

Undertaking physical activity in adolescence is beneficial for health, and can set standards for adult physical activity levels, thereby influencing health outcomes in later life. Research supports the role that physical activity in adolescence has in the prevention and treatment of a range of youth health issues including asthma, mental health, bone health and obesity. More direct links to adult health are found between physical activity in adolescence and its effect on overweight and obesity and related diseases, breast cancer rates and bone health in later life. The health effects of adolescent physical activity are sometimes dependent on the activity type, *e.g.* water physical activities in adolescence are effective in the treatment of asthma, and exercise is recommended in the treatment of cystic fibrosis (Hallal *et al.*, 2006; Currie *et al.*, 2008).

Some of the factors influencing the levels of physical activity undertaken by adolescents include the availability of space and equipment, the child's present health conditions, their school curricula and other competing pastimes.

Only one in five children in EU countries undertake moderate-to-vigorous exercise regularly, according to results from the 2005-06 HBSC survey. Children in Switzerland, Luxembourg and Italy are least likely to exercise regularly, whereas the Slovak Republic and Ireland stand out as strong performers with over 40 and 30% respectively of children aged 11 to 15 exercising for a total of at least 60 minutes per day over the past week (Figure 2.3.1). The country rankings reported vary according to the child's age. France appears at the lower end, especially for girls, at both ages. Boys consistently undertake more physical activity than girls, across all countries and all age groups.

It is of concern that physical activity tends to fall between ages 11 to 15 for most EU countries (Figure 2.3.2), with boys in the Czech Republic and Luxembourg the only exceptions. In Portugal, Norway, Sweden, Austria, and Finland, the rates of exercising among boys more than halve between ages 11 and 15. The rates of girls exercising to recommended levels also falls between the ages of 11 and 15 years. In many countries, rates for 15-year-old girls are less

than half of those at age 11, and in Iceland, Romania, Ireland and Finland, rates of physical activity among girls fall by over 60%.

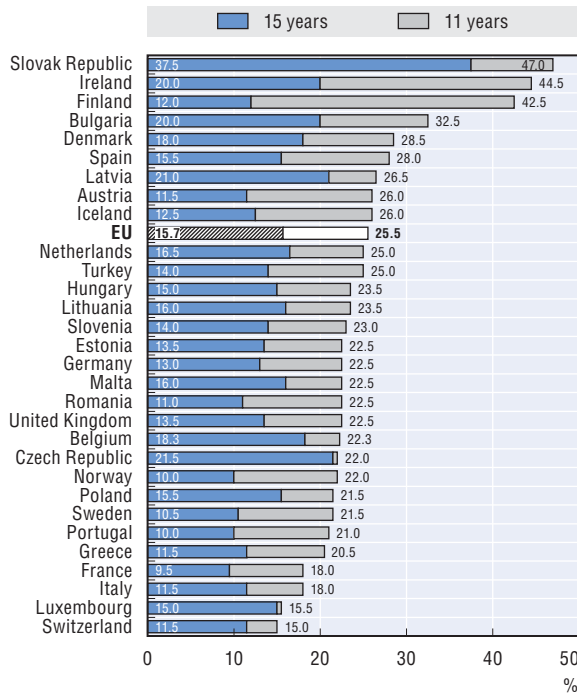
To compare levels of exercise between 2001-02 and 2005-06 for 15-year-old children, results are reported in relation to the EU average (Figure 2.3.3). In 2001-02, rates refer to 15-year-olds reporting an hour of moderate to vigorous exercise five days a week, but in 2005-06 figures refer to exercise of this type seven days a week. Boys' rates were above the EU average in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Greece, Spain and Switzerland in 2001-02, but fell below the average in 2005-06. Latvia, Belgium and Denmark are countries where rates of physical activity were below the EU average in 2001-02, but were among the higher performers in 2005-06. For 15-year-old boys, only the Czech Republic, Ireland and Poland have been consistently high performers on measures of physical activity in both waves. For girls, Latvia, Belgium and Malta have moved from below average performances in 2001-02 to above average in 2005-06. In Sweden, Poland, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Slovenia, rates of physical activity among 15-year-old girls have fallen below the EU average since 2001-02.

Definition and deviations

Data for physical activity considers the regularity of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity as reported by 11- and 15-year-olds for the years 2001-02 and 2005-06. Moderate-to-vigorous physical activity refers to exercise undertaken for at least an hour which increases both heart rate and respiration (and leaves the child out of breath sometimes) on five or more days per week in 2001-02, and seven days a week in 2005-06.

Indicators are taken from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey (HBSC). Data are drawn from school-based samples, but some countries report regional results only.

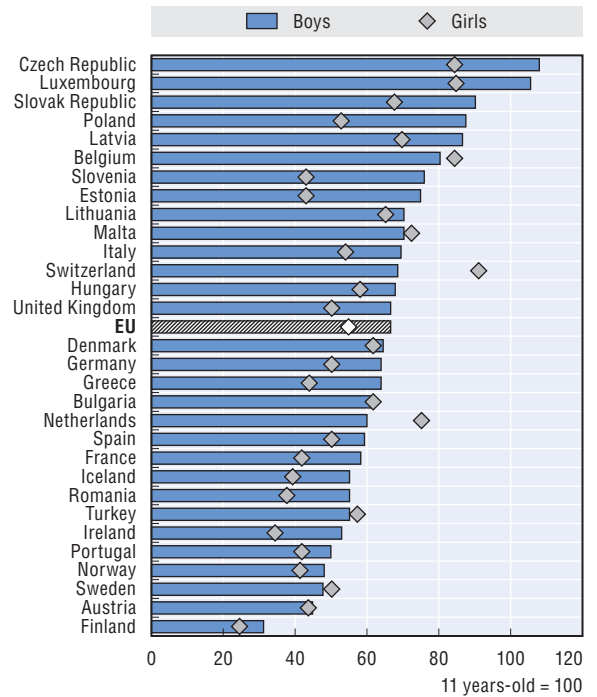
2.3.1. Children aged 11 and 15 years doing moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily in the past week, 2005-06



Source: Currie et al. (2008).

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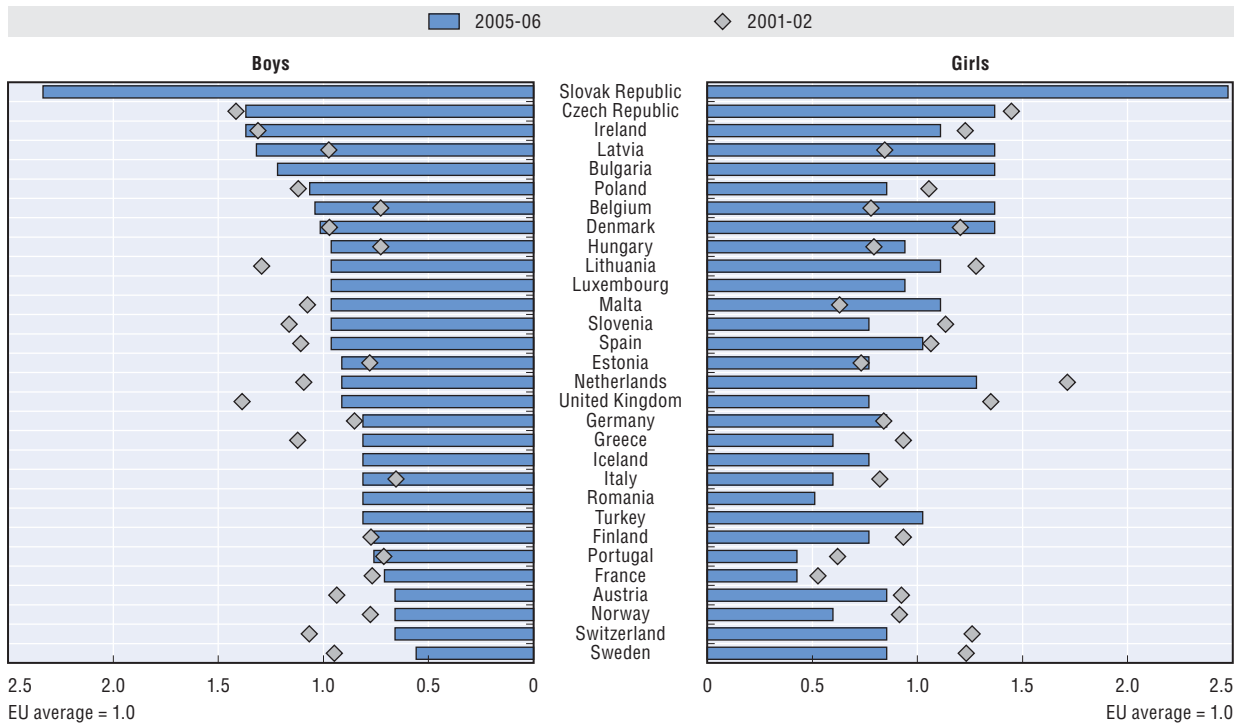
2.3.2. Comparing physical activity of 11- and 15-year-old children by sex, 2005-06



Source: Currie et al. (2008).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932336369>

2.3.3. Standardised rates of physical activity for 15-year-old children (EU average = 1), 2001-02 and 2005-06



Source: Currie et al. (2004, 2008).

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