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The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) is a research study conducted by an international network of research teams<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (Europe) and co-ordinated by Professor Candace Currie of the University of St Andrews. This factsheet is based on data collected in 2010 from 12,661 10-17 year olds in Ireland from randomly selected schools throughout the country.

Further information is available at:  
<http://www.hbsc.org>  
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## Summary

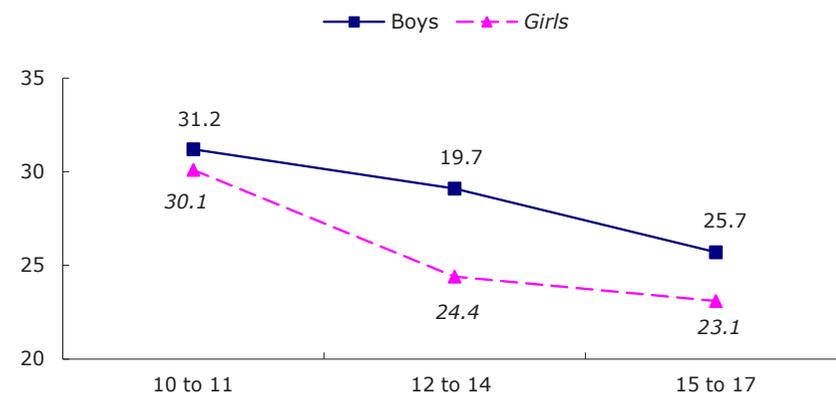
HBSC Ireland 2010 found that 26.5% of schoolchildren in Ireland report actively travelling to school, 28.1% of boys and 24.7% of girls. Boys are more likely to report actively travelling to school. The percentage of children who report actively travelling to school decreases with age; 31.2% of boys and 30.1% of girls aged 10-11 years, 29.1% of boys and 24.4% of girls aged 12-14 years and 25.7% of boys and 23.1% of girls aged 15-17 years. Children who report that they actively travel to school are more likely to report excellent health, being very happy, that they bullied others and that they exercise 4 or more times per week. Active travel to school in this factsheet refers to children who travel to school by walking or cycling for the main part of their journey.

## Why this topic?

Children's active travel to school has the potential to increase daily levels of physical activity<sup>2</sup>. This is a health behaviour that can be incorporated into children's daily routines<sup>2</sup>. Active travel can contribute to higher levels of physical activity and may contribute to preventing overweight and obesity among children<sup>2</sup>. Previously research has argued that increasing levels of physical activity can positively contribute to children's physical health<sup>3,4</sup> mental health and social development<sup>5,6,7</sup>.

## Change 2006-2010

This question was asked in 2010 for the first time and therefore, there are no time trend comparisons.



Percentage of children who report actively travelling to school, by age and gender

## Active travel in context

\*\*\* These analyses have been controlled for social class and urban/rural location of school.

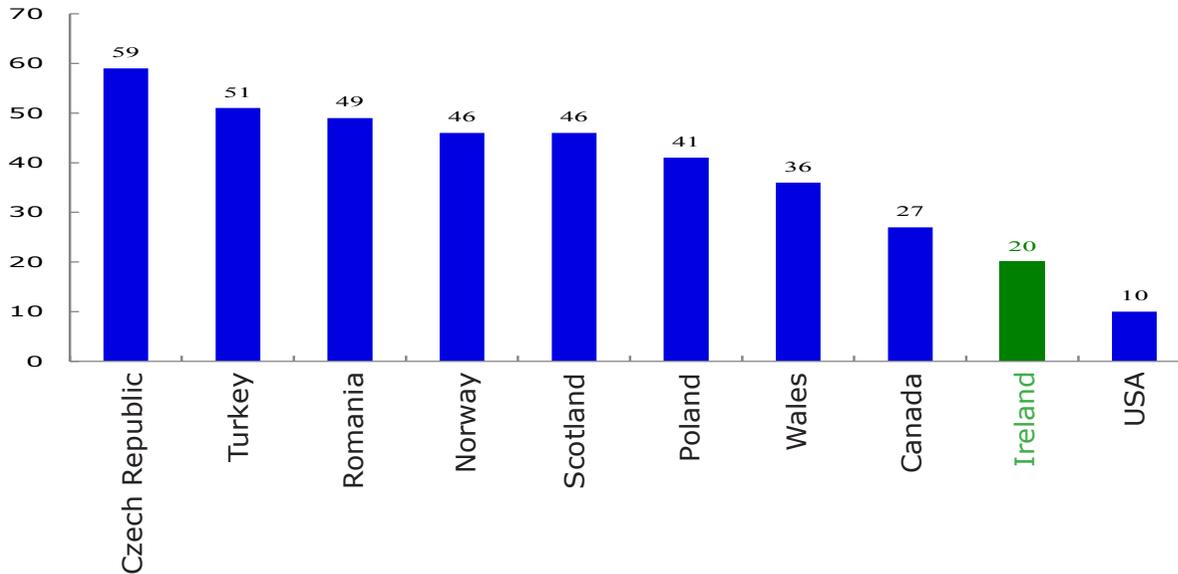
- Children from lower social classes (SC) are more likely to report actively travelling to school (SC1-2: 21.7%; SC3-4: 26.4%; SC5-6: 30.3%).
- Children who report actively travelling to school are more likely to report excellent health (33.5% vs. 32.5%) than children who do not.
- Children who report actively travelling to school are more likely to report being very happy (52.0% vs. 49.9%) than children who do not.
- Children who report actively travelling to school are more likely to report that they bullied others (18.6% vs. 15.7%) than children who do not.
- Children who report actively travelling to school are more likely to report that they exercise 4 or more times a week (51.5% vs. 50.1%) than children who do not.



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## ...Active travel among schoolchildren in Ireland



Percentage of 15 year olds who report actively travelling to school, by country

- Active travel is not significantly associated with reporting emotional or physical symptoms, drunkenness, current smoking or being injured.

### International

With 19.8% reporting that they actively travel to school, 15 year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 9<sup>th</sup> among the 10 countries in Europe and North America that asked this question. Ireland is ranked 9<sup>th</sup> among 13 year old children (24.7%), and 9<sup>th</sup> (29.9%) among 11 year old children.

### Implications

Less than one third (26.5%) of schoolchildren actively travel to school in Ireland. In comparison to other European and North American countries that asked this question Ireland is ranked low. These findings indicate a strong association with social class and active travel to school, with children from lower social classes more likely to actively travel. Children from urban areas are also more likely to actively travel. These may be confounding factors

for the higher rates of bullying others and exercising 4 or more times per week among children who actively travel. Active travel is also linked with reporting excellent health and feeling very happy. As children get older they are less likely to actively travel to school. This identifies a specific target for health professionals to increase active travel to school to ensure this continues as they get older. With the potential health benefits of active travel to school and the current obesity epidemic it must be a priority of policy makers and health professionals to work with schools and children to increase rates of active travel.

### References

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This factsheet was prepared by Mary Callaghan, Natasha Clarke, Aoife Gavin, Colette Kelly, Michal Molcho, Larri Walker and Saoirse Nic Gabhainn.

HBSC Ireland is funded by the Health Promotion Policy Unit of the Department of Health.

We would like to thank all the children, teachers and schools who participated and acknowledge the contribution of our colleagues in the Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway.

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