

Participation in sports and physical activity 2013 Comparing the Netherlands to the European Union (%)



The Netherlands

With 16.8 million inhabitants and 34,000 km² of land, the Netherlands is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. With a per capita- GDP of €35,900 (EU average €25,700), it is also a wealthy country. With the sea and multiple lakes, rivers and canals close by, water is a crucial element of Dutch society.^a

The Dutch economy has strong roots in trade. Power has traditionally been in the hands of cities and merchants, rather than royalty. The Dutch have a reputation for being egalitarian, cooperative and open-minded (though this is subject to change).

In terms of sport, the Dutch pride themselves on their strong traditions, especially in swimming, football and speed-skating. The country always strives for a top 10 position in the Olympic medal tables. Between 1900 and 2012, the Dutch won 267 medals (78 gold) at the Olympic Games. Swimming was responsible for 21% of these (and 26% of gold medals). The all-time best result for the Dutch was Sydney 2000 (8th, 25 medals, 12 gold). The peak at the winter games was Sochi 2014 (5th, 24 medals, 8 gold).

Sports policies are the responsibility of the Department of Health. Physical education policies fall under the Department of Education.^b Nevertheless, most investment in sports facilities and sports clubs comes from the cities. The Dutch sports industry is estimated at €12.7 bln (1% of GDP).

Physical activity and sports participation^c

Short distances and the flatness of the country means riding bicycles is very common in the Netherlands^d. As a consequence, the general daily physical activity level is quite high. Among the EU-28, the Netherlands ranked the highest for monthly (89%), weekly (83%) and daily (43%) recreational non-sports physical activity in 2013.

The Dutch score 4th in terms of monthly sports participation. Only in the Scandinavian countries is monthly sports participation higher. Between 2009 and 2013, sports participation seemed to have declined a little (from 64% to 62%).^e

8% of the Dutch take part in sports more than five times a week. This is the same as the EU average. Apparently, as far as frequent sports participation is concerned, the Dutch do not stand out.

The Mulier Institute is an independent research agency dedicated to social science sports research. As such, it works closely with universities and statistics agencies in the Netherlands (as well as throughout Europe). The Mulier Institute closely monitors developments in Dutch sports, carries out both academic and applied sports research and organizes debates and conferences on subjects related to sports & society. Funding for these programmes comes from the Department of Health, from scientific councils and contracted research.

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Organization of sports

The Netherlands ranks highest in the EU in terms of membership of sports clubs, and 2nd for volunteering (after Sweden and jointly with Denmark). With 25,000 sports clubs (on average 62 per municipality), clubs play a central role in the Dutch sports system. There are two reasons for this: first, the Dutch history of ‘pillarization’, which meant that in each city there would be Catholic, Protestant and public football clubs. Second, the strength of civic society in the Netherlands, which forms a good basis for flourishing clubs.

The most popular club sports are football (1.2 mln members); tennis (0.7 mln); golf (0.4 mln); gymnastics (0.2 mln) and field hockey (0.2 mln). The most practiced sports are fitness, swimming, running, walking and cycling.

Sports facilities

In no other European country is the satisfaction of the citizens with opportunities to take part in sports locally as high as in the Netherlands. This was also true in 2009, reflecting 50 years of investment by municipal authorities in grassroots sport facilities. Density of population is another factor, accounting for shorter travelling distances and sports facilities that are seldom very far away.

In the EU, the Dutch are the least unsatisfied with the sports policies of their municipalities. In 2009, the Dutch ranked 4th in this respect.

Motives

As for most Europeans, health (61%) is the most important motive for the Dutch to take part in sports (56%), followed closely by relaxation and pleasure (both 56%) .

Notes

^a 94% of Dutch children follow swimming classes. The Netherlands has more than 800 public swimming pools – twice the number of municipalities in the country.

^b In the Netherlands, education to become a PE (physical education) teacher is at Bachelor’s degree level. Courses to become a PE teacher are provided by Universities of Applied Sciences. Teachers for grades 1-4 in primary education (ages 4-7) are not required to possess formal PE qualifications to teach PE.

^c Data for this factsheet is drawn from the Euro 2013 [Eurobarometer ‘Sports and Physical Activity’](#). The setup of the EB 2013 is the same as for the EB 2009. The surveys are not fully identical, however. In 2013, use was made of a lengthier list of questions and some wording has been changed slightly.

^d It is calculated that there are more bicycles in the Netherlands (22.3 mln) than working cell phones (22.1 mln).

^e National statistics do not show the same drop in sports participation. Most national statistics suggest that sports participation has been rather stable in recent years, with perhaps a slight increase in very recent years (2013/2014).

Participation in sports and physical activity: a comparison between the Netherlands and the European Union 2009 - 2013

	2009			2013		
	EU	NL	RANK	EU	NL	RANK
	%	%	(1-27)	%	%	(1-28)
Participation in sports						
At least once a month	46	64	4	47	62	4
Five times a week or more*	9	5	22	8	8	14
Physical activity (recreational or non-sports-related)						
At least once a month	74	91	2	57	89	1
Five times a week or more*	27	42	4	15	43	1
Where do you engage in sports or physical activity?						
<i>Multiple answers possible</i>						
At a health or fitness centre	11	19	4	15	18	9
At a sports club	11	25	1	13	23	1
At a sports centre	8	10	4	8	10	5
At school or university	4	5	13	5	6	9
At work	8	9	11	13	13	12
Are you a member of any of the following clubs where you participate in sports or recreational physical activity?						
<i>Multiple answers possible</i>						
Sports club	12	27	1	12	27	1
Health or fitness centre	9	20	3	11	19	3
Social or cultural club that includes sports in its activities (e.g. employees' club, youth club)	4	3	14	3	3	9
Statements about sports and physical activity						
<i>(totally) agree</i>						
The area where you live offers many opportunities to be physically active	75	95	1	76	95	1
Local sports clubs and other local providers offer many opportunities to be physically active	71	87	2	74	94	1
Your local authority does not do enough for its citizens in relation to physical activities	35	19	4	39	18	1
Voluntary work (supporting sporting activities)	7	16	3	7	18	2

* Sports participation and physical activity is cumulative. Five times a week or more is also part of sports participation/physical activity of once a month.

For more information on the Eurobarometer and sports participation in Europe, see the Measure Research Network (*Meeting for European Sports Participation and Sports Culture Research*) at <http://www.measuresport.eu/> or contact Harold van der Werff at h.vanderwerff@mulierinstituut.nl.