

Physical inactivity is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease, as well as a number of other chronic diseases including diabetes, certain types of cancer, obesity and hypertension (Knight, 2012). Regular physical activity improves chances of living longer, strengthens bones and muscles, helps control body weight and improves mental health and mood. It has also been shown to have positive effects on symptoms of anxiety and clinical depression (Anderson et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2005).

The WHO recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week for adults aged 18-64 years old, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity (WHO, 2011). A 2013 Council Recommendation on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity also promotes sport and physical activity.

Physical activity among adults varies two-fold across the EU, from 38% in Romania to 80% in Sweden (Figure 4.24). In 2014, less than 60% of adults in Bulgaria, Portugal, Romania and Spain took part in the recommended amount of physical activity, compared with over 70% in Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Slovenia and Sweden. Overall, 64% of the EU adult population meet the recommended amount. Gender gaps also differ by country. They are low (under 2 percentage points) in Finland, Greece, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In the Czech Republic, Latvia, Romania and Spain, there is a gap of over 15 percentage points in the proportion of men doing regular moderate physical activity compared to women. Denmark is the only country where women exercise more than men (3 percentage points' difference). The average gender gap across the EU is 8 percentage points.

There is also a gap in many countries between adults with lower and higher levels of education (Figure 4.25). In 17 of 24 EU countries, people with a lower level of education do more physical activity than those with a higher level of education. These differences are most prominent in Bulgaria, France and Romania (over 10 percentage points). On the other hand, in Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, the Slovak Republic, Spain and the United Kingdom, people with a higher level of education undertake physical activity more often than those with lower education. Across the European Union, an average of 62% of people with lower levels of education, and 59% of those with higher levels, meet the weekly recommended level of physical activity.

WHO/Europe and the European network for the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity collaborate

closely, strengthening and supporting efforts to increase participation in physical activity. Studies have shown that common barriers to physical activity include perception of lack of time, feeling too tired and preferring to rest, and concerns about personal safety (WHO, 2006).

Promotion of physical activity is being used in public health campaigns in many countries. An increasing number of private large companies have also invested in wellness programmes to encourage physical activity and improve health-related behaviours of their employees with the view of keeping workers in good health and working longer.

Definition and comparability

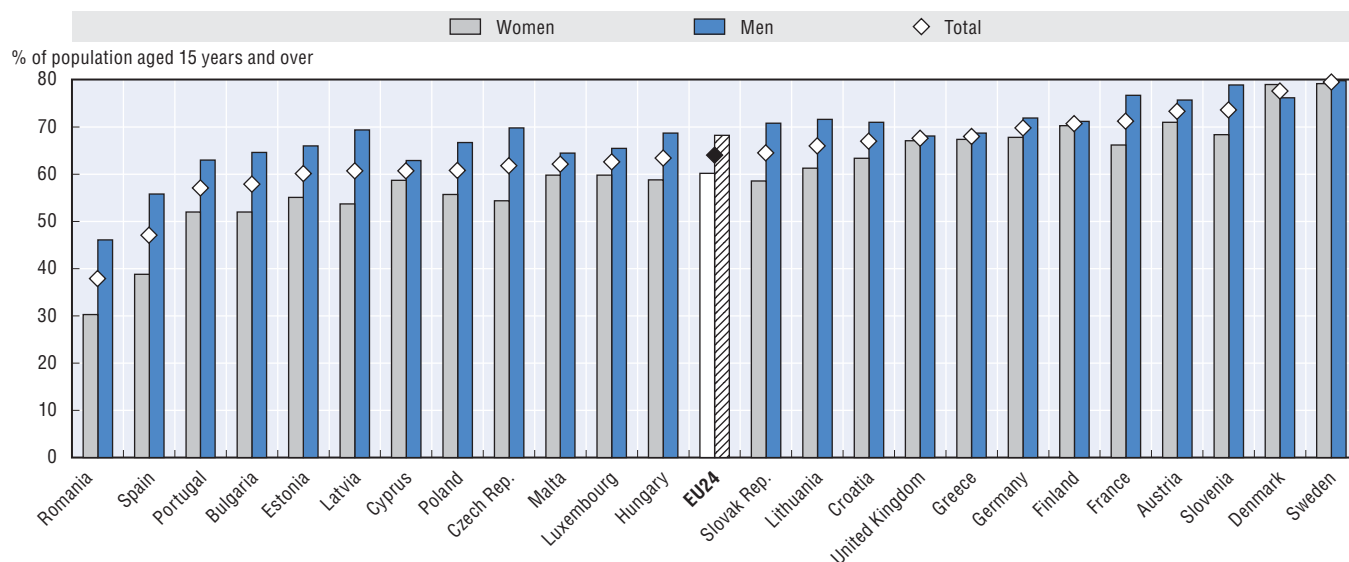
The indicator of moderate physical activity is defined as doing at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week. Estimates of moderate physical activity are based on self-reports from the European Health Interview Survey 2014, combining work-related physical activity with leisure-time physical activity (bicycling for transportation and sport).

Education level is based on the ISCED 2011 classification. Lowest education level refers to people who have a lower secondary education or below (ISCED 0-2). Highest education level refers to people who have tertiary education (ISCED 6-8).

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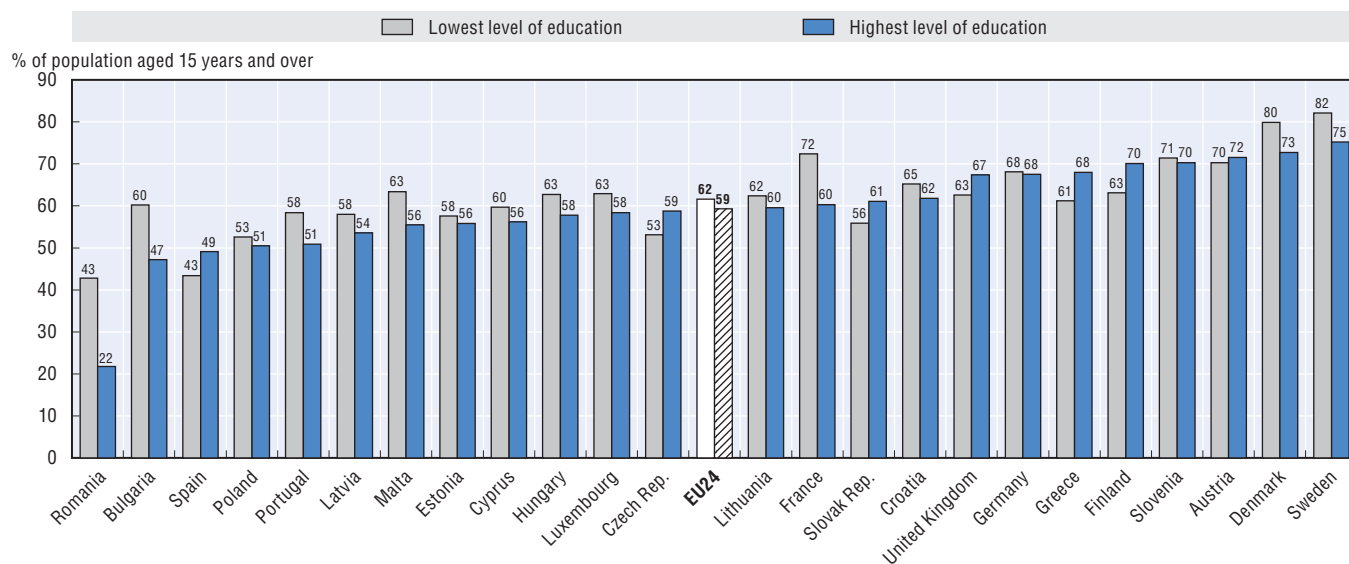
4.24. Moderate weekly physical activity among adults in EU countries, 2014



Source: Eurostat, EHIS 2014.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933429157>

4.25. Moderate weekly physical activity among adults in EU countries, by level of education, 2014



Source: Eurostat, EHIS 2014.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933429162>



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