

## Physical activity among adults

Being physically active is good for physical and mental health. Regular physical activity improves mental and musculoskeletal health, helps to manage weight, and reduces the risk of various non-communicable diseases. WHO recommends that adults perform at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week and limit the amount of time spent being sedentary.

In 2019, about one-third (32%) of adults reported to perform at least 150 minutes of (non-work related) physical activity per week on average across EU countries (Figure 4.16). This proportion varies from 10% or less in Bulgaria and Romania, to more than 50% in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark as well as Norway and Iceland. Conversely, almost one in two European adults (48%) reported to perform no (non-work related) physical activity. This proportion varies from less than 20% in Denmark and Norway to more than 80% in Bulgaria and Romania.

A greater proportion of men reported to perform at least 150 minutes of weekly physical activity than women in virtually all countries except Denmark, Sweden, and Iceland. The gender gap is largest in the Czech Republic, France, the Slovak Republic, and Spain (Figure 4.17).

People with tertiary education are more likely than those with lower education levels to perform at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week in all EU countries. On average, 42% of people with tertiary education reported to perform at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week in 2019, compared to 27% of those with non-tertiary education (Figure 4.18). The education disparities are largest in Ireland, Slovenia, the Slovak Republic, and Iceland.

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the physical activity of most people declined and sedentary behaviours increased due to lockdowns (Stockwell et al., 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). For example, in France, a survey of 4 000 adults conducted during the first lockdown in April 2020 found that 45% reported a reduction in physical activity and 59% an increase in screen watching (Constant et al., 2020<sup>[2]</sup>).

The European Commission has launched in 2021 a *HealthyLifestyle4All* initiative to promote physical activity and sports across generations and social groups, inviting sports organisations, civil society, international, national, regional and local authorities to join in the co-creation of the initiative by submitting a pledge (European Commission, 2021<sup>[3]</sup>). Another European Commission's initiative is the *#BeActive Award* that rewards projects and individuals who are dedicated to the promotion of sport and physical activity. In 2022, the award includes a new category *#BeActive Across Generations Award* to recognise the importance of sport across different ages.

### Definition and comparability

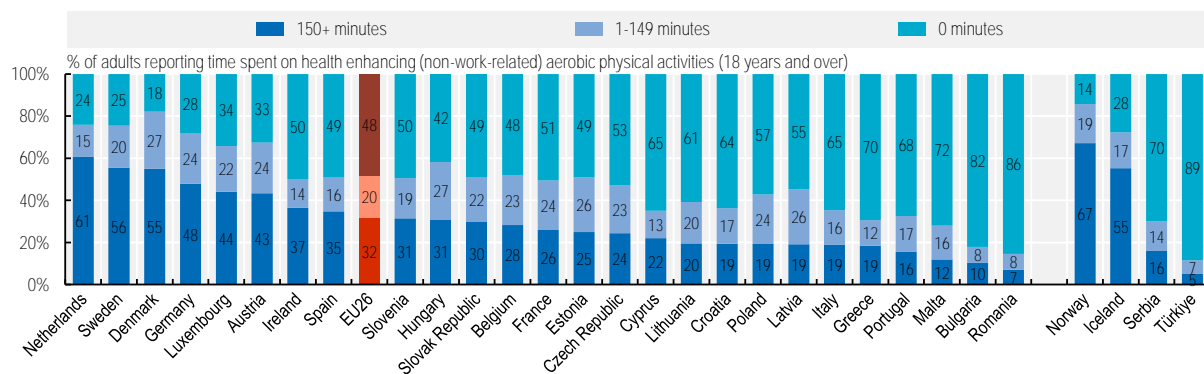
The indicator on physical activity refers to time spent on (non-work-related) physical activity, collected from the European Health Interview Survey 2019. In Germany, data collection for EHIS took place in 2019 and 2020. The data are categorised into three groups (at least 150 minutes per week, 1-149 minutes, and 0 minutes).

Data are stratified by education level. As per the International Standard Classification for Education 2011, tertiary education refers to Levels 5-8 (short-cycle tertiary education, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctoral degrees). The non-tertiary education group corresponds to the average of "less than upper secondary" and "upper secondary and less than tertiary" education.

### References

- Constant, A. et al. (2020), "Socio-Cognitive Factors Associated With Lifestyle Changes in Response to the COVID-19 Epidemic in the General Population: Results From a Cross-Sectional Study in France", *Frontiers in Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.579460>. [2]
- European Commission (2021), *The HealthyLifestyle4All Initiative*, <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/initiatives/healthylifestyle4all>. [3]
- Stockwell, S. et al. (2021), "Changes in physical activity and sedentary behaviours from before to during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown: a systematic review", *BMJ Open Sp Ex Med*, Vol. 7, p. 960, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjsem-2020-000960>. [1]

Figure 4.16. Time spent on physical activity among adults, 2019

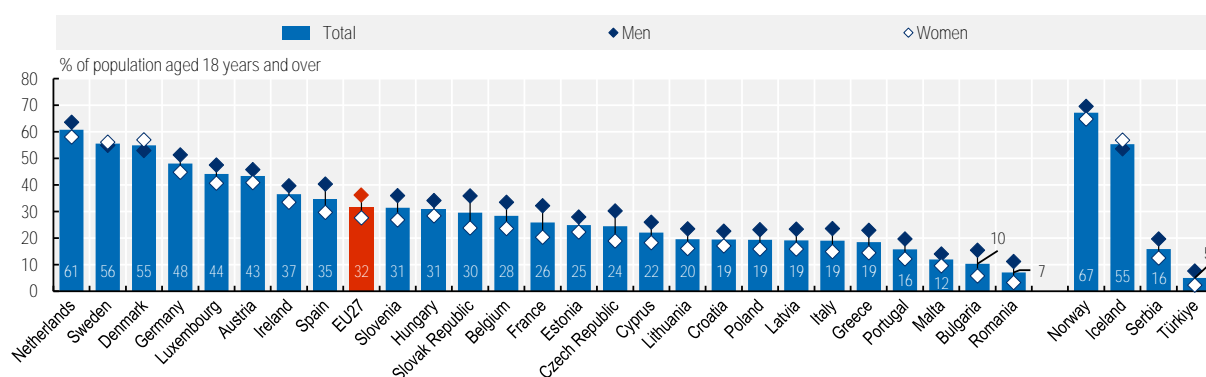


Note: The EU average is weighted.

Source: Eurostat, 2022 (EHIS 2019).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/dj8kwc>

Figure 4.17. Spending at least 150 minutes per week on physical activity, by gender, 2019

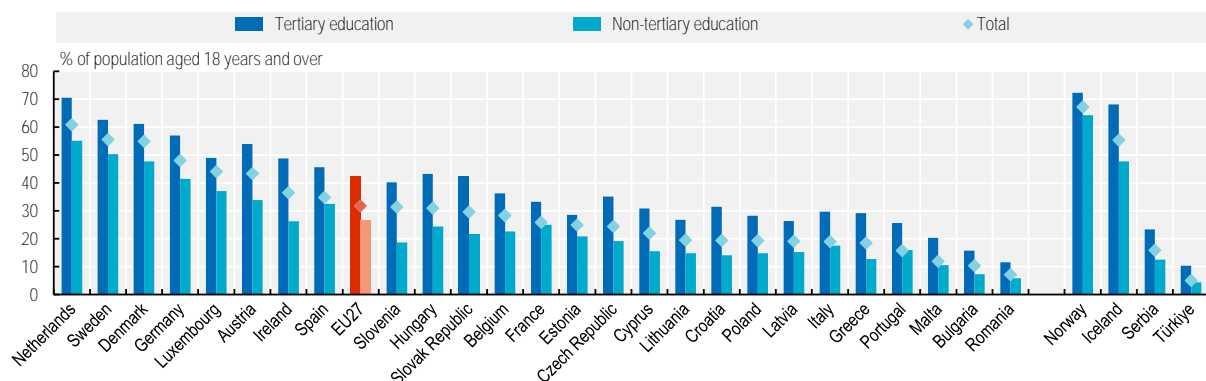


Note: The EU average is weighted.

Source: Eurostat, 2022 (EHIS 2019).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/xq8tez>

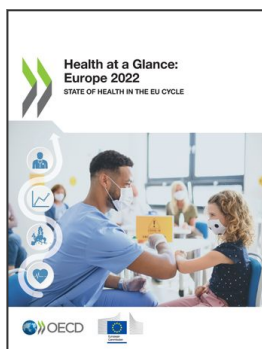
Figure 4.18. Spending at least 150 minutes per week on physical activity, by education level, 2019



Note: The EU average is weighted.

Source: Eurostat, 2022 (EHIS 2019).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/wxt0ck>



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