



Investment into Sported – Engage Her Programme 2025/2026

Equality Impact Assessment and Screening Flowchart

October 2025

Screening flowchart and template (taken from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for public authorities April 2010 (*Appendix 1*)).

Introduction

Part 1. Policy scoping – asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

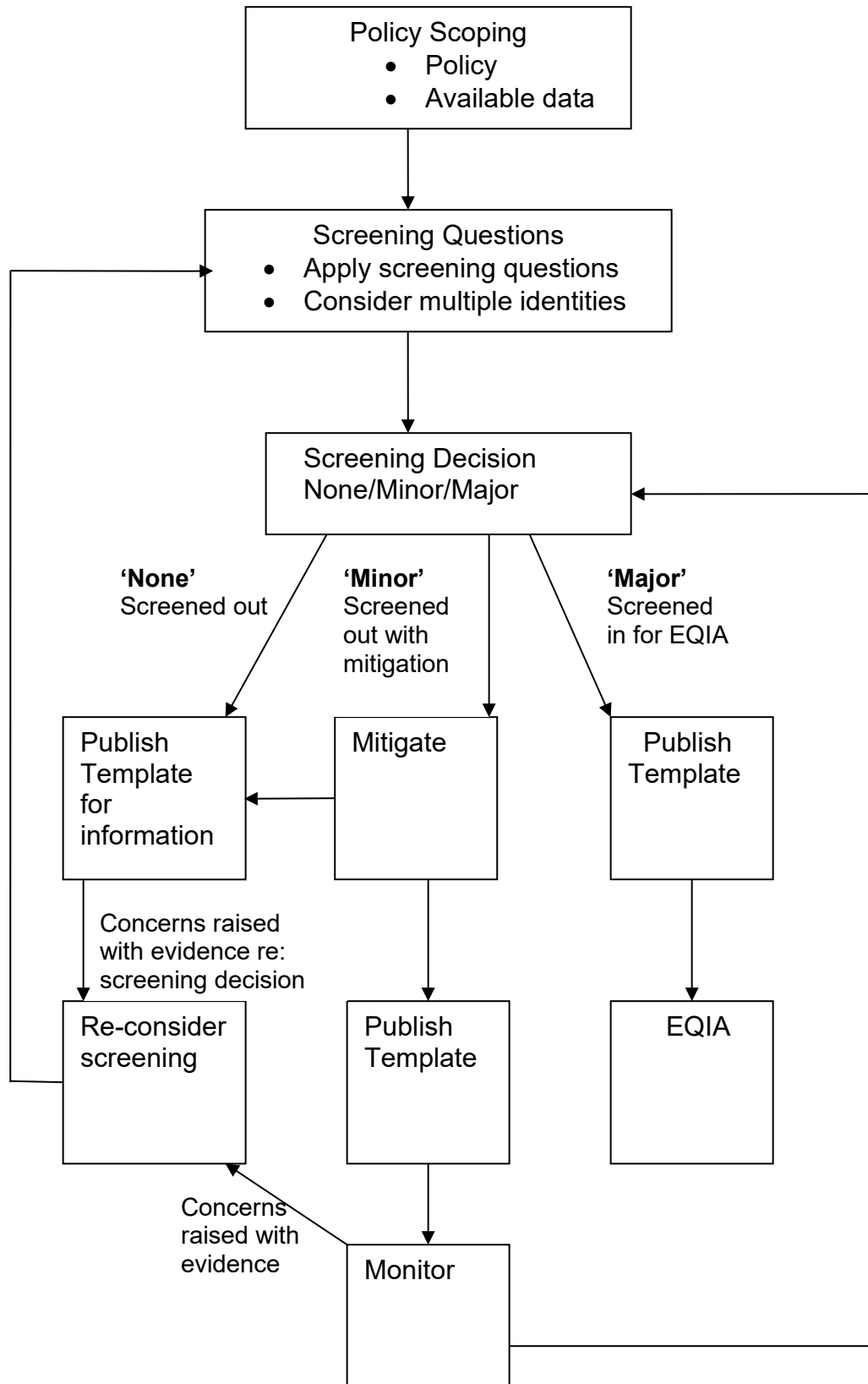
Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues.

Part 3. Screening decision – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Part 4. Monitoring – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

Part 5. Approval and authorisation – verifies the public authority's approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

A screening flowchart is provided overleaf.



Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy

Name of the policy

Investment into Sported – Engage Her Programme 2025/2026

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

This is a new investment programme but Sported Engage Her programme was last funded by Sport NI between 2016 – 2019.

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

Local clubs throughout Northern Ireland will benefit from tailored insight, training and operational support to strengthen their understanding of how to engage with women and girls more effectively. They will also receive Sported volunteer support to help embed the learning into their day-to-day activities and develop new opportunities for women and girls to get involved in sport and physical activity locally.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?

If so, explain how.

Females including intersectionality such as religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disabled females and females with dependants are the intended beneficiaries of this Sported Engage Her programme.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

Sport NI initiated the decision to invest but Sported initiated the policy.

Who owns and who implements the policy?

Sport NI owns the responsibility for investment, whereas Sported owns the responsibility for the programme.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?

Yes

If yes, are they (please delete as appropriate)

The success of meeting the objectives is reliant upon the 30 clubs/organisations involved in the programme engaging with Sported volunteers and mentors to develop the implementation plan that is required to receive the £2000 award at the end of the programme. Should any of these clubs dis-engage, it would be hard to meet the desired of objective.

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual) that the policy will impact upon? (please delete as appropriate)

- **Internal:** Sport NI board and staff, particularly the delivery teams within the Sports Systems Unit and Communications team.
- **External:** Governing bodies, local clubs, local sporting organisations, members of Sported network, and women and girls not engaged in sport and physical activity.
- **Strategic Partners:** Sported

other, please specify _____

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

Sport NI Corporate Plan [Power of Sport – Sport NI's New Five-Year Plan | Sport NI](#)

The Sport NI Corporate Plan following significant partner consultation identified the following mission statement and outcomes which will focus its delivery across the period 2021-2026.

Mission: We are passionate about maximising the *power of sport* to change lives. By 2026 we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all.

Outcome 1: People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and physical activity.

Sport NI believes the delivery of these outcomes will be with the implemented through a strategic approach to investing into the sports systems. These outcomes are underpinned specifically by 4 cornerstones

- Building a positive and inclusive sports culture, recognising the rights of everyone to access and participate in sport.
- Retaining a duty of care to all those engaged in the Sporting System.
- Promoting wellness and well-being.
- Targeting sport in rural communities, in disadvantaged areas and with under-represented groups.

The above will guide Sport NI's support to the sector over the period of the corporate plan.

- **Department for Communities (DFC), Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland, Active Living (Link: [Active Living: A Strategy for sport and Physical Activity DfC](#) [Active Living | About Us](#))**

This strategy was published in March 2022 following endorsement by the NI Executive and was developed as part of a co-design consultation with the sports sector, government departments and key stakeholders. The Sport and Physical Activity is based around inclusion, engagement, community, excellence, partnership, collaboration and shared spaces that collectively maximise the benefits of more people, being more active, more of the time. The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy has six key themes (The numbering of the themes should not be interpreted as being in a priority order):

1. Recovering from the Impact of the Pandemic
2. Promoting Participation, Inclusion and Community Engagement
3. Promoting Excellence in Sport
4. Promoting Partnership and Integration
5. Providing Inclusive, Shared Spaces and Places
6. Promoting the Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity

This proposal will directly impact on Themes 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'

On 27 February 2025 the Executive agreed a Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. It outlines our priorities for making a real difference to the lives of people here. A Wellbeing Framework has been designed to identify areas of concern and help us understand if projects and programmes are working for everyone. Link: the [Wellbeing Framework](#) page and "we all lead healthier and happier lives" and Sport and Physical activity domain: [PfG Wellbeing Framework - Sport and physical activity](#) measuring female participation through NISRA Continuous Household Survey.

Sport NI policy framework will also be adhered to.

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data. The Commission has produced this guide to [signpost to S75 data](#).

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

Religious belief evidence / information:

Evidence relating to religious belief is drawn from the Continuous Household Survey 2023/24, which captures data on religious identification within the population and their engagement with sport and physical activity.

Source: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#)

Additionally, the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Sport NI's Corporate Plan highlights the importance of supporting sports to develop more mixed and inclusive participant bases that are not segregated along religious lines.

Source: [Equality Impact Assessment – Sport NI Corporate Plan](#)

Political Opinion evidence / information:

The EQIA for Sport NI's Corporate Plan also references research (2016) which identified the symbolic nature of sport in Northern Ireland's divided society, where some sports can reflect religious, cultural, and political allegiances. However, the same research suggested that the politicisation of sport may be gradually weakening, indicating a potential shift toward greater inclusivity across political divides.

Source: [Equality Impact Assessment – Sport NI Corporate Plan](#)

Racial Group evidence / information:

Currently, Sport NI does not hold comprehensive participation data disaggregated by racial group. This gap in data was explicitly identified through Sport NI's participation in the 2021 'Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport' collaborative study, conducted alongside the other UK Sports Councils.

Source: [Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport Review 2021](#)

A key finding for Northern Ireland was that a lack of available data and insight into the racial diversity of participants in sport makes it difficult to measure progress or identify specific barriers faced by ethnically diverse communities.

The study's lived experience component — *#TellYourStory* — further highlighted this issue, stating that: "The final numbers provide sufficient data for the England analysis, but the in-depth one-to-one interviews conducted in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales offer only initial insights for these countries. Low engagement may also reflect weaker networks and relationships between the Sports Councils and ethnically diverse communities at local level."

Further contextual evidence can also be drawn from the Northern Ireland Assembly's paper on grassroots sport, which outlines general participation trends and potential challenges across communities.

Sources:

- [Grassroots Sport in NI: A Summary of Participation and Potential Challenges](#)
- [Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport Review 2021](#)
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Information on race may also be extracted from: In addition, the 2022 the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Survey ([CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie](#)), the 2022 Children's Report Card ([PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf](#)) the 2023 Kids' Life and Times Survey (focused on P7 pupils) and the Young People Life and Times Survey (focused on 16-year-olds) offer valuable insights into participation patterns and attitudes towards sport and physical activity among children and young people ([Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023](#) and ([Young Life and Times Survey: Sport](#)). These surveys highlight a clear decline in participation levels as children transition from primary to post-primary education, indicating the importance of targeted interventions to sustain participation into adolescence and adulthood.

Age evidence / information:

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides the most up-to-date data on participation in sport across different age groups in Northern Ireland. Findings are available at:

[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

In addition, the 2022 the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Survey ([CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie](#)), the 2022 Children's Report Card ([PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf](#)) the 2023 Kids' Life and Times Survey (focused on P7 pupils) and the Young People Life and Times Survey (focused on 16-year-olds) offer valuable insights into participation patterns and attitudes towards sport and physical activity among children and young people ([Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023](#) and ([Young Life and Times Survey: Sport](#)). These surveys highlight a clear decline in participation levels as children transition from primary to post-primary education, indicating the importance of targeted interventions to sustain participation into adolescence and adulthood.

Marital Status evidence / information:

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) also provides insight into sport participation rates based on marital status. This evidence helps Sport NI better understand how relationship status may influence participation. Findings can be accessed at: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

This evidence is supplemented by the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Sport NI's Corporate Plan, which reviewed broader research and data on participation patterns across different Section 75 groups, including marital status. [Equality Impact Assessment – Sport NI Corporate Plan](#)

Sexual Orientation evidence / information:

Currently, Sport NI does not hold robust quantitative data on sport participation rates disaggregated by sexual orientation, largely due to the absence of this data in standard population-level surveys.

However, evidence gathered through extensive consultation for the Corporate Plan highlighted a number of barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ people in sport, including:

- The invisibility of LGBTQIA+ identities within many sporting environments.
- The absence of visible role models and a reluctance among athletes to come out.
- Homophobic microaggressions and unreported hate incidents creating hostile environments in some sports settings.
- Specific challenges faced by single-identity LGBTQIA+ teams, particularly around sustainability and broader acceptance.

These insights are captured within the Corporate Plan's Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and demonstrate the ongoing cultural and structural barriers impacting LGBTQIA+ inclusion in sport. Source: [Equality Impact Assessment – Sport NI Corporate Plan](#)

Men & Women generally evidence / information:

The 2023-24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides gender-disaggregated data on sport participation, enabling Sport NI to track differences in participation rates between men and women.

The data is available at: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

In addition to participation rates, consultation evidence from the development of the Corporate Plan highlighted gender-specific barriers to participation, including:

- Caring responsibilities, which disproportionately impact women.

- Concerns around personal safety, particularly when accessing facilities or participating in sport after dark.
- Gendered stereotypes affecting perceptions of who sport is for and what activities are seen as appropriate for different genders.

Source: [Equality Impact Assessment – Sport NI Corporate Plan](#)

A desk based review of the evidence on women in sport drew findings from:

Department of Health Survey: first results. Available at: Health survey Northern Ireland: first results | Department of Health (health-ni.gov.uk)

NISRA . Wellbeing In Northern Ireland Report Available at: Wellbeing in Northern Ireland | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (nisra.gov.uk)

The Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (2022). Ulster University, University College Dublin, University College Cork, and University of Limerick. Available at: CSPPA.ie – The Children’s Sport Participation & Physical Activity Study 2022

ARK. Young Life and Times Survey (2015). ARK www.ark.ac.uk/ylt [distributor], May 2016. Available at: <https://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2015/index.htm>

NISRA (2017). Young Persons’ Behaviour & Attitudes Survey Available at: Young Persons’ Behaviour & Attitudes Survey 2016 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (nisra.gov.uk)

Schubotz, D., McKnight, M., & Lloyd, K. (2016). Young people and sport in Northern Ireland. Sport Northern Ireland. <http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Young-People-and-Sport.pdf> Available at: Young people and sport in Northern Ireland. — Queen’s University Belfast (qub.ac.uk)

Research Work Group for Ireland’s Report Card on Physical Activity in Children and Adolescents. (2022). The 2022 Ireland North and South Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents Available at: The 2022 Ireland North and South Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents (Summary) (iphrepository.com)

NISRA (2021/22) Continuous Household Survey: Engagement in Culture, Arts, Heritage and Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland. Available at: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/engagement-culture-arts-heritage-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202122.pdf>

Sport NI, (2010). The Northern Ireland Sport and Physical Activity Survey: A Baseline Report Available at: SAPASReport.pdf (sportni.net)

Outdoors Recreation Northern Ireland, 56 Degrees Insight (2020/21), Outdoors in Northern Ireland, Results of population survey November 2020 to October 2021. Available at: POMNI_2020_2021_results_final_version.pdf (mcusercontent.com)

Sport Northern Ireland (2020). Northern Ireland Sports Club Survey

Sport Northern Ireland (2018). Sporting Clubs Programme - Year One Progress Update

Sport Northern Ireland (2019). Performance Pathway Coach Mapping

Norman, L., Rankin-Wright, A.J., and Allison, W. 2018. It’s a concrete ceiling – it’s not even glass: understanding tenets of organisational culture that supports the

progression of women is coaches and coach developers, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. 42 (5), 393-414.

Sport Northern Ireland (2020). Northern Ireland Sports Club Survey.

Deloitte 2020, Data-driven change: Women in the boardroom - A global perspective, Sixth edition

Available at: Women in the Boardroom (deloitte.com)

Sport Northern Ireland (2018) Sporting Winners Programme – Progress Update

Sport Northern Ireland (2018). Sporting Clubs Programme - Year One Progress Update

Sport Northern Ireland, Sheffield Hallam University (2021). Talent Pathway Inclusion Insight pending final report

NISRA (2019/20), Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey Available at: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitude Survey 2019 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (nisra.gov.uk)

Connolly S, Carlin A, Johnston A, Woods C, Powell C, Belton S, O'Brien W, Saunders J, Duff C, Farmer O, Murphy M. Physical Activity, Sport and Physical Education in Northern Ireland School Children: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2020 Sep 19;17(18):6849. doi: 10.3390/ijerph17186849. PMID: 32961784; PMCID: PMC7559058.

Web link: Physical Activity, Sport and Physical Education in Northern Ireland School Children: A Cross-Sectional Study - PubMed (nih.gov)

European Commission. 2010. Sport and Physical Activity. Special Eurobarometer

Web Link: Sport and Physical Activity - March 2010 - - Eurobarometer survey (europa.eu)

Allender et al cite: Porter, S. 2002. Physical Activity: An Exploration of the Issues and Attitudes of Teenage Girls. London: Scott Porter Research and Marketing;

Web Link: Understanding participation in sport and physical activity among children and adults: a review of qualitative studies | Health Education Research | Oxford Academic (oup.com)

Coakley, J & White, A. 1992. 'Making decisions: gender and sport participation among British adolescents', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 9: 20–35;

Web Link: (PDF) Making Decisions: Gender and Sport Participation among British Adolescents (researchgate.net)

Orme, J. 1991. 'Adolescent girls and exercise: too much of a struggle?', *Educational Health* 9: 76–80

Web Link: Adolescent Girls and Exercise: Too Much of a Struggle?. | Semantic Scholar

Rutherford, J. 2019. '#ActiveFitSporty How can We Encourage Females to Participate and Flourish in Sport and Physical Activity?'

Paul Sellars, Jack Walklett, & Professor Diane Crone (November 2022).

Understanding outdoor sports participants' motivations and connectedness to nature in Northern Ireland - 2022 Update

Belfast Newsletter (2022). Menopausal Mermaids extol benefits of bracing dips in the North Atlantic

Menopausal Mermaids extol benefits of bracing dips in the North Atlantic | Belfast News Letter

Sport NI (2021). Mourne's User Survey; Sport NI (2020). The Get Wet Stay Active Project Monitoring Report

The Women in Sport Fitness Foundation (2011). Study into Women and Informal Sport Available at: Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation : (wsff.org.uk)
Sport NI and University of Ulster (2019). Active Fit and Sporty Participation Survey Available at: Active Fit Sporty Report | Sport NI

Sport NI and Sported (2017). EngageHER Case Study. Available at: Case Study: Engage-HER – Challenging
NI Assembly Research paper [Potential issues regarding women and sport](#)

Information on gender may also be extracted from: In addition, the 2022 the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Survey ([CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie](#)), the 2022 Children's Report Card ([PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf](#)) the 2023 Kids' Life and Times Survey (focused on P7 pupils) and the Young People Life and Times Survey (focused on 16-year-olds) offer valuable insights into participation patterns and attitudes towards sport and physical activity among children and young people ([Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023](#) and [Young Life and Times Survey: Sport](#)). These surveys highlight a clear decline in participation levels as children transition from primary to post-primary education, indicating the importance of targeted interventions to sustain participation into adolescence and adulthood.

Disability evidence / information:
The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) also captures participation rates for disabled and non-disabled people, providing a key evidence base for understanding disparities in participation.
This data can be accessed at:
[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

Alongside this quantitative data, Sport NI continues to engage closely with Disability Sport NI, gathering practical insights into the lived experiences of disabled athletes, participants, coaches, and volunteers. This qualitative evidence helps contextualise participation data and highlights barriers such as:

- Accessibility of facilities and equipment.
- Limited availability of inclusive programmes.
- Gaps in awareness and understanding among coaches and volunteers.

Information on disability may also be extracted from: In addition, the 2022 the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Survey ([CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie](#)), the 2022 Children's Report Card ([PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf](#)) the 2023 Kids' Life and Times Survey

(focused on P7 pupils) and the Young People Life and Times Survey (focused on 16-year-olds) offer valuable insights into participation patterns and attitudes towards sport and physical activity among children and young people ([Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023](#) and [Young Life and Times Survey: Sport](#)). These surveys highlight a clear decline in participation levels as children transition from primary to post-primary education, indicating the importance of targeted interventions to sustain participation into adolescence and adulthood.

Dependants evidence / information:

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides further evidence on participation in sport among individuals with caring responsibilities. This data helps identify the impact of dependants on levels of participation, particularly for parents of young children, lone parents, and carers of disabled or older relatives.

Data is available at:
[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

Consultation for the Corporate Plan further reinforced how caring responsibilities create a significant barrier to regular participation, particularly for women. Issues raised include:

- Lack of affordable childcare.
- Timetabling of sessions, which may not be compatible with family schedules.
- Limited availability of family-friendly sport and physical activity options.

Source: [Equality Impact Assessment – Sport NI Corporate Plan](#)

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

Specify details of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

Religious belief

Continuous Household Survey Participation

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides the most recent data on participation in sport across different religious backgrounds in Northern Ireland. According to the survey:

- 46% of people identifying as Catholic participated in sport at least once in the previous seven days.
- 47% of people identifying as Protestant participated in sport at least once in the previous seven days.
- 56% of people identifying as 'Other' or having no religion participated in sport at least once in the previous seven days.

Source: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#)

Research Insights and Consultation Feedback

Evidence from the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Sport NI's Corporate Plan references a 2016 study (Mitchell, Somerville & Hargie) on Sport and Social Exclusion. This research found:

- Strong public support (86%) for the principle of sport as a peacebuilding tool in Northern Ireland.
- Both Protestant and Catholic communities expressed a desire for sports to become more mixed in terms of participation and support bases.

Source: [Equality-Impact-Assessment-Sport-NI-Corporate-Plan.pdf](#) Through Sport NI's extensive public consultation for the 2021-2026 Corporate Plan, further religious and cultural considerations were identified:

- Religious and cultural practices impact participation, particularly for some women and girls from specific faith backgrounds.
- Issues raised included the need for:
 - Female-only sessions for activities such as gym classes and swimming.
 - Private changing facilities for those unable to use communal spaces.

- The need for dedicated development officers to support participation within culturally diverse communities, helping sustain engagement and facilitate progression within sport.

Inclusive Provision and Facility Access

The Department for Communities (DfC) screening of the Active Living Strategy reinforces these priorities, highlighting:

- Facility access at times that respect religious observances.
- Programming of gender-specific sessions to align with religious and cultural requirements.

Sport NI also acknowledges that community background continues to influence sporting preferences and participation. This reality should inform the allocation of resources and the design of inclusive programmes. Further, Sport NI respects the personal choice of athletes in relation to national representation, recognising the diverse identities within Northern Ireland's sporting landscape

Political Opinion

Historical Context and Evolving Trends

The EQIA for Sport NI's Corporate Plan references evidence (Mitchell, Somerville & Hargie, 2016) that highlights the historical politicisation of sport in Northern Ireland, where certain sports became associated with particular political, religious and cultural identities.

However, this research also found emerging evidence that the politicisation of sport may be gradually weakening, with some sports becoming more cross-community in character.

Consultation Feedback and Strategic Priorities

Through consultation on Sport NI's Corporate Plan (2021-2026) and the Department for Communities' Active Living Strategy, the following needs and experiences were identified for people of differing political opinions:

- Neutral and accessible facilities: Facilities should be seen as welcoming to all and free from political or sectarian symbolism that could discourage participation.
- Safe and inclusive environments: Participants highlighted the importance of feeling safe and secure when using facilities, venues, and open spaces.
- Avoidance of territorial markings: Facilities should be free from flags, emblems, murals, or other territorial markers that could alienate potential users.

Sport NI also recognises the importance of respecting personal choice in relation to international representation, acknowledging that some athletes may choose to represent Northern Ireland, Ireland, or the UK — and that this choice should be fully supported within the system.

Racial Group

Current Evidence and Research Insights

Sport NI, alongside the other Home Country Sports Councils, commissioned an extensive quantitative and qualitative research programme to better understand racial inequalities and racism in sport across the UK. This resulted in two key reports:

- “Tell Your Story” (2021) – capturing the lived experiences of people from ethnically diverse communities within sport, highlighting racism, microaggressions and structural inequalities.
- “Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport” (TRARIIS) – bringing together existing data to map inequalities in participation, representation, and experience within sport and physical activity.

Headline Findings:

- People from ethnically diverse backgrounds consistently report lower participation rates in sport and physical activity compared to White British/White Irish populations.
- Structural and cultural barriers, including language barriers, lack of visible role models, experiences of overt racism and microaggressions, contribute to lower engagement.
- Inequalities exist across all levels of sport – from grassroots participation through to elite performance and leadership roles.
- The research identified five common themes for action, which guide Sport NI’s approach:
 - Representation and Leadership
 - Embedding Anti-Racism
 - Education and Cultural Awareness
 - Data and Insight
 - Systems and Accountability

Sources:

- [Tell Your Story](#)
- [Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport](#)
- [5 Common Themes for Action](#)

CSPPA 2022 found at primary and post-primary school level, reported participation in community sport differed significantly by ethnicity (primary: Northern Irish, Irish or British = 75% vs other nationalities= 60%, post-primary: Northern Irish, Irish or British = 72% vs other nationalities = 62%).

Consultation Feedback and Community Insights

Through consultation on Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2021-2026 ('The Power of Sport'), alongside the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for the Plan, the needs, experiences and priorities of ethnically diverse communities were explored in greater detail.

Key messages from consultation included:

- **Inclusive Culture:**
Participants highlighted the need for a genuinely open, welcoming and inclusive sporting culture that actively promotes wellbeing and inclusion, rather than simply expecting participation.
- **Cultural and Language Barriers:**
Stakeholders proposed practical tools to overcome cultural and language barriers, including:
 - A multi-language app to support signposting, tailored to different confidence levels, sports and local club options.
 - Welcome videos from relatable participants to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions around sport being elite-focused.
- **Tackling Racism and Bias:**
Participants reported both blatant racism and subtle microaggressions in sporting environments. This aligns with the findings of the TRARIIS research and further emphasises the need for:
 - Anti-racism training for clubs, officials and coaches.
 - Stronger policies and enforcement mechanisms to challenge discrimination when it occurs.
- **Targeted Development and Pathways:**
Feedback highlighted the need for culturally diverse development officers, who can act as bridges between communities and the sporting system, helping build trust and sustained engagement.
- **Affordability and Accessibility:**
Cost was consistently raised as a barrier to participation. This includes not only membership fees, but also kit, equipment and transport costs.
Clubs and governing bodies were encouraged to explore more flexible pricing structures and targeted outreach programmes to remove these barriers.
- **Pathways to Leadership and Representation:**
Feedback highlighted the lack of ethnically diverse representation within coaching, officiating and governance roles. Clear pathways to leadership were seen as essential, alongside targeted mentoring and outreach.
- **'Who You Know' Culture:**
A strong theme across consultations was frustration at the informal networks that often shape access to development and leadership opportunities within Northern Ireland sport. More transparent recruitment and targeted outreach to ethnically diverse communities were identified as a critical priority.

Broader Strategic Alignment

The Sport NI EQIA also referenced the Sport England “Sport for All” study (2020), which provides further evidence that:

- Different ethnic communities have diverse needs and preferences, which should inform programme design.
- People’s experiences are shaped by multiple factors, including age, gender, disability, faith, sexual orientation — meaning solutions must account for these intersecting identities.
- Systemic change requires collective action across the whole sporting system, not just at club or governing body level.

Source: [‘Sport for all’ highlights ethnicity gap in sport | Sport England](#)

Age

Sport NI has reviewed a range of research and data to understand how age affects people’s participation in sport and physical activity. Key sources include the 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey, the Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2022 (CSPPA), and the Kids Life and Times (KLT) and Young Life and Times (YLT) surveys 2023 and The Children’s Report Card 2022.

What we know from the data:

(CHS 2023/24) In 2023/24, adults aged 45 and over were less likely to have participated in any sport within the last year (37%) or within the last 4 weeks (32%) compared to adults aged 16-44 years (64% and 55% respectively). More detailed analysis of sport participation in the last year by age group shows no difference between adults aged 16-24 years (72%) and adults aged 25-34 years (67%). The participation rate decreased for those aged 35-44 years (59%) and was similar for those aged 45-54 years (55%). The participation rate then decreased with each subsequent age group to 26% of those aged 65 and over.

Similarly, when looking at participation rates over the last 4 weeks, two-thirds of adults aged 16-24 (66%) had taken part in sport compared to just over a fifth of adults aged 65 and over (22%).

Sport preferences amongst younger and older adults

Adults aged 16-44 years were more likely to have participated in 9 out of the 12 sports listed compared to those aged 45 and over in the last year. The sports where there was no significant difference in participation between the age groups include “Golf or pitch and putt”, “Bowls or tenpin bowling” and “Angling or fishing”.

When looking at participation in sport over the last 4 weeks, the results were similar. However, a higher proportion of adults aged 45 and over had participated in “Golf or pitch and putt” or “Bowls or tenpin bowling” in the last 4 weeks compared to those aged under 45.

Age and Sport participation trends

Generally speaking participation in sport decreases with age. This is especially true beyond the 45-54 age group with lower proportions from successive age groups

participating in sport within the previous year. Over the trend period adults aged 16-24 years have consistently been the most likely to participate in sport while those aged 65 years and over have been the least likely to participate in sport.

(CSPPA 2022) Seventeen percent (17%) of students in Northern Ireland report participating in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity a day (21% primary and 16% post-primary students). These proportions are higher than in 2018, when 13% reported being active daily (20% primary and 11% post-primary students). Forty-four percent (44%) of primary and 42% of post-primary school students report meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines. This was measured for the first time in 2022.

Seventy-three percent (73%) of primary and 71% of post-primary school students reported participating in community sport at least once a week, compared to 65% and 49% respectively in 2018. The proportion of post-primary school students who reported never participating in community sport decreased from 47% in 2018 to 16% in 2022.

Ninety-two percent (92%) of primary and 76% of post-primary school students reported participating in school sport at least once a week. This represented an increase at both primary (65%) and post-primary school (58%) levels since 2018.

Eight percent (8%) of primary and 20% of post-primary school students reported meeting the Physical Education guidelines of at least 120 minutes/week. In 2018, 40% of postprimary students reported meeting the guidelines and this was not reported for primary school students.

Forty percent (40%) of primary and 18% of post-primary school students reported active travel to or from school. This represents an increase at primary school level (36%) and the proportions remain unchanged for post-primary school students since 2018.

There was an age-related decline in reported community sport participation at post-primary level.

(The 2022 Ireland North and South Report Card on physical activity for Children and Adolescents) has shown we are making progress in relation to children's PA across the island of Ireland. Positive trends observed across a number of indicators. Grades for three indicators ('Overall PA', 'School' and 'Physical Education') increased.

Two indicators ('Family and Peers' and 'Government') were assigned a grade for the first time, having previously been graded as 'Incomplete'.

The majority of grades remained unchanged for other indicators.

'Physical Fitness' was included as a new indicator in this edition of the Report Card but was graded as 'Incomplete'.

The availability of new data sources which have collated data on an all-island basis are valuable in adding to the evidence base around PA levels among children and young people.

As with previous editions of the Report Card, there were difficulties aligning data to the proposed benchmarks, primarily due to either the phrasing of questions, or the reporting of findings.

Grades on disability were included for the first time. Eight indicators were graded. Three indicators, 'Active Play', 'Physical Fitness', and 'Physical Education' were graded as 'Incomplete'.

When data specific to disability were compared to the overall grades, grades were generally lower for each indicator with the exception of Family and Peers, where the grade was higher.

In summary, sport participation declines as people get older, particularly between primary and post-primary school. Boys are more likely to meet this target than girls. Participation rates are lower for children with disabilities and children from minority ethnic backgrounds.

What older people told us:

- They want more adapted sports like walking football, table tennis and bowls.
- Transport, costs and lack of local facilities are big barriers, especially in rural areas.
- Better communication and promotion of activities is needed.
- Feeling self-conscious about going to classes alone puts people off.
- Health concerns, lack of changing facilities and digital barriers (for online classes) also affect participation.
- There is strong support for fun, social and non-competitive activities.
- Linking with initiatives like Age Friendly programmes and ensuring sports facilities meet accessibility standards was highlighted.

What children and young people told us:

- There is strong demand for better quality PE in schools, with more focus on skill development and physical literacy, not just competition.
- Early focus on competitive sports leaves many children feeling excluded.
- School-to-club pathways need to improve to help children stay involved.
- After-school activities are often unaffordable for low-income families.
- Young people want a wider range of sports and more adventure-style activities, especially in rural areas.
- Transport, self-confidence, and stereotypes around which sports are for boys or girls are barriers.
- 17/18-year-olds feel there are fewer suitable activities for them locally.

What parents, early years staff and community workers told us:

- Early years play and fundamental movement skills are crucial but often overlooked.
- Many parents lack the knowledge or confidence to encourage physical activity at home.
- Financial pressures, lack of local support, and digital exclusion all affect family participation.
- Outdoor play and using natural environments should be encouraged, but weather is often seen as a barrier.
- Costs of clothing, equipment and club fees can exclude families.
- There's a need for better partnerships between clubs, schools and local community groups to offer low-cost options.
- Messaging should focus on fun, health and wellbeing rather than competition.

In

summary:

There is clear evidence that participation levels change across the life course, with steep declines during adolescence and into adulthood. Different age groups face distinct barriers,

from the cost of after-school sport for children, to transport and health concerns for older adults. The consultation highlighted strong support for improving PE in schools, providing affordable community sport for all ages, and ensuring that messaging, facilities and programmes are truly inclusive.

Marital status

Overview

The 2022/23 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) gathered data on participation in sport. Findings related to marital status are available in the published tables: [engagement-culture-arts-heritage-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202223.xlsx \(live.com\)](#).

Participation levels by marital status were as follows:

- Married / Cohabiting: 50%
- Single: 52%
- Widowed: 21%
- Separated / Divorced: 36%

More recent data from the 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) indicates:

- 51% of married people had participated in sport within the previous 7 days.
- 54% of single people had participated in sport within the previous 7 days.

Needs, Experiences and Priorities

The Department for Communities' screening assessment on the Active Living Strategy highlights several factors affecting participation across different marital status groups:

- Access to facilities at times that fit around family and work commitments.
 - Encouraging parental involvement in children's sports and physical activity.
 - Childcare issues are a significant barrier for many parents, particularly those in dual-working households.
 - Cost is a limiting factor, particularly for those on lower incomes.
-

Sexual orientation

Overview

There remains a lack of robust data on the sexual orientation of those participating in sport in Northern Ireland.

However, the Sport NI Corporate Plan consultation highlighted important insights:

“There is an invisibility of narrative around trans inclusion and sexuality, a lack of athletes comfortable to come out, and cultural normalisation of homophobic microaggressions and both reported and unreported hate crime. These factors present serious barriers to accessibility within the sporting system. Single-identity teams exist, but they often struggle to sustain themselves.”

Key Research and Evidence Sources

In preparing the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for the Corporate Plan, Sport NI reviewed academic and other relevant sources on LGBTQIA+ experiences in sport, including:

- (2016) *OUTstanding in your field: Exploring the needs of LGB&T people in rural Northern Ireland*, Rainbow Project.
- (2015) *Through Our Eyes: Housing and homelessness experiences of LGBT people in Northern Ireland*, Rainbow Project & Council for the Homeless NI.
- (2013) *Through Our Minds: Emotional health and wellbeing of LGBT people in Northern Ireland*, Malachai O'Hara.
- (2012) *Multiple Identity; Multiple Exclusions and Human Rights*, Disability Action & Rainbow Project.
- (2012) *All Partied Out: Substance use in Northern Ireland's LGBT community*, Eoin Rooney.
- (2011) *Making this Home my Home: Inclusive nursing/residential care for older LGBT people*, AgeNI & Rainbow Project.
- (2011) *Left Out Of The Equation: Experiences of LGB young people at school*, Gavin Boyd.
- (2011) *Through Our Eyes: Experiences of LGB people in the workplace*, Matthew McDermott.
- (2009) *Through Our Eyes: Perceptions and experiences of LGB people towards homophobic hate crime and policing*, John O'Doherty.

Needs, Experiences and Priorities

Findings from the Department for Communities Active Living Strategy screening assessment (through pre-consultation focus groups) further illustrate the barriers faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in sport:

- The need for exclusive access sessions for LGBTQ+ participants and appropriate changing facilities.
- A lack of understanding and awareness of LGBTQ+ needs within the sport sector.
- LGBTQ+ participants often feel they need to belong to be motivated to join groups — many feel isolated because of their sexual orientation.
- Fears of judgement at facilities such as gyms.
- Transphobic abuse experienced during outdoor exercise, with some feeling safer walking in different areas.
- Transgender inclusion is a cross-sport issue, requiring sector-wide consideration.
- Separate sessions with dedicated changing facilities for trans participants were requested.

Findings from Sport NI Corporate Plan Consultation

The public consultation on Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2021-2026 reinforced these insights:

- Marginalised and under-represented groups consistently emphasised the need for an open, welcoming, inclusive sporting culture, one that promotes wellbeing.
- Many felt this welcoming culture does not currently exist across the sporting landscape.

- Specific solutions proposed by focus groups (including the Celebrating Diversity Panel, Young Persons Panel, and Women’s Panel) will be integrated into future plans.

Developing the Sporting System

Innovative ideas emerged through creative discussions with culturally diverse groups, including the concept of a translated app. This app would:

- Allow users to select their preferred language, sport, and confidence level.
- Signpost users to inclusive clubs.
- Feature welcome videos from relatable participants to break down perceptions of exclusivity and competitiveness.

Organisations such as Stonewall, Rainbow Project, and Sporting Mermaids supported the idea of clubs actively indicating their LGBTQ+ inclusivity via this app.

The invisibility of trans and LGBTQ+ narratives within sport, coupled with a lack of visible role models, creates systemic barriers. Sport NI is now working with Stonewall, the Rainbow Project, and Sporting Mermaids through their Ambassadors Programme, building training and education tools for the sector, as well as storytelling campaigns to increase empathy and awareness.

People Development

LGBTQ+ groups (along with others) reported a significant lack of signposting to development opportunities — reinforcing Northern Ireland’s perceived ‘who you know’ culture. Outreach via non-traditional channels was suggested to better engage underrepresented communities.

Connected Communities

Focus groups raised further concerns, particularly around:

- Racist and homophobic aggressions in sport — both blatant and subtle microaggressions.
- Outing of young people/athletes transitioning.
- Wheelchair athletes being deemed health and safety risks in some school settings.

These experiences reinforce the need for proactive, ongoing work to foster an inclusive and welcoming sporting environment.

Men and Women Generally

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) examined participation in sport by gender. Findings are available in the report: [Engagement in Culture, Arts, Heritage & Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2022/23](#).

In 2023/24, women (44%) were less likely to have taken part in sport at least once within the last year than men (58%). Similarly, when looking at participation rates over the previous four weeks, just under two-fifths of women (38%) stated that they had taken part in sport compared to just over half of all men (51%). Furthermore, men were more likely to be a member of a sports club than women (35% and 18% respectively).
Sport preferences of men and women

There were differences in the types of sports men and women participated in within the last year. Compared with women, a higher proportion of men participated in 8 of the 12 sports listed in the survey. Sports with the most notable differences include 'Football', 'Cycling for recreation', 'Golf or pitch and putt' and 'Jogging/running'.

Women were more likely than men to have participated in two of the 12 sports listed. These were 'Keep fit/aerobics/yoga/dance exercise/weight training' and 'Swimming or diving'.

There were no differences between men and women for 'Bowls, indoor or outdoor' and 'Racket sports (tennis, badminton, squash)'.

Sport participation and gender trends

- Throughout the entire trend period a higher proportion of men participated in sport than women year on year. The same trend is seen when looking at sport participation over the last 4 weeks. Full findings available here: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

The Children's Report Card 2022 fundings highlighted the need to continue to develop policy measures that address inequalities highlighted in the report across a range of determinants including disability, gender, socioeconomic status, and age impact on children and adolescent PA levels.

CSPPA 2022 noted for both primary and post-primary level, a greater percentage of boys participated in 60 minutes of physical activity on a daily basis compared to girls. Reported daily physical activity levels for primary school girls decreased from 19% in 2018 to 16% in 2022. Levels of physical activity were higher for boys at both school levels and for girls at post-primary level in 2022 compared to 2018. The greatest difference was in post-primary boys which increased from 14% to 22%. At primary school level, self-reported physical activity levels only differed by gender, with boys the most physically active. At post-primary level, self-reported daily physical activity levels differed significantly by gender, school location, disability status, socio-economic status, percentage of free school meals and age group.

The WHO physical activity guidelines include a recommendation for children and adolescents to incorporate activities that strengthen muscle and bone on at least three days per week [3]. Overall, 44% of primary and 42% of postprimary school students participated in muscle strengthening activities on at least three days per week. At both primary and post-primary level, there was a significant difference in meeting the guidelines by gender, with a greater percentage of boys meeting the guidelines. Over half of boys in primary and post-primary school meet the guidelines.

There was no significant difference in community sport participation by gender at primary school level. At post-primary level, a significantly higher percentage of boys (73%) reported participating in community sports at least once a week than girls (70%) or students who identify as other (50%).

Soccer (57%), swimming (34%), Gaelic football (30%) and cycling (29%) were the most commonly reported sports for boys. Swimming (36%), dance (36%), Gaelic football (30%) and gymnastics (30%) were the most commonly reported sports for primary school girls.

Soccer (36%), swimming (27%), Gaelic football (27%), weight training (26%) and cycling (25%) were the five most commonly reported sports for postprimary boys. Swimming (36%), dance (25%), Gaelic football (24%), camogie (23%) and cycling (23%) were the top five sports for post-primary school girls.

Soccer (50%), Gaelic football (22%), basketball (23%), athletics (17%) and rugby (17%) were the most popular with post-primary school boys. For post-primary school girls, netball (19%),

Gaelic football (18%), soccer (17%), hockey (16%) and athletics (15%) were the most commonly reported sports.

Overall, soccer (47%), basketball (27%), Gaelic football (25%), swimming (24%) and athletics (20%) were the five most popular primary school sports in 2022 (Table 10.7). The top five sports were the same for both boys and girls, although in a different order.

Soccer (33%) and Gaelic football (20%) were the two most commonly reported post-primary school sports in 2022. Soccer (50%), Gaelic football (22%), basketball (23%), athletics (17%) and rugby (17%) were the most popular with post-primary school boys. For post-primary school girls, netball (19%), Gaelic football (18%), soccer (17%), hockey (16%) and athletics (15%) were the most commonly reported sports.

Sport NI completed a **desk based review** of the data that exists on women in sport in 2022 and this is attached at appendix A.

Sporting System Investment – Women’s Focus Group Findings:

Women’s focus groups identified the need for gender-specific approaches to participation:

- Inactive girls are more influenced by friends and social media; therefore, initial activities must align with their existing social habits.
- Lack of confidence and competence (physical literacy) was a barrier, with issues stemming from both school PE and traditional club environments.
- Women preferred flexible, family-friendly club offerings rather than rigid competitive structures.
- Greater visibility of relatable female role models, particularly on social media, is needed.
- Short-term funded projects were deemed ineffective in driving sustained change.

High Performance – Women’s Pathway Challenges

Women’s groups also highlighted barriers in the high-performance pathway:

- Lack of female role models in performance and coaching roles.
- Need for empathetic coaching, life skills training, and post-athlete career support.
- Low media coverage of female athletes reduces visibility and aspiration.

People Development – Addressing the Coaching Gap

There is a clear need to develop coach education to:

- Recognise women’s different learning styles.
- Embed empathetic, athlete-centred coaching approaches.
- Improve safeguarding and wellbeing provisions, particularly in female sports.

Remove barriers to female coaching and volunteering, such as rigid qualification processes and time commitments.

Department for Communities – Active Living Strategy

The **Department for Communities' screening assessment** of the **Active Living Strategy** identified specific needs for men and women, summarised below.

Common Needs for Both Genders:

- Safe, affordable, welcoming facilities.
- Wide range of sports and opening hours.
- Clear coaching pathways and opportunities for progression.
- Innovative use of technology to support engagement.

Gender-Specific Needs and Priorities

Women:

- Increased visibility of female role models.
- Challenge unconscious bias in clubs to ensure equal opportunities.
- Targeted recruitment and training of female coaches.
- Address transport barriers and rural access issues.
- Improved promotion and advertising of available opportunities.
- Build confidence and self-esteem, especially in gym and changing environments.
- Encourage buddy systems for new participants.
- Address family/work/time commitments.
- Combat societal attitudes towards women in sport.
- Provide women-only swimming/exercise classes.
- Use local, community-based venues rather than large leisure centres.
- Align exercise opportunities with children's activities so parents can participate too.
- Encourage GPs to prescribe physical activity.
- Offer non-competitive, social or fun-based activities.
- Empower women to prioritise their health without guilt.
- Emphasise lifelong participation over competitive success at school level.
- Maximise use of local outdoor spaces and school facilities.
- Expand successful community initiatives such as Couch to 5K and parkrun.
- Develop tailored classes for women with limited mobility.

Men:

- Recognition that not all men are active and some face significant barriers.
- Stronger link between physical activity and health prevention.
- Specific focus on men transitioning into retirement to avoid isolation.
- Address lack of confidence and motivation.
- Use sport as a vehicle for tackling social isolation and mental health.
- Rebrand sport-based interventions as "activities" to reduce intimidation.
- Improve rural facilities (walking paths, lighting).
- Address facility availability and access in disadvantaged areas.
- Improve access to GP referral schemes at affordable rates.
- Encourage greater community use of stadiums and elite sports facilities.

- Foster partnerships between Men's Sheds and sports clubs to promote physical activity.
 - Ensure programmes are long-term rather than short interventions.
 - Embed mental health support into physical activity initiatives.
-

Disability

NISRA Continuous Household Survey (CHS) found that in 2023/24, adults who have a disability were less likely to have taken part in sport at least once within the last year (30%) compared with those who do not have a disability (59%). A similar disparity was found when participation rates over the last four weeks were considered, with just under a quarter of those with a disability (23%) having taken part in sport compared to over half of adults who do not have a disability (53%). Furthermore, a lower proportion of adults with a disability were members of a sports club compared to those who do not have a disability (13% and 32% respectively).

Disability and age are closely related. On balance, the older we become, the more likely we are to have a disability. Compounded with the projections by NISRA of an increasingly aging population, the focus on disability inclusion is critical for Sport NI. Results have also shown that age and sport participation are negatively correlated, as we get older, the less likely we are to participate in sport. Considering age and disability, NISRA CHS analysis was conducted on broad age groups under 50 years and 50 years and over. The results show that both younger and older adults who have a disability were less likely to participate in sport within the previous year than those who do not have a disability. This suggests that irrespective of age, disability negatively affects the likelihood of adults participating in sport. When participation rates over the last four weeks were considered, the results were similar.

In 2023/24, three in every ten adults with a disability (30%) participated in sport at least once within the last year, an increase on the 2022/23 figure of 26%. Similar proportions of adults with a disability took part in sport in the previous four weeks when compared with 2022/23 (23% and 21% respectively). The gap in sport participation rates between adults who have a disability and those who do not have a disability has remained fairly consistent over the trend period.

The Children's Sport and Physical Activity Survey 2022 ([CSPPA 2022 Report – CSPPA.ie](https://www.csppe.ie)) found that disabled pupils/students experienced lower average hours of PE per week at primary (5 minutes lower) and post-primary (two minutes lower). The percentage of students who took part in 60 minutes of daily physical activity was 9% lower at primary school and 2% lower at post-primary school for disabled pupils/students. The percentage meeting the PE guidelines was 5% lower at primary school and 1% lower at post primary school for disabled pupils and students. School sport participation per week for disabled primary pupils (7% lower) and disabled post primary students (8% lower) was lower. There was an over-representation of non-swimmers with a disability at primary and post-primary school levels.

Students with disabilities (54%) also received less coaching than those without disability (70%). Community sports participation at least once a week was 14% lower for disabled primary school pupils and 15% lower for disabled post primary school students. Participation in any sport at least once a week in school or community setting was 5% lower at primary school and 10% lower at post primary school for disabled pupils/students. However, the percentage of disabled students who volunteered in community sport in last seven days and last 12 months was higher for disabled pupils at primary school (by 8%) and post-primary school (by 1%).

The Kids Life and Times ([Kids' Life and Times - Sport module](#)) and Young People Life and Times Survey 2023 ([Young Life and Times Survey: Sport](#)) also note an under-representation in sport by disabled young people. The Children's Report Card ([Ireland-report-card-short-form-2022.pdf](#)) in 2022 used grades on disability for the first time. Eight indicators were graded. Three indicators, 'Active Play', 'Physical Fitness', and 'Physical Education' were graded as 'Incomplete'. When data specific to disability were compared to the overall grades, grades were generally lower for each indicator with the exception of Family and Peers, where the grade was higher.

The UK Coaching Survey found that in NI that 16% of Active coaches are disabled or have a long-term health condition. In the wider UK findings, just under 1 in 4 (23%) of Active coaches have a disability or long-term health condition. Active coaches with a disability/longterm health condition are more likely to hold an official coaching qualification (59% vs 53%), and they are also more likely to be aged 55 and over (17% vs 13% UK average) and from lower social grades (39% vs 33%). Compared to Active Coaches as a whole, those with a disability/long term health condition are more likely to be paid (57% vs 53%) and report that coaching is their primary occupation (21% vs 12%) Active coaches with a disability/long term health condition are more likely to coach racket games (21% vs 16%) than Active Coaches as a whole, and to do so at sports clubs (39% vs 34%) and Local Authority leisure centres (16% vs 13%); however, they are less likely to coach children aged 5-9 (21% vs 25%) and aged 10-13 (21% vs 26%) • Finally, active coaches with a disability/long term health condition are more likely to provide coaching support (34% vs 26% UK average) and have access to support (58% vs 53%) compared to Active Coaches as a whole, while those without are more likely to report both of these.

The **Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (2015)** examined sports provision for disabled people and found that disabled adults were far less likely to engage in regular physical activity than their non-disabled peers (19% compared to 37%).

Barriers and Challenges

Disability Sport NI (DSNI) has highlighted the complex range of factors contributing to lower participation rates among disabled people. These include:

- The lasting negative impact of COVID-19 on participation habits.
- Reduced provision of disability-specific sports opportunities by District Councils.
- Disruption to Governing Body programmes during the pandemic.
- Financial pressures due to the cost-of-living crisis, making it harder for disabled people to afford participation fees and travel costs.

DSNI expressed particular concern about this decline, as it follows a period of steady progress up to 2019/20 when disabled sports participation was at its highest. This progress had been driven by targeted programmes delivered by Sport NI, District Councils, and Governing Bodies across Northern Ireland.

Consultation Feedback and Recommendations

Consultation on **Sport NI's 2021-2026 Corporate Plan: The Power of Sport**, and the Department for Communities' screening assessment on the **Active Living Strategy**, identified several critical themes from the disability sector:

- Marginalised and under-represented groups, including disabled people, stressed the need for an open, welcoming, inclusive sporting culture, which promotes both wellness and wellbeing.
- Participants reported that many sports environments still feel unwelcoming and inaccessible.
- There was evidence of **underreporting** of disability, meaning some disabled people's needs may go unrecognised in sport participation data.
- A **targeted focus on inactive people** (rather than just those identifying as disabled) was seen as a more effective engagement strategy.
- Inconsistent accessibility support across Councils was noted, with accessibility provisions appearing to decline in recent years as capital asset management became a higher priority.
- There were calls for a more **diverse leadership** within sports organisations, noting that cognitive bias at Board and committee level can perpetuate exclusion.
- Limited **data quality and granularity** on disability participation makes it harder to design effective policies and programmes.
- The importance of **advocacy, awareness raising, storytelling, training, and the integration of inclusivity requirements into funding criteria** was strongly emphasised.

Specific Needs and Barriers

The **Department for Communities screening assessment** on the **Active Living Strategy** further highlighted several specific needs and barriers for disabled people:

- Tailored approaches for different types of disability — physical, mental health, sensory, and learning disabilities.
- **Transport and accessibility barriers**, especially in rural areas.
- **Financial barriers**, including the cost of public transport and sports services — with community-based options seen as more accessible.
- Lack of awareness and **poor promotion** of available services and opportunities.
- **Low confidence, motivation and self-esteem**, along with fears of being judged, create psychological barriers to participation.
- The importance of **peer support** — disabled people were more likely to engage if attending with someone they know.
- The need for **advocates or support workers** to help individuals build motivation and confidence to take part.

Dependants

The 2022/23 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) also gathered data on sporting participation levels among adults with dependants. Findings are available in the associated data tables: [Engagement in Culture, Arts, Heritage & Sport by Adults in NI 2022/23](#).

In 2022/23, participation rates were slightly higher among adults with dependants (50%) compared to adults without dependants (46%).

In 2023/24, this gap widened slightly, with 54% of adults with dependants participating in sport, compared to 49% of those without dependants.

This indicates that having dependants is not necessarily a barrier to participation in sport, and may in some cases act as a motivator, potentially linked to family-based or child-led activity programmes. However, further exploration is needed to understand the nature of these activities and whether they provide meaningful opportunities for sustained engagement.

Part 2. Screening questions

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4 which are given on pages 66-68 of this Guide.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

- a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
- b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
- c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
- d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
- e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
- f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

- a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
- b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;

- c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
- d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

- a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
- b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?

Please provide details of the likely policy impacts and determine the level of impact for each S75 categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Age**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Marital Status**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Sexual Orientation**:

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Men and Women**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / ~~Major~~ / ~~None~~ (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Disability**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Dependants**:

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories? Yes/No

Engage Her project will support participating groups to undertake consultation with women and girls in their local community from a range of these categories, gathering insight from those with lived experience on how local clubs can better promote opportunities for individuals from this background. The clubs will then be supported to develop an engagement action plan based on this insight, and the grant funding will support them to take the practical steps necessary to ensure greater inclusion and promote opportunities.

Detail opportunities of how this policy could promote equality of opportunity for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief - If Yes, provide details: Participating clubs will be from a range of religious and community backgrounds, and Sported will share key learning from all groups and encourage peer-support amongst this cohort. Participating clubs will be supported to consult with women & girls from within their local community from all religious backgrounds and make practical changes within the club setting to meet the needs of these individuals

If No, provide reasons:

Political Opinion - If Yes, provide details: As above, clubs will be supported to undertake consultation with a range of women & girls from their local community, which will include those of differing political opinion. They will be supported to consider any practical actions they can undertake to ensure inclusion of all.

If No, provide reasons

Racial Group - If Yes, provide details: Clubs will be supported to consult with individuals from different racial/cultural backgrounds to better understand how to promote their club and activities to individuals from this category. The grant funding may be used to support this – e.g. ensuring kit meets cultural requirements or providing a space within their venue for individuals for any religious/racial practices.

If No, provide reasons

Age - If Yes, provide details: The Engage Her training programme will share insight and research on engaging women and girls in sport at various life stages – from early teens and puberty, through to periods, menopause and being active in later life. Groups will be supported to consult with women and girls from a wide age range, and make practical changes based on this insight to increase inclusion at all ages. Actions may include providing period packs or developing ‘social sport’ activities, rather than competitive sessions.

If No, provide reasons:

Marital Status - If Yes, provide details: The programme will share insight and research around engaging women from all marital status and support clubs to consider programming to meet local need, ascertained through consultation.

If No, provide reasons

Sexual Orientation - If Yes, provide details: The consultation exercises carried out by participating groups may include those from different sexual orientation, and consider any practical changes that are required for the club to ensure inclusion. For example, the club may be supported to review their changing facilities, policies or signage within their venue.

If No, provide reasons:

Men and Women generally - If Yes, provide details: While the Engage Her programme has a specific focus on engaging women and girls, the training sessions will be delivered to both men and women in leadership positions within the grassroots clubs. This will upskill both men and women around the insight related to women and girls engagement, encouraging more women into sport and supporting men to be allies of this engagement.

If No, provide reasons:

Disability - If Yes, provide details: The consultations carried out by participating clubs may include individuals living with a disability. Participating clubs will be supported to apply this insight, making any practical changes within their club's deliver to ensure inclusion and promote opportunities, or to partner with relevant local organisations who can do so.

If No, provide reasons:

Dependants - If Yes, provide details: The programme will support local grassroots clubs to consult with individuals with dependents, either through existing clubs links or by facilitating partnership with local groups – women's group, mums and tots group. Club leaders will be supported to develop an engagement plan to increase inclusion of these individuals. For example, the grant funding may be used to facilitate sessions for mothers while their kids are participating in existing sessions, or to establish social activity sessions for single mums & their children.

If No, provide reasons:

3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Please provide details of the likely policy impact and determine the level of impact for each of the categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None** (circle as appropriate)

Whilst this programme positively impacts upon Women including intersectionality with religious belief, political opinion and racial group, given the level of investment of £2k per club, this is likely to be "none".

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief - If Yes, provide details: Participating clubs will be from a range of religious and community backgrounds, and Sported will share key learning from all groups and encourage peer-support amongst this cohort. Participating clubs will be supported to consult with women & girls from within their local community from all religious backgrounds and make practical changes within the club setting to meet the needs of these individuals

If No, provide reasons:

Political Opinion - If Yes, provide details: As above, clubs will be supported to undertake consultation with a range of women & girls from their local community, which will include those of

differing political opinion. They will be supported to consider any practical actions they can undertake to ensure inclusion of all.

If No, provide reasons

Racial Group - If Yes, provide details: Clubs will be supported to consult with individuals from different racial/cultural backgrounds to better understand how to promote their club and activities to individuals from this category. The grant funding may be used to support this – e.g. ensuring kit meets cultural requirements or providing a space within their venue for individuals for any religious/racial practices.

If No, provide reasons

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

Given the nature of the programme, the participating clubs and organisations will consult and work with women from across the intersectional groups. The programme will therefore benefit women from different religious beliefs, women with different political opinions, women from catholic and protestant communities, women from different ethnic backgrounds, older women, young women, married women, divorced women, single women, younger and older women from across the LGBTQ+ community, women with disabilities, women from urban and rural communities, women with children and caring responsibilities.

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

The programme explicitly recognises the importance of intersectionality. It addresses the compound barriers faced by, for example, disabled women, ethnic minority mothers, LGBTQ+ teenagers, or older women in rural areas. Programmes are encouraged to disaggregate data, tailor interventions to lived experience, and ensure no one is left behind due to overlapping inequalities.

Part 3. Screening decision

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced - please provide details.

N/A

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

While no adverse impact have been identified, a minor positive impact for women has been identified and on advice from Equality Commission NI, an EQIA is completed.

All public authorities' equality schemes must state the authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Commission publication: Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment.

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

If so, **give the reasons** to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

N/A

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been '**screened in**' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	2
Social need	2
Effect on people's daily lives	3
Relevance to a public authority's functions	1

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

If yes, please provide details.

N/A

Part 4. Monitoring

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, the public authority should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Effective monitoring will help the public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by: Christine Rea
Position/Job Title: Sport Developer
Date: 15.10.25

Approved by: Rebecca Hope
Position/Job Title: Interim Director of Sport
Date: 30/10/25

Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.

Appendix A – A desk based review of the evidence of women in sport



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