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The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) is a research study conducted by an international network of research teams<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (Europe) and co-ordinated by Professor Candace Currie of the University of St Andrews. This factsheet is based on data collected in 2010 from 12,661 10-17 year olds in Ireland from randomly selected schools throughout the country.

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**hbsc**  
HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN  
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN



## Summary

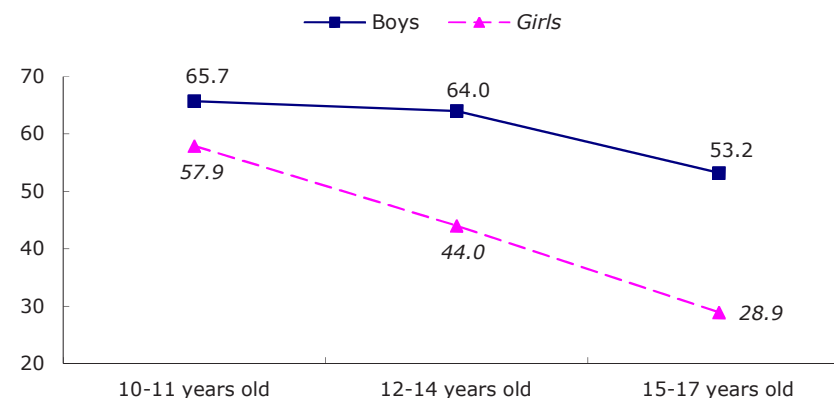
HBSC Ireland 2010 has found that 50.5% of schoolchildren in Ireland report that they exercise four or more times a week. This figure represents a slight decrease from 2006 (53.0%). More boys (60.1%) than girls (40.4%) report exercising four or more times a week. The percentage of children exercising four or more times a week is higher among younger children; 65.7% of boys and 57.9% of girls aged 10-11 years, compared to 53.2% of boys and 28.9% of girls aged 15-17 years. The most prominent decrease may be seen in the 12-14 year old age group for girls, from 50.5% in 2006 to 44.0% in 2010. Children who exercise are more likely to live with both parents, find it easy to talk to their parents and spend more than four evenings a week with their friends. They are less likely to feel pressured by schoolwork. Exercising in this factsheet refers to children who report exercising four or more times a week outside school hours, to the point where they get out of breath or sweat.

## Why this topic?

Physical activity is essential for good physical<sup>2</sup> and mental<sup>3</sup> health and may increase academic achievement<sup>4</sup>. Conversely, physical inactivity is associated with a range of negative health outcomes including obesity<sup>5</sup> and low self-esteem<sup>6</sup>. Many young people do not meet physical activity guidelines<sup>7</sup> while participation in physical activity has been shown to decrease further as a child enters adulthood<sup>8</sup>.

## Change 2006-2010

Overall the percentage of children who report exercising four times or more per week has decreased slightly from 53.0% in 2006 to 50.5% in 2010. This decrease is seen among boys (62.6% to 60.1%) and girls (43.3% to 40.4%). The most pronounced decrease is among girls aged 12-14 (50.5% to 44.0%) while the only figure to remain stable is for girls aged 15-17 (28.1% to 28.9%).

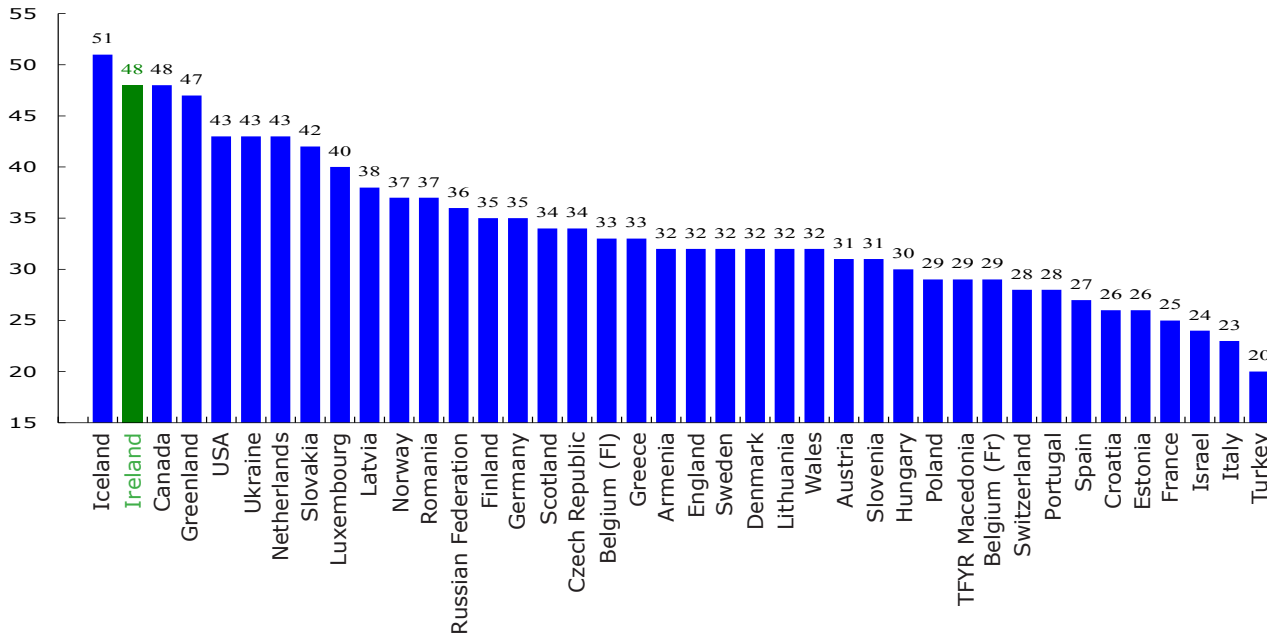


*Percentage of children who exercise four or more times a week outside school hours, by age and gender*

## Exercise in context

- Children who exercise regularly are more likely to live with both parents (77.8% vs. 74.4%) than those who do not.
- Children who exercise regularly are more likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (83.2% vs. 80.1%) and father (71.0% vs. 61.7%) than those who do not.
- Children who exercise regularly are more likely to spend more than four evenings per week with friends (45.1% vs. 31.9%) than those who do not.
- Children who exercise regularly are less likely to feel pressured by schoolwork (35.7% vs. 41.3%) than those who do not.
- Exercise is not associated with social class.

## ...Exercise among schoolchildren in Ireland



Percentage of 15 year old children reporting exercise four or more times a week outside school hours, by country

### International

Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 2nd among 40 countries in Europe and North America with 47.9% reporting that they exercise four or more times per week. Overall 65.0% of 11 year olds (ranked 2nd) and 54.0% of 13 year olds (ranked 1st) reported exercising four or more times per week.

### Implications

The percentage of young people that report exercising four or more times a week has decreased slightly since 2006. However, Ireland continues to rank highly with over half of young people reporting that they exercise four or more times weekly, in comparison to other European and North American countries. The findings presented in this factsheet indicate that positive relationships with family and friends are associated with taking part in exercise. With the increase in childhood obesity, it is important to further

increase participation in exercise. While it is positive that there is no decline among 15-17 year old girls, the decline among girls aged 12-14 must be addressed.

### References

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