

Activity Check-In

Identity, sport and physical activity: Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults

The Activity Check-In tracks behaviours and attitudes from both adults, children and young people towards sport and physical activity, revealing the impacts of a rapidly changing world.

Each wave captures views on a specific topic of current relevance – in this publication we focus on what sport and physical activity means for Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults in England.

Full data sets are available on our website.

This report is based on Sport England's Activity Check-In survey and focus groups held in spring and summer 2024. It looks at how culture, family, and social influences shape people's attitudes and experiences of sport and physical activity.

The research focuses on Black African and Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults – groups who are less active than average but generally positive about being active – using boosted survey samples and peer-led discussions in local communities.

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Context

There are 1.6 million Pakistani and 0.6 million Bangladeshi adults in England, together making up 41% of the Asian adult population. Just over nine in ten identify as Muslim.

While 28% live in London, significant populations are found in the West Midlands (18%), North West (17%), and Yorkshire & Humber (15%).

Both groups are less active than the national average, though their attitudes towards sport and activity are broadly positive – 48% strongly agree with at least one Active Lives statement on capability, opportunity, or enjoyment (vs 49% adults overall).

This report draws on Wave 12 of the Activity Check-In survey and peer-led focus groups in Birmingham and London, which took place in spring and summer 2024.

It aims to better understand how identity, culture, and lived experience shape behaviour – and where barriers and opportunities lie to support more equitable participation.



Attitudes

Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults draw similar distinctions between 'sport' and 'physical activity' as adults in England overall, though they tend to see sport as less accessible and more dependent on social networks.

- Sport is seen as structured, organised, and often team-based — something done for fun with others.
- Physical activity is viewed more broadly, linked to movement, health, and everyday wellbeing.

“Sports are fun. It doesn’t feel like you’re exercising. I’m really just enjoying myself. But physical activity is a side benefit to it. Whereas when I’m doing physical activity, I’m doing it mainly for the actual health benefits.”

Male, age 25.



Quantitative findings reflect these views:

- Sport is most associated with Team, Competitive, Fun.
- Physical activity is linked to Health, Wellbeing, Important.
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults are less likely to see sport as accessible (52% vs 60% of all adults), with team sports often perceived as harder to take part in without strong social networks.

Overall, the meanings of sport and physical activity are similar to those held by adults generally, but perceived accessibility - especially for team-based sport - is lower, and gender differences are more pronounced.



Barriers and motivations

Barriers are often similar to those faced by the wider population – such as lack of time, motivation, and poor weather – but there are notable differences:

- Affordability is a greater concern (8% vs 3%), covering costs like equipment, transport, or access fees.
- Low body confidence is more common (8% vs 4%), particularly among women.
- Family expectations and domestic responsibilities often limit participation, with education and household priorities taking precedence.
- Access and social networks also matter – team sports can feel harder to join without existing connections.

Motivations are also distinctive:

- Social connection is a stronger driver (28% vs 21%), with activity valued as a way to connect with others.
- Career development is cited more often (22% vs 11%), especially among younger adults.
- Seeing others participate (16% vs 11%) highlights the importance of visible role models and peer encouragement.



Role of family and expectations

Family plays a strong and influential role in shaping participation for Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults:

- Encouragement is lower and more selective: 54% said their parents encouraged them to take part in any sport or activity they wanted (vs 63% nationally), while 36% said parents were selective about which activities were acceptable (vs 29%).
- Participation was often shaped by family preferences: 14% mainly took part in activities their parents encouraged, compared with 10% of adults nationally.
- Shared family activity still matters: 44% said their family frequently discussed or did activity together (vs 39% overall), showing family can also motivate involvement.
- Family expectations can both help and hinder: cultural and gender norms often influence which activities are supported, with some families prioritising education or domestic responsibilities over sport, while others see activity as a way to manage these pressures and support wellbeing.



Culture, identity and participation

For Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults, culture and identity underpin many of the choices around sport and physical activity. Qualitative findings show that participants with stronger ties to their heritage often preferred activities that met their socio-cultural needs and values, whereas those more integrated into wider British culture were more open to non-traditional activities. However, engaging in such activities could attract judgement or pressure from family or the wider community.

"I wouldn't be shocked if other women in my culture said this, my brother can go outside and do whatever...if he wants to go play football then, 'it's fine, he's really hard-working.' When I was working full-time, my dad never said that. All he thought was, 'Home and education,'"

Female, age 23.

Quantitative findings show

- 33% said it was very important to be active in ways that maintained their cultural traditions or views.
- A further 37% said it was quite important.
- However, 50% of all Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults said it was important but could not always do so.



The research highlights a growing awareness among women about the importance of sport and activity for wellbeing, with some asserting their right to participate and challenging traditional gender roles.

Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults are less likely than average to see their own culture and British culture as the same. However, the largest proportion said their sport and activity choices are driven by their own culture.

Length of time in the UK shaped attitudes:

- Those in the UK less than three years were more likely to base choices on their own culture (60%) than those living in the UK three years or more (36%).
- Those living mostly among people of the same culture (45%) were more likely to say their attitudes were culture-driven than those living among more mixed communities (31%).

Generational differences were evident: second and third-generation migrants often challenged traditional expectations, showing greater acceptance of personal enjoyment as a valid reason for activity, even if unrelated to academic or economic achievement.



Opportunities

This research shows the need for the sector to better recognise the cultural and social contexts shaping participation among Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults.

Although attitudes to being active are positive, participation is shaped by access, affordability, family expectations, and gendered norms.

Many want to be active but face barriers linked to cultural expectations, domestic priorities, and limited inclusive opportunities.

The sector can respond by:

- Making sport and activity more accessible, especially where team sport depends on social networks.
- Engaging families and communities to build support, particularly for women and younger people.
- Creating affordable, flexible, and culturally sensitive options, with spaces that feel welcoming and familiar.
- Sharing diverse stories and role models, showing that being active can align with faith, culture, and family priorities.

Adapting to different cultural contexts and motivations is key to a more inclusive and relevant sport and physical activity system.



Methodology

Wave 12 of the Activity Check-In used a mixed-methods approach and took place in spring and summer 2024:

The quantitative survey included both a nationally representative sample of adults in England and a boosted sample of 741 Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults to allow for subgroup analysis.

Results for these groups are weighted to be representative of the national adult population, unless stated otherwise. Comparisons labeled as 'overall' refer to all adults in England from the full survey sample.

The qualitative research involved two peer-led focus groups with Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults in Birmingham and London (April–May 2024), capturing a mix of gender, age, and attitudes to activity.

Discussions explored how identity, culture, family expectations, and social context shape participation and perceptions of sport and physical activity.

Full data tables and qualitative reports are available on the Sport England website.