

Who gets to play? Inequality persists in sports

The International Day of Sport for Development and Peace (IDSDP) is celebrated annually on April 6. In 2025, under the theme 'Leveling the playing field: Sport for social inclusion', the international community turns its attention to the transformative power of sports to foster social integration, challenge discrimination, and empower marginalized groups for a more unified world.

In this context, the **Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research (WIN)**, the leading global association of independent market research and polling firms, has released its latest **Win Worldviews Survey**. This year's survey, conducted across 39 countries with 34,946 respondents, explores global habits, attitudes, and inequalities related to physical activity and healthy living. The findings offer valuable insights into how sport and exercise intersect with broader issues of gender, education, and social inclusion. Having tracked these trends since 2018, the survey reveals both encouraging progress and persistent gaps in access to active lifestyles around the world.

1. Inequalities remain despite slow by steady rise in exercise globally

There has been a slow but steady rise in people's engagement in physical activities globally: the percentage of individuals who exercise regularly has increased from 37% in 2018 to 43% in 2025, reflecting growing awareness about the benefits of an active lifestyle. This is seen across different countries and demographic groups.

However, inequalities remain. A gender gap persists, with 45% of men reporting regular exercise compared to 40% of women. This disparity is particularly notable amongst those under 35, where the difference reaches 9 percentage points. Amongst individuals aged 35 and older, the gap narrows to just 4 points. Education level is also a key driver of physical activity: just 34% of people with little to no basic education exercise often, this figure rises significantly to 58% amongst master's and PhD graduates.

2. Disparities and major strides across countries in exercise habits

While there is a positive global trend, exercise habits vary widely by country. People in India (73%), China (68%), Finland (61%), Australia (56%), and Morocco & France (56%) are amongst the most physically active. In contrast, less than 30% of people in Turkey, Ecuador, Serbia, Brazil, Thailand, Chile, Slovakia and Indonesia report exercising often.

However, some countries have made notable strides. For instance, China saw an increase from 51% to 68%, France from 44% to 56%, and Greece from 31% to 43% over recent years. This change is driven by post-pandemic health awareness, strong government investment in fitness initiatives and infrastructure in some countries, in addition to the growing popularity of digital fitness trends, shift in work policies and social challenges. Cultural shifts, such as urbanization and a focus on well-being, have also further reinforced this positive transformation. On the other hand, there were declines in people who report frequently exercising in Brazil (from 36% to 27%) and Indonesia (from 40% to 25%). This suggests a need for renewed efforts to promote physical activity in these regions.

3. Championing equal access to sports

These findings underscore the urgent need to break down barriers to sports participation – particularly for women, young people, and those with lower education levels. As we mark World Sports Day, we are reminded that sports is more than just a path to physical and mental well-being; it can be powerful force for social change.

When truly inclusive and accessible to everyone, sports has the potential to bridge divides, challenge inequality, and unite communities. It's time to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to play, thrive, and be part of the game.

Richard Colwell, President of WIN International Association, said:

“The study highlights a growing embrace of physical activity, yet deep inequalities persist in determining who has access to an active and healthy lifestyle. WIN hopes these findings serve as a powerful reminder of this year's theme: ‘Leveling the Playing Field’. Sports has the potential to unite and inspire, but this can only happen if no one is left on the sidelines.”

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Media enquiries:

Elena Crosilla, WIN Coordinator

+39 335.62.07.347

E-mail: coordinator@winmr.com