A generation missing out

Global trends in adolescent physical activity, 2010–2025



World Health Organization

Introduction

Physical activity is essential for adolescent health, well-being and development. It supports healthy growth, promotes physical and mental well-being and helps establish habits that often continue into adulthood.

Yet the latest global evidence showed that too many adolescents are missing out on these benefits. Important inequalities in participation persist, girls remain less active than boys and global progress has stalled over the past 15 years. The consequences extend beyond just physical health, as regular physical activity benefits brain health, learning, self-confidence, social participation and future well-being (see ***Box 1***).

Box 1. ***Multiple benefits of regular physical activity throughout adolescence***

Benefits now

- better physical health
- improved mental well-being
- enhanced learning and educational outcomes
- greater social connection and inclusion

Benefits later

- lower risk of noncommunicable diseases
- healthier adult lifestyles
- improved productivity and quality of life

Benefits for the next generation

- healthier families
- stronger communities
- reduced future health burdens



Photo: young people walking on rocks along the shore, Vancouver Island, Canada, by Sophia Martinez/Unsplash

At the same time, the environments shaping adolescent lives are changing rapidly. Urbanization, changing patterns of transport, increasing pressure on academic performance, and growing use of digital technologies for entertainment, communication, study and work are reshaping how young people spend their time and the opportunities they have to be physically active.

This report presents the latest global assessment of adolescent physical activity from 2010 to 2025 and highlights four key findings. Together, they showed that current progress is insufficient to achieve the global target of a 15% relative reduction in physical inactivity by 2030, compared with the 2010 baseline *(1)*. However, they also demonstrated that progress is possible. Large differences between countries indicated that higher levels of adolescent physical activity can be achieved when young people have safe, accessible and enjoyable opportunities to move every day.

Methods and data sources



Photo: adolescent girl sitting on a ledge with a soccer ball, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, by Shafiq Sah/Unsplash

These estimates are based on pooled data from 389 population-based surveys conducted in 140 countries and territories. The dataset includes information from more than 3.2 million adolescents aged 11–17 years and representing almost 60% of the world's adolescent population.

Physical activity was assessed using a survey question that asked adolescents how many days in the previous week they accumulated at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (hereafter referred to as 'active days'), including physical activity at school, during travel and in leisure time.

The analysis estimated the distribution of active days per week (0–7 days), average active days per week and trends by age, sex, country and region. Statistical modelling was used to generate comparable estimates across countries and years and to assess changes from 2010 to 2025. Projections to 2030 were generated to assess progress towards the global target of reducing physical inactivity by 15%.

The estimates presented in this report provide the most comprehensive assessment of adolescent physical activity currently available and support monitoring of progress towards national and global targets.

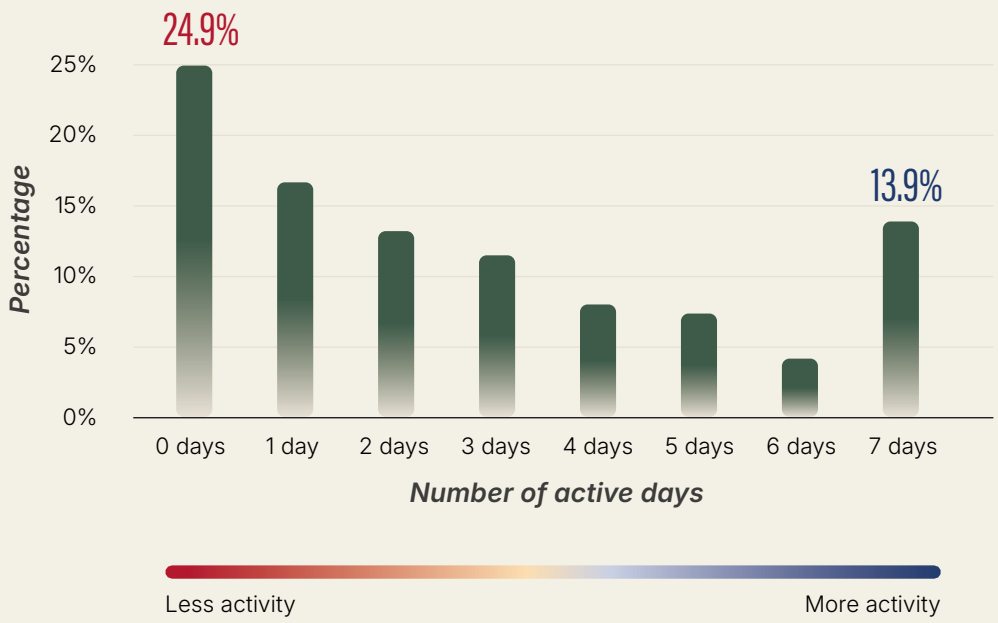
Full details of data sources, methods and statistical analyses are provided in the accompanying scientific publication (2).

Main findings

1. A quarter of adolescents reported no active days

Globally, one in four adolescents aged 11–17 years reported no active days (defined as days on which they accumulated at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity) in the previous week *(**Fig. 1**)*. This is equivalent to around 240 million adolescents worldwide. Only 14% reported seven active days and on average adolescents reported 2.7 active days per week. Combined, these findings show that many adolescents were falling short of recommendations—they are missing out on the benefits of sufficient regular physical activity. These results highlight the need for policy actions to reach the least active whilst also promoting and enabling all adolescents to be regularly active.

Fig. 1. ***Prevalence of reported active days, boys and girls combined, 2025***



These new data supersede previous global estimates which reported that, in 2016, 81% of adolescents did not achieve at least 60 minutes of moderate-to vigorous-physical activity on every day of the week *(3)*. The new estimates show that, in 2025, 86% of adolescents reported less than seven active days, a figure that has not changed since 2010. However, direct comparison of these estimates is not appropriate as this new analysis applied different methods, drawing on larger, more recent datasets and providing updated estimates for each year from 2010, and projections to 2030.

2. Girls are being left behind

Girls were less active than boys in almost every country. Globally, in 2025, more than one in four girls (28%) reported no active days in the previous week, compared with around one in five boys (22%), and girls were less likely to report being active every day. Boys were more active than girls in all regions. This persistent pattern suggests that policies and programmes are not adequately addressing the unique barriers faced by girls. This trend is concerning because adolescence is a critical period for establishing lifelong health behaviours. If girls are not supported to be active during these formative years, inequalities in participation and health are likely to persist into adulthood. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening efforts to ensure that girls have safe, enjoyable and equitable opportunities to be physically active.

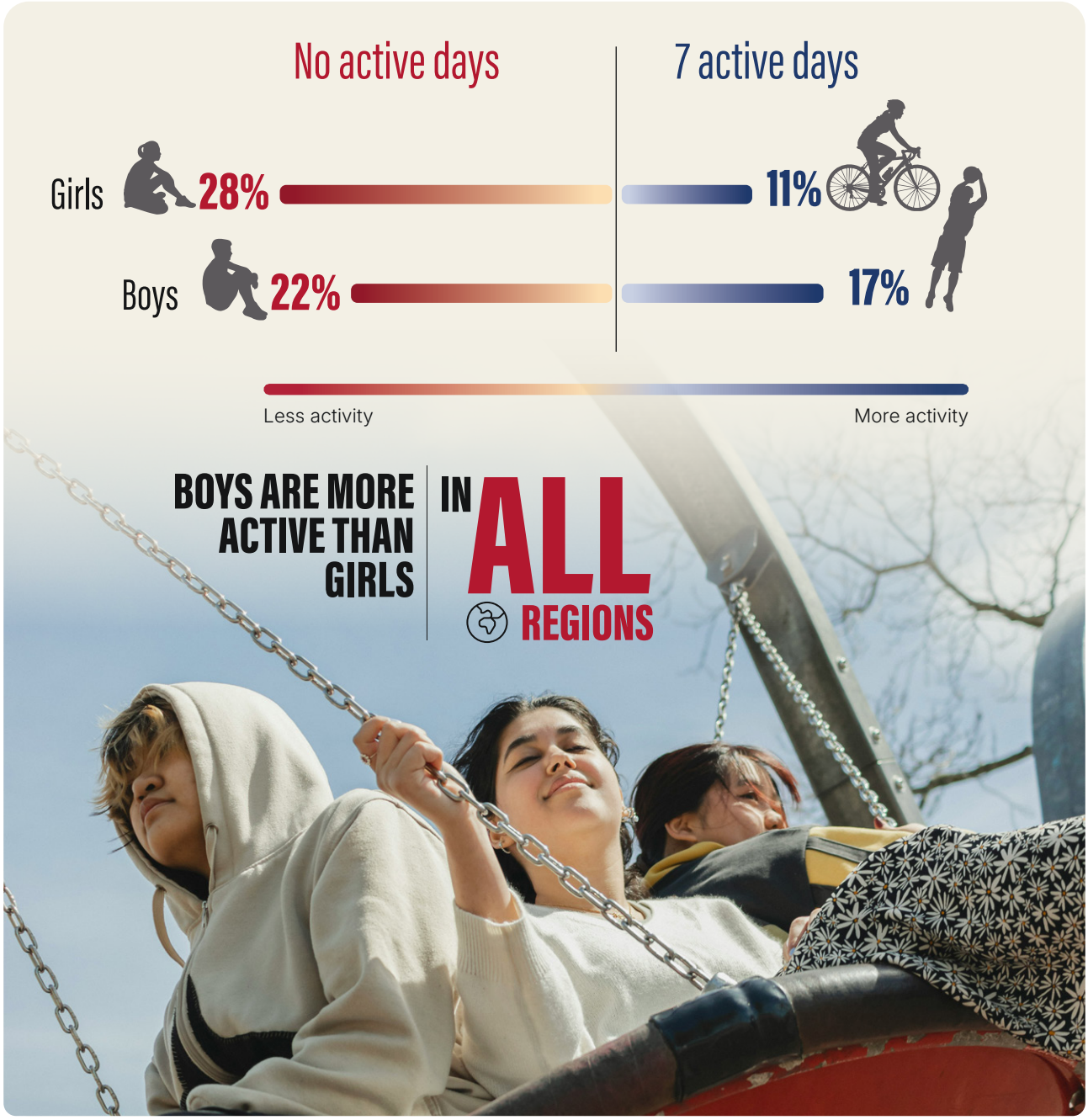
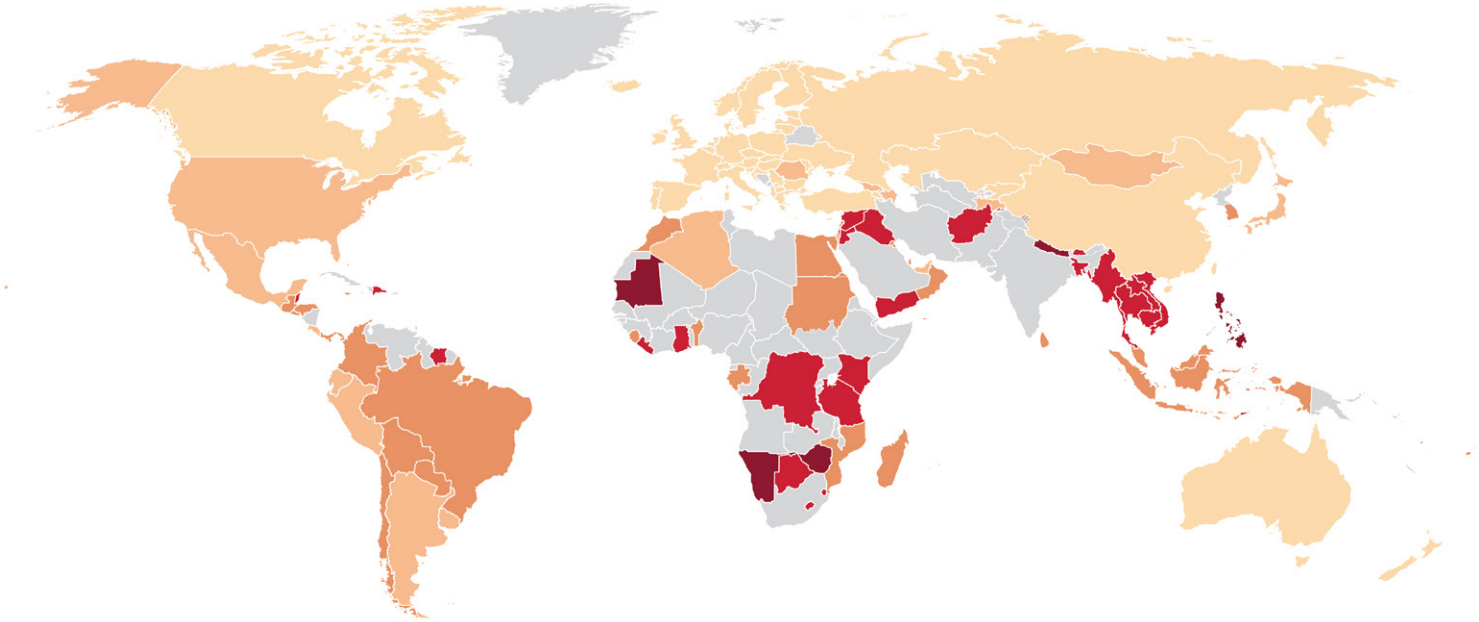


Photo: three adolescent friends sitting together on a red swing in a park, British Columbia, Canada, by Aedrian Salazar/Unsplash

3. Physical activity patterns vary widely across countries

The proportion of adolescents reporting no active days in 2025 ranged from 4% in some countries to over 40% in others *(**Fig. 2**)*. Countries with higher levels of adolescent physical activity show that this is achievable *(**Fig. 3**)*. While national averages can mask important local variation, substantial evidence shows that adolescent physical activity is shaped by social, cultural, environmental and policy contexts *(1)*. Strengthening policies and creating supportive environments that enable all adolescents to be active should remain a public health priority.

Fig. 2. ***Map of prevalence of 0 active days per week in 2025 for adolescents aged 11–17 years***

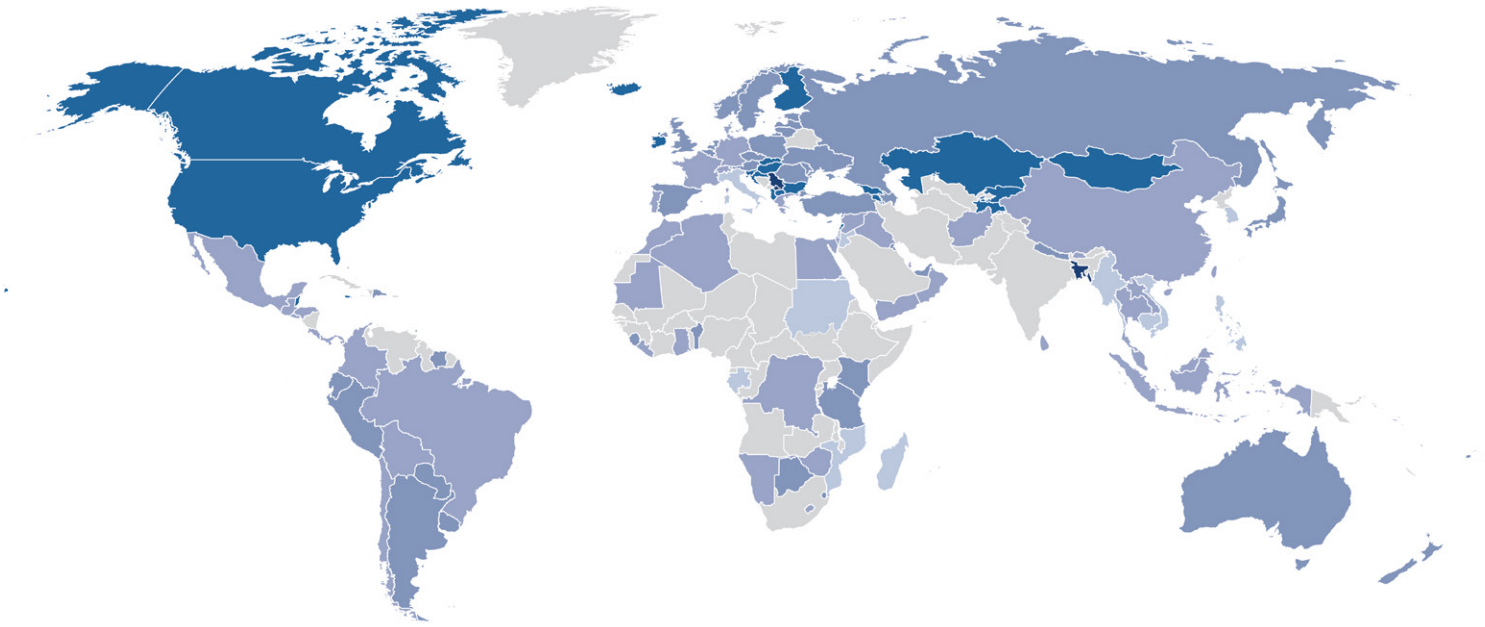




4% to >40% have no active days

In some countries, **over 40%** of adolescents report **no days** with at least 60 minutes of **physical activity in the week.**

Fig.3. ***Map of prevalence of 7 active days per week in 2025 for adolescents aged 11–17 years***



Percentage reporting 7 active days

0% to <10% | 10% to <15% | 15% to <20% | 20% to <30% | ≥30% | No survey data included

Less activity — More activity



Higher levels of activity ARE achievable

Countries with **higher levels of adolescent physical activity** show that this is **achievable**.



Photo: adolescent climbing an indoor climbing wall, Romania, by Tofan Teodor/Unsplash

4. Global progress has stalled

Despite growing recognition of the importance of physical activity, global levels have changed little since 2010. Current trends indicate that no country is on track to achieve the global target of a 15% relative reduction in physical inactivity by 2030. Without accelerated action, adolescent inactivity is projected to remain largely unchanged over the remainder of the decade (***Fig. 4***). This highlights the urgent need for stronger policies, sustained investment and coordinated action across sectors to create opportunities for all adolescents to be physically active.

Fig. 4. ***Estimated prevalence of less than 7 active days per week for 2010, 2025 and projected to 2030***

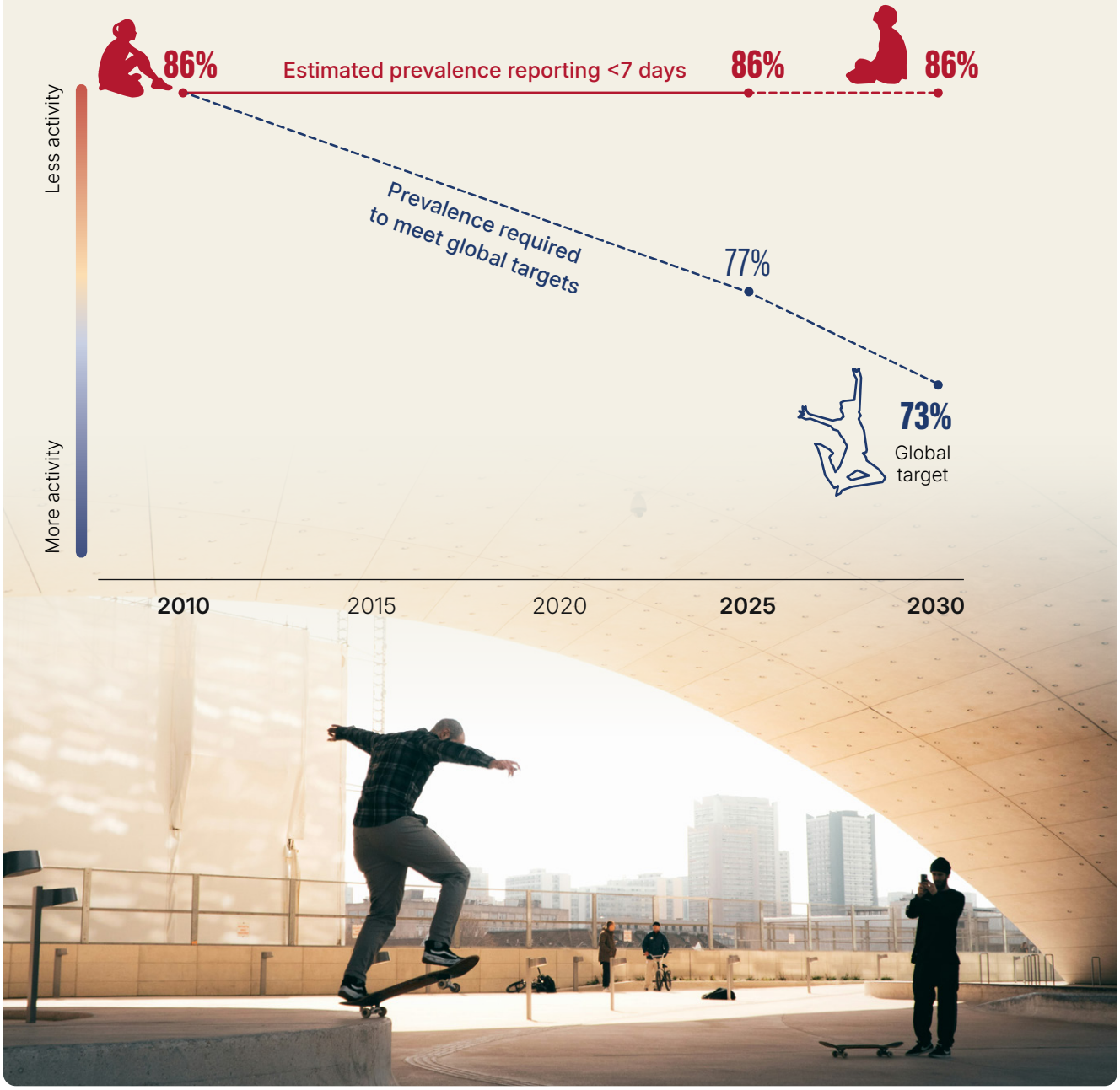


Photo: young man jumping at a skate park with friends watching, Paris, France, by Bastien Nvs/Unsplash

Why progress remains limited

Fifteen years of limited progress suggest that continuing with current approaches is unlikely to achieve the changes needed for more adolescents to be more active. Changing the current trends will require greater investment and more coordinated action across sectors to create the conditions that enable physical activity throughout adolescence. All sectors have a role to play, including health, education, transport, sport, urban planning, youth development and community services.

Adolescent participation in physical activity is shaped by the social, cultural, economic and physical environments in which young people live, rather than solely by individual choice. For example, many young people live in communities that do not adequately support physical activity. Safe and accessible places to walk, cycle, play and be active may be unavailable, inaccessible or unaffordable. Family expectations, educational and work demands, social and cultural norms, and increasing engagement with digital technologies can further limit opportunities for regular and enjoyable physical activity *(4)*.

Creating more active generations therefore requires action beyond individual behaviour change. While policies and programmes remain important, they are most effective when supported by environments that make physical activity safe, accessible, affordable and enjoyable. Countries with the highest levels of adolescent physical activity demonstrate that progress is possible and provide valuable examples of what can be achieved through sustained, whole-of-society action.



Photo: young woman with a backpack returning her bike to a bike rack, Mexico City, Mexico, by Julio Lopez/Unsplash

Priority areas for action

CREATE MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE

Four areas for change:



Transform the systems that shape adolescent physical activity

Close the gender gap

Reach the least active adolescents and reduce inequalities

Use data and evidence to guide action and monitor progress

1. Transform the systems that shape adolescent physical activity

Physical activity is shaped by the environments in which adolescents live, learn, travel and spend their free time. Fifteen years of limited progress suggest that current approaches are insufficient. Sustained improvements will require stronger policy alignment, coordinated investment and collaboration across sectors to create communities, schools and services that make physical activity safe, accessible, affordable and enjoyable for all adolescents.

Opportunities for action

1.1. Embed objectives to increase physical activity within education, transport, urban planning, sport, youth and health policies, with shared accountability for achieving targets and impact.

1.2. Protect and strengthen opportunities for regular, inclusive and high-quality physical education throughout schooling to develop movement skills, confidence, enjoyment and lifelong participation in physical activity.

1.3. Involve adolescents in planning, designing and evaluating policies, programmes and public spaces to ensure they respond to their needs and preferences including the design of communities and transport systems that prioritize active travel and independent mobility for all.

1.4. Learn from countries and communities achieving higher levels of adolescent physical activity to identify promising policy and environmental approaches that could be adapted and adopted elsewhere.



Photo: group of adolescents playing basketball on an urban outdoor court, New York City, USA, by Sarah Louise Kinsella/Unsplash

2. Close the gender gap

Girls remained consistently less active than boys across all regions of the world. This gap reflects unequal opportunities for participation and persistent social, cultural and environmental barriers rather than differences in interest or ability.

Reducing this gender gap offers one of the greatest opportunities to increase adolescent physical activity globally.

Opportunities for action

2.1. Tackle harmful social norms and stereotypes that discourage girls' participation in physical activity, active recreation and sport.

2.2. Improve the safety of streets, public spaces and transport systems to support walking, cycling and wheeling, with particular attention to the needs of girls and women.

2.3. Invest in and expand equitable access to community facilities, programmes and resources tailored to the needs and interests of adolescent girls and young women.

2.4. Increase the visibility of girls' participation in sport and physical activity, including through media coverage, and increase investment in developing female leadership, mentoring and girls and women as role models.



Photo: girl running and laughing in an outdoor park area with other children and young adolescents, Cao Lãnh, Vietnam, by Mi Pham/Unsplash

3. Reach the least active adolescents and reduce inequalities

Increasing adolescent physical activity requires both population-wide approaches that create opportunities for all adolescents and targeted efforts to reach those facing the greatest barriers to participation. These groups may include girls, adolescents living in disadvantaged communities, young people with disabilities and others facing social, economic or environmental barriers to participation. Universal policies can help create more opportunities for all young people to move and play, while targeted approaches are needed to address the barriers faced by adolescents reporting the lowest levels of activity.

Opportunities for action

3.1. Invest in understanding at national, subnational and local level which groups are least active and what barriers they face, to inform policy priorities and targeted action.

3.2. Address financial and structural barriers to participation (such as through subsidies, voucher schemes) and increase access to age- and culturally relevant opportunities for physical activity, community sport, active recreation and active travel.

3.3. Invest in designing environments and innovative programmes that increase opportunities for physical activity in key settings where young people already meet and enjoy spending time, including non-sport community settings and activation of public open spaces.

3.4. Prioritize investment and implementation in the communities and population groups with the lowest levels of physical activity, using equity-focused targets and accountability mechanisms to reduce inequalities over time.



Photo: two adolescents sitting on a bench and using their phones, Taipei, Taiwan, by H&CO/Unsplash

4. Use data and evidence to guide action and monitor progress

Better data and stronger evidence systems are essential for accelerating progress. They help countries identify which adolescents are being left behind, understand barriers to participation, direct investment more effectively and evaluate what works. Significant data gaps remain, particularly in low- and middle-income countries and among underserved populations, limiting the ability to monitor inequalities and assess progress over time. Moreover, many existing survey instruments predate the *WHO 2020 Guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour* and therefore do not support direct monitoring of progress against current recommendations. Regular monitoring can identify where progress is occurring, where inequalities persist and where additional action is needed. Strong data systems are also essential for accountability, enabling governments and stakeholders to assess whether policies and investments are reaching the adolescents who need them most.

Opportunities for action

4.1. Ensure use of national, sub national and local data and input from community to guide policy development, implementation and investment decisions.

4.2. Strengthen national data and monitoring systems on adolescent physical activity and align with WHO recommendations and report on related indicators.

4.3. Collect and report data by sex, age, disability and other relevant equity characteristics to identify and track changes in specific population subgroups that may require additional support.

4.4. Support the development, testing and integration of wearable technologies to measure physical activity to provide additional data and improve knowledge and understanding of adolescent movement patterns.



Photo: group of five adolescent friends walking together on Venice Beach, Los Angeles, USA, by Seven Shooter/Unsplash

Building a more active generation

Physical activity is essential for adolescent health and well-being, now and in the future, yet too many young people, particularly girls, continue to miss out. The latest data show that progress over the past 15 years has been limited, but also demonstrate that change is possible. Countries with higher levels of adolescent physical activity demonstrate that greater progress can be achieved when supportive policies, environments and opportunities are in place.

The decisions taken over the remainder of this decade will help determine whether the next generation has the opportunity to be more active, healthier and better prepared for adulthood. Achieving this goal will require sustained political commitment, coordinated action across sectors, long-term investment and stronger accountability for results.
By creating environments that enable all adolescents to be active, countries can improve health and well-being today while building healthier generations for the future.

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Photo: young woman standing against a football goal post, Fortaleza, Brazil, by Igor Rodrigues/Unsplash



Photo: four young people hugging outdoors, Mauritius, by Cybèle & Bevan/Unsplash

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Front cover photo: adolescent girl wearing a black hoodie and backpack on a bridge with a city skyline in the background, AI-generated by Eddy Hill Design

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Photo: adolescent boy wearing a backpack, crossing a street under an elevated monorail track, with a bus approaching, Kamakura, Japan, by Zheng XUE/Unsplash