

Inclusive activity

Taking a person-centred approach



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Introduction

Research shows there are high levels of physical inactivity among certain populations. This includes disabled people, women and girls, older people, ethnically diverse communities, LGBTQIA+ community and people from lower socioeconomic households.

Many organisations group inactive audiences by these standard demographics. This can lead to assumptions about their behaviour, motivations and barriers to being active.

Disabled people are a part of every social demographic, motivated to be or not to be active for numerous reasons. For the sport, leisure and physical activity sector to be inclusive of disabled people, we must acknowledge this and treat disabled people as individuals.

Disabled people's lives are influenced and shaped by many characteristics. This includes, but is not limited to age, gender expression and identity, ethnicity, race, disability, religion or

belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity.

This is part of what is known as **'intersectionality'** the framework for understanding how a person's social identities connect and overlap. Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and understand the differences in all of us.

This resource highlights intersectionality in relation to disabled people. It encourages the sport, physical activity and leisure sector to look beyond standard demographics and take a person-centred approach in providing opportunities.



Taking a person-centred approach in activity begins with understanding your audience. The following statistics show how different factors influence disabled people's lives and their activity levels.

Disabled people in the UK

- There are **16 million** disabled people in the UK, accounting for one in four (**24%**) of the total population. ¹
- **26% of UK women** (8.7 million) are disabled compared to **22% of men** (7.3 million). ²
- The prevalence of disability rises with age. **11% of UK children, 23% of working-age adults** and **45% of state pension age adults** are disabled. ³
- **Three in five** disabled people (**60%**) in the UK are aged over 50. ⁴
- **6% of disabled people in England identify as LGBTQ+** compared to 3% of non-disabled people. ⁵
- **33% of trans men, women and non-binary people** and **14% of cisgender men and women with a minority sexual orientation** in the UK consider themselves to have a disability. ⁶
- **18% of the population** are ethnically diverse. 13% of Black/Black British people, 12% of Asian/British Asian people, 8% of Chinese people and 7% from a mixed ethnic background are disabled. ⁷

It is important to recognise that disabled people have diverse backgrounds and are part of every community. [Activity Alliance's Annual Disability and Activity Survey Demographic report](#) provides more in-depth insight about how disabled people's demographic differences affect their activity.

One in four of the total UK population is disabled.



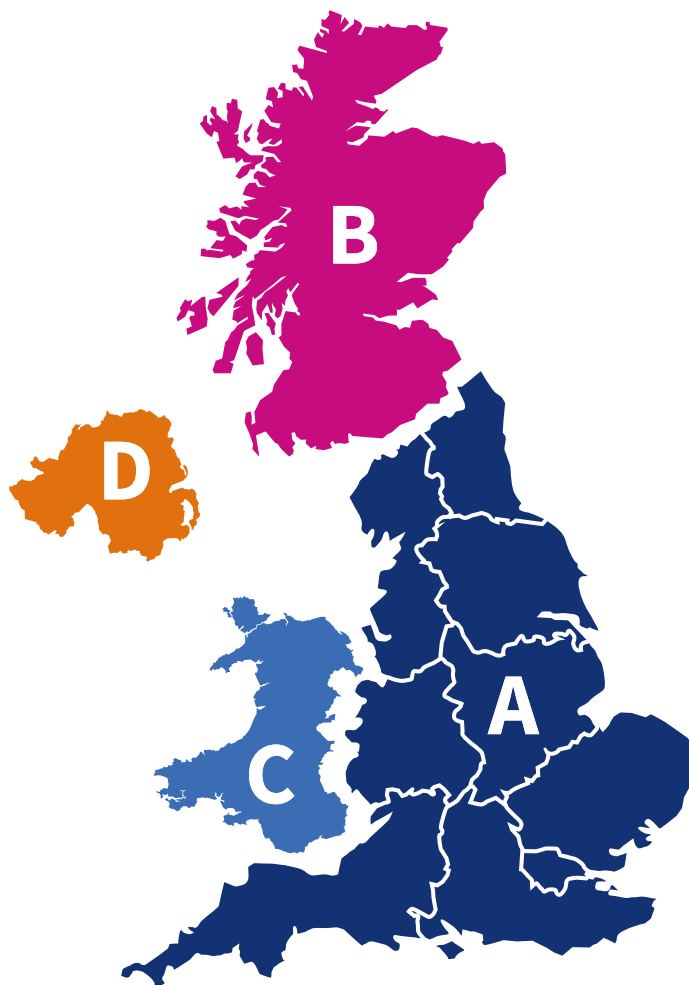
Proportion of disabled people in UK home nation countries⁸

A England
13.3 million **24%**

B Scotland
1.4 million **26%**

C Wales
0.8 million **26%**

D Northern Ireland
0.4 million **22%**



Proportion of disabled people in each English region⁹

South West
1.3 million



South East
1.9 million



London
1.6 million



East of England
1.5 million



East Midlands
1.3 million



West Midlands
1.6 million



North East
0.8 million



North West
2.0 million



Yorkshire and the Humber
1.4 million



Impairments and activity levels



- Disabled adults are **twice as likely** as non-disabled people to be physically inactive (**41% vs 21%**).¹⁰
- **Nearly four in five** disabled people (**77%**) would like to be more active.¹¹
- **Six in 10** disabled people (**64%**) are motivated to be active to improve or maintain their physical health.¹²
- Over **seven in 10** of disabled people (**72%**) have more than one impairment.¹³
- Inactivity increases with the number of impairments an individual has. **48%** of people with three or more impairments are physically inactive compared to **32%** of people with one impairment.¹⁴
- **47%** of disabled people in the UK have a mobility impairment, **35%** have a stamina or breathing impairment and **32%** have a mental health impairment.¹⁵



Four in five

disabled people would like to be more active.



Six in

10 disabled people want to be active to improve their health.



Economy and living standards



- Disabled people face a higher risk of poverty and have done so for the last 20 years. **29%** of disabled people are in poverty compared to **20%** of non-disabled people. ¹⁶
- Disabled people from lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to be physically inactive than disabled people from higher socioeconomic groups (**45%** vs **29%**). ¹⁷
- The average disabled household faces **£975** a month in extra costs. ¹⁸
- **Almost four in 10** disabled people (**37%**) we spoke to, who receive benefits, said they feared losing them if they were seen to be more active. ¹⁹
- **Over half** (58%) of young disabled people say the increased cost of living crisis has reduced how active they are. ²⁰
- Businesses could be missing out on a share of **£274 billion each year** by not meeting the needs of disabled people. ²¹



By not meeting the needs of disabled people, businesses could be missing out on a share of **£274 billion each year**.



Employment and education

- Disabled people are more than **twice as likely** as non-disabled people to be unemployed (**7%** vs **3%**). The disability employment gap is at its widest point since 2018. ²²
- Disabled people who are unemployed are much more likely than non-disabled people to be physically inactive (**40%** vs **30%**). ²³
- Disabled people with no qualifications are **twice as likely** to be physically inactive as disabled people who have a higher education qualification (**64%** vs **32%**). ²⁴
- In 2022, just **37%** of pupils with special educational needs attained a level 2 qualification in English and Maths (GCSE level or equivalent) compared to **79%** of non-disabled pupils. ²⁵
- Over **1.5 million** pupils, one in seven (**15%**) in England have special educational needs (SEN), but fewer than one in 10 (**9%**) attend a state funded special school. ²⁶



What can I do? Tips on taking a person-centred approach

Disabled people are the least active in our society. We all have a role to play in changing attitudes and addressing this inequality.

We recommend using the following approaches to enhance your organisation's commitment to disability inclusion. In each section we have provided questions for you to consider that will challenge and improve your existing approach.

Understand



Strong insight on people's preferences, needs and their influencers is vital. It ensures that your programmes and services deliver positive experiences for everyone. Take time to understand people's values, lifestyles, motivations and barriers to being active. Remember, disabled people are a part of all target audiences.

Ask yourself:

- How robust is your insight on disabled people?
- Can you evidence this insight and how are you applying it in your work?

Helpful resources

Read [Activity Alliance's research reports on disabled people's experiences and perceptions of physical activity.](#)

Read [Activity Alliance's effective engagement factsheet on gathering and using insight.](#)

Connect



There are many ways to effectively reach people from diverse populations. Firstly, you must identify your relevant audience, along with their support services or networks, to connect them to your activity or programme. Give individuals, supporters and organisations a platform to co-design your activities.

Ask yourself:

- How connected are you currently with local support networks and organisations?
- Are your current partnerships reaching people effectively?
- How can disabled people's views and experiences shape your work going forward?

Helpful resources

Read [Activity Alliance's engagement resources](#) and in particular our [effective engagement factsheets.](#)



Engage



Collaborate with your new connections. Listen and consult with disabled people using their expertise and lived experience to co-design and develop your opportunities. Activities that have been co-designed will benefit people from all backgrounds, not just disabled people.

Ask yourself:

- How inclusive and accessible are your current programmes?
- How does your organisation prioritise inclusion and diversity?

Helpful resources

Activity Alliance's leading inclusion programme can improve your organisation's commitment to inclusion and disability equality at every level.

Contact your local Activity Alliance Strategic Partnership Advisor to find out more about this programme.

Learn and share



Review your programmes and processes regularly. Success is not just about numbers. Ask people about their lived experiences, find out what they value most about your sessions and how they think your offer could be improved. Use this feedback to adapt future practice to be more effective and better suited to the people you are serving. Use methods like 'positive storytelling' to show impact and learning. Share your success with your members and partners using a range of communication platforms.

Ask yourself:

- Do you know what 'good service' looks like for your audience?
- Are your evaluation methods accessible for people with different impairments?
- How does feedback and evaluation inform your programme design and development currently?

Helpful resources

Find out what disabled people value the most by reading [Activity Alliance's 10 principles resource](#) to make your opportunities more appealing and accessible.

Read [Activity Alliance's engagement factsheet on performance measurement and learning](#).



How we help

Disabled people are twice as likely to be inactive than non-disabled people. Activity Alliance works with partners to close this gap. We embed inclusive practice within organisations and lead the way in changing attitudes towards disabled people in sport and activity.

For more information about Activity Alliance and how we can support your work please visit our website at activityalliance.org.uk



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- 6** Government Equalities Office, National LGBT Survey 2018.
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This document is also available in Word format. Please contact us if you need more support.

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