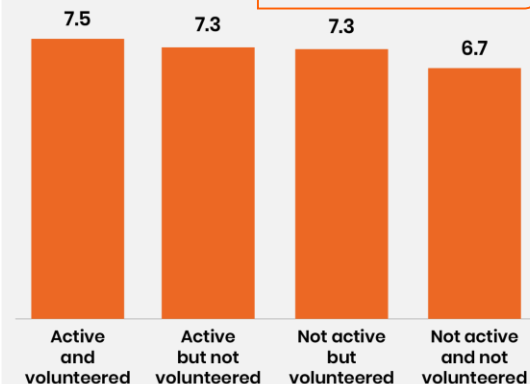


There's a compounding benefit of being both active and volunteering*

Those who are both active and volunteer have slightly higher mental wellbeing scores than those who just engage in one or the other.

How satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
Mean score out of 10

*11% of adults are active and volunteer whilst 22% do neither



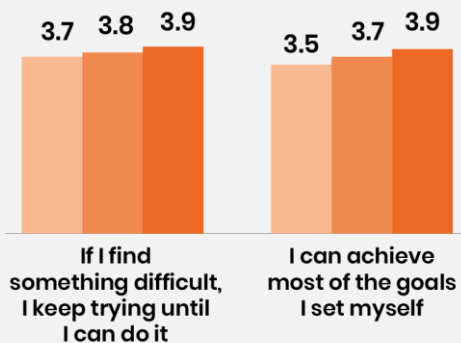
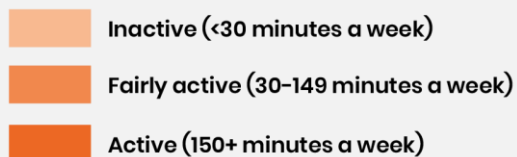
Mental wellbeing and individual & community development

Individual development



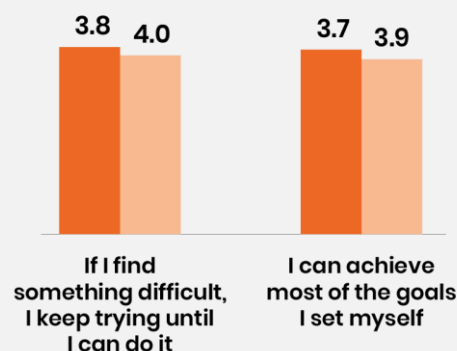
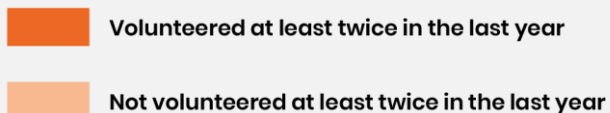
There's a positive association between activity levels and individual development

Increasing activity levels (see [page 6](#)), means more people are benefiting.



Adults who volunteer have higher individual development scores than those who don't

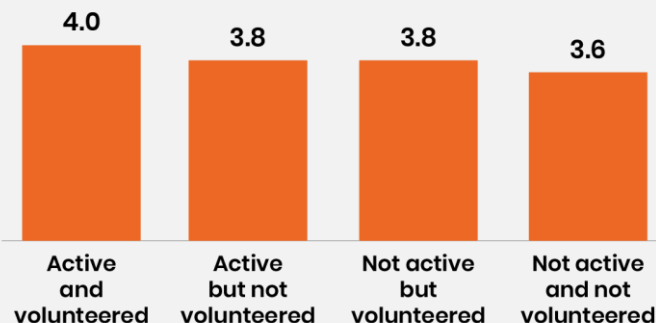
With volunteering levels falling (see [page 17](#)) fewer people are benefiting from this.



There's a compounding benefit of being both active and volunteering*

Those who are both active and volunteer are slightly more likely to feel they can achieve their goals and/or keep trying when things get difficult.

I can achieve most of the goals I set myself
Mean score out of 5



*11% of adults are active and volunteer whilst 22% do neither



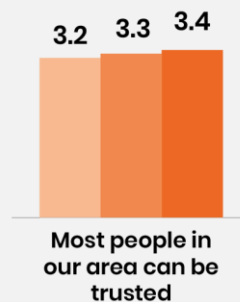
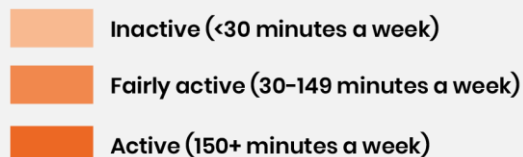
Mental wellbeing and individual & community development

Social and community development



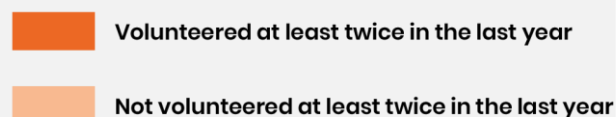
There's a positive association between activity levels and social and community development

Increasing activity levels (see [page 6](#)) means more people are benefiting.



Adults who volunteer have higher social and community development scores than those who don't

With volunteering levels falling (see [page 17](#)) fewer people are benefiting from this.



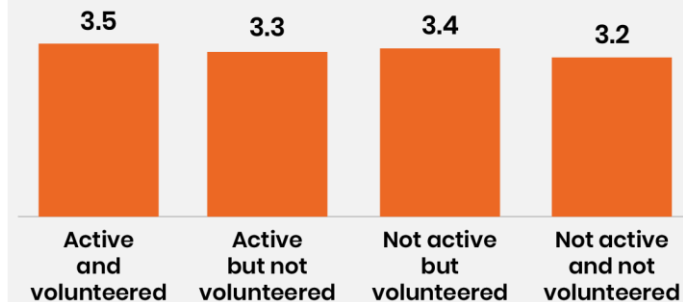
There's a compounding benefit of being both active and volunteering*

Those who are both active and volunteer are slightly more likely to feel they can trust other people.

Volunteering has a slightly greater impact than being active, although both are positive.

Most people in our area can be trusted
Mean score out of 5

*11% of adults are active and volunteer whilst 22% do neither



Loneliness

Definition



Tackling loneliness is a key and important government objective.

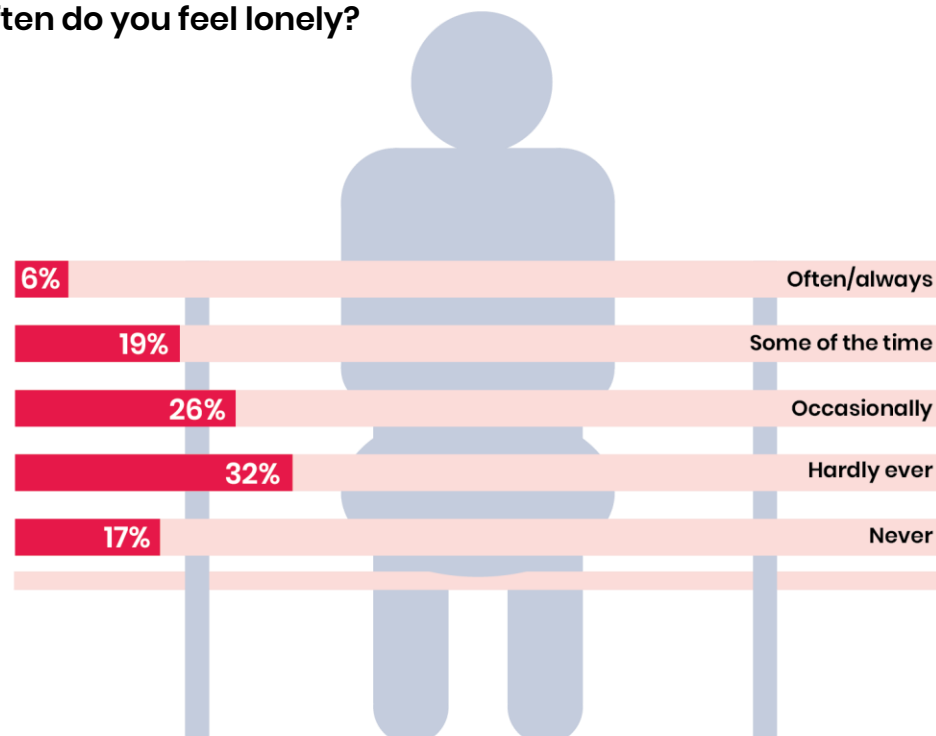
In October 2018, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport published 'A Connected Society', its first strategy for tackling loneliness in England.

This chapter sets out the role sport and physical activity – and volunteering to support it – has in this.

Supporting people to have meaningful social relationships is not just crucial to people's physical and mental health. It also affects their engagement in the workplace and wider community cohesion.

We've focused on those who are often/always lonely, as policy is centred around this group.

How often do you feel lonely?



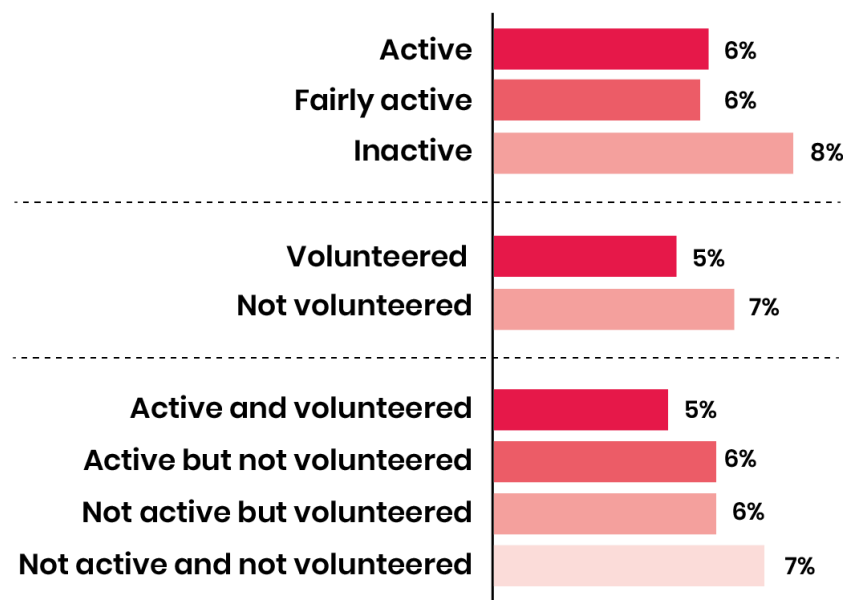
Loneliness



People who engage in sport and physical activity are less likely to feel lonely

- Those who are active or fairly active are less likely to feel lonely than those who are inactive
- Adults who volunteer are less likely to feel lonely than those who don't.

Often/always feel lonely

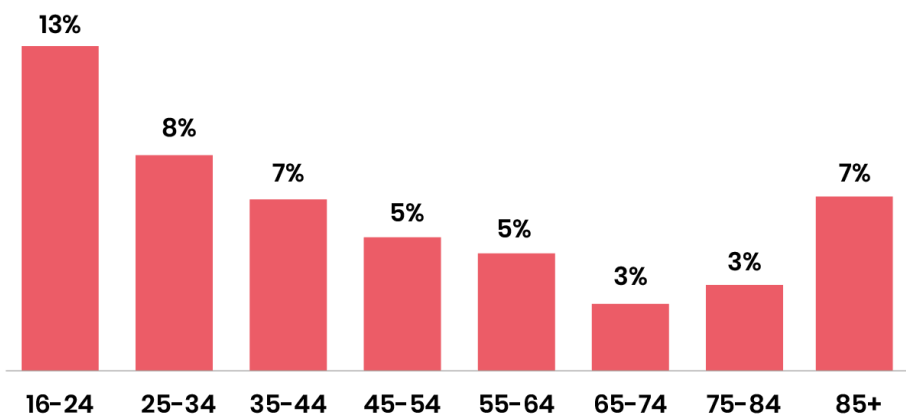


Loneliness is particularly prevalent amongst certain groups

These groups have the most to gain through engagement in sport and physical activity. Loneliness is highest for:

- The youngest and oldest age groups
- Women 7% (vs men 5%)
- Adults with a disability or long-term health condition (16%)
- Lower social groups (NS-SEC 6-8, 12%) and students/other (NS-SEC 9, 10%)
- Adults from Mixed (12%), Asian - excluding Chinese (9%), other (9%) and Black (8%) ethnic backgrounds.

Often/always feel lonely



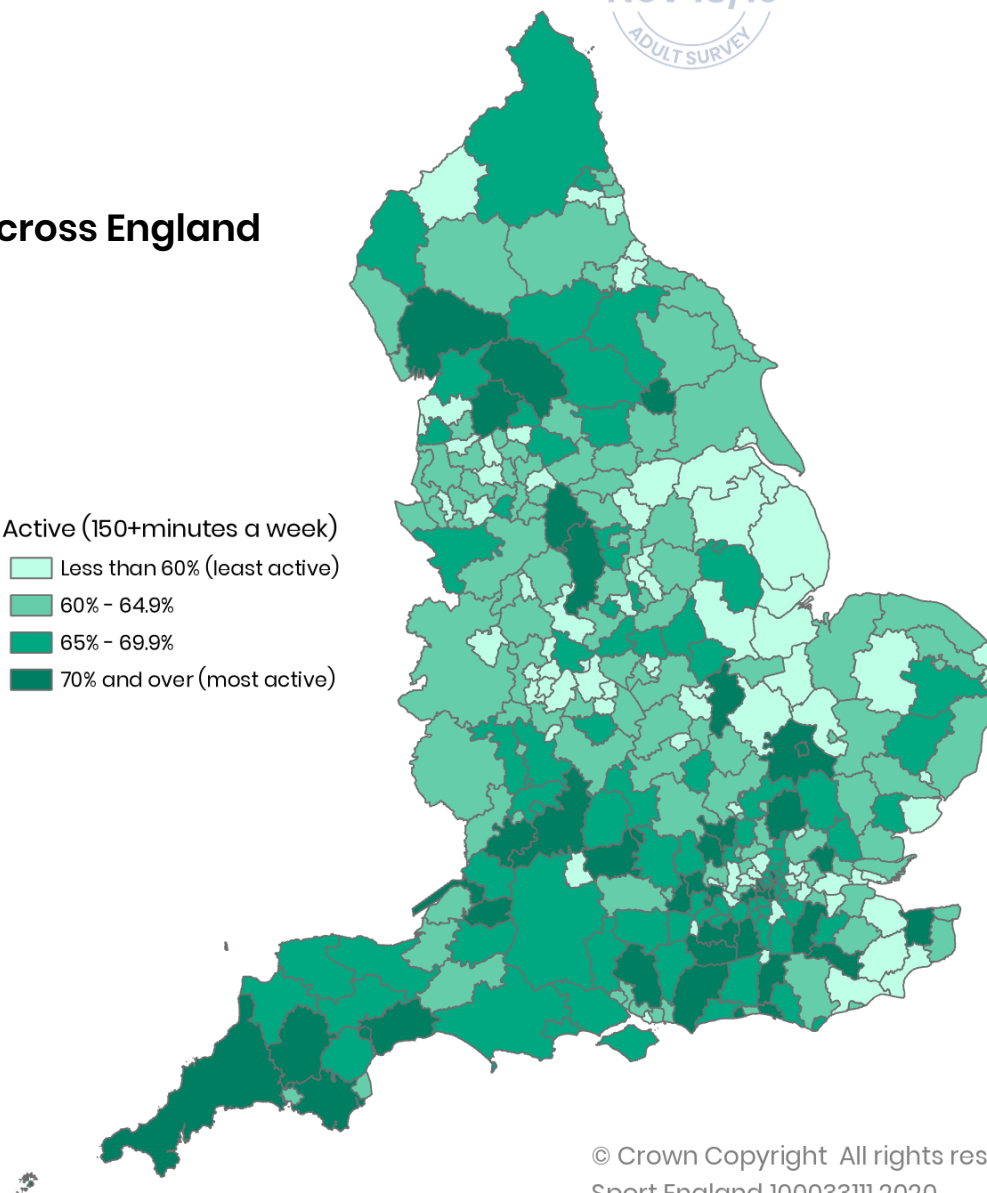
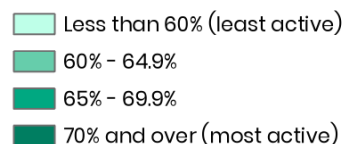
Local level data

Data for local areas (regions, Active Partnerships, local authorities) are available for the following measures:

- Levels of activity
- Volunteering at least twice in the last 12 months.

Activity across England

Active (150+minutes a week)



[Link to data tables](#)



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Sport England 100033111 2020

Definitions

Moderate activity is defined as activity where you raise your heart rate.

Vigorous activity is where you're out of breath or are sweating (you may not be able to say more than a few words without pausing for breath).

[Link to more information on measures and demographics](#)

NS-SEC groups are defined as:

- **Higher** (NS-SEC 1-2): Managerial, administrative and professional occupations (e.g. chief executive, doctor, actor, journalist).
- **Middle** (NS-SEC 3-5): Intermediate, lower supervisory and technical occupations; self employed and small employers (e.g. auxiliary nurse, secretary, plumber, gardener, train driver).
- **Lower** (NS-SEC 6-8): Semi-routine and routine occupations; long-term unemployed or never worked (e.g. postman, shop assistant, bus driver).

Students and other (NS-SEC 9).

Limiting disability and long-term health conditions is defined as an individual reporting they have a physical or mental health condition or illness that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more, and that this has a substantial effect on their ability to do normal daily activities.

Impairment types cover matters that limit day to day life, including chronic health conditions (e.g. diabetes and cancer), physical disability (e.g. mobility and dexterity), mental health (e.g. depression and anxiety) and sensory impairments (e.g. hearing and vision).

Volunteering roles are all in relation to supporting sport or physical activity and/or a sports organisation or event. They're defined as:

- Provided transport to help people other than family members take part
- Coached or instructed an individual or team(s) other than solely for family members
- Refereed, umpired, or officiated at a match, competition or event
- Administrative or committee role e.g. chairman, treasurer, social secretary, first aider, welfare officer
- Stewarded or marshalled
- Provided any other help e.g. helping with refreshments, sports kit or equipment.

The active lives adult survey is a push-to-web survey.

Carried out by Ipsos MORI, it involves postal mailouts inviting participants to complete the survey online.

The survey can be completed on mobile or desktop devices. A paper questionnaire is also sent out to maximise response rates. More information on the survey can be found [here](#).

**Link to more information
on measures and
demographics**



Sample and weighting

The achieved sample was 181,535 (16+).

Data have been weighted to Office for National Statistics (ONS) population measures for geography and key demographics.

Confidence intervals can be found in the linked tables. These indicate that if repeated samples were taken and confidence intervals computed for each sample, 95% of the intervals would contain the true value. Only significant differences are reported within the commentary. Where results are reported as being the same for two groups, any differences fall within the margin of error.

Significance tests can be found in the linked tables. The tests indicate that if repeated samples were taken, 95% of the time we would get similar findings, i.e. we can be confident that the differences seen in our sampled respondents are reflective of the population. When sample sizes are smaller, confidence intervals are larger, meaning differences between estimates need to be greater to be considered statistically significant.

Population totals are estimated values and have been calculated using ONS mid-2015, mid-2016, mid-2017 and mid-2018 estimates. Confidence intervals also apply to these. More detail can be found [here](#).

Sport spectating

Whilst not covered in this report, data tables showing the number of people attending live sports events form part of this release.

[Link to data tables](#)



Data considerations

How we measure change

Active Lives figures are based on the response of 181,535 adults, which we then scale up to provide an England-wide picture. That means there will naturally be small fluctuations when we compare the figures we have now with 12 months ago.

In accordance with Government Statistical Service good practice guidance, we highlight changes within the report where we are confident that there are genuine differences. If the data is showing only small differences which are within the margin of error, they're noted as "no change".

Suppressed data

During the first six months of surveying, a number of respondents were double counting a gym session and the individual activities that they did within the gym. We resolved this problem by rewording the question from May 2016. Due to exercise bike being counted within cycling for leisure and sport, this means we cannot report November 15/16 data for either fitness activities or cycling for leisure and sport.

[Link to more information on measures and demographics](#)

