

Statistical bulletin

Disability and social participation, England: 2018

Exploring the social participation of disabled and non-disabled adults in England across civic engagement and social action; volunteering; and participation in groups, clubs and organisations.

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To be announced

Notice

24 February 2021

This is not the latest release. Please see [Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2020](#) for the latest estimates.

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1 . Other pages in this release

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has explored outcomes for disabled people across a number of areas of life, through a series of bulletins. Other pages in this release include:

- [Improving disability data in the UK](#)
- [Disability and education](#)
- [Disability and employment](#)
- [Disability and housing](#)
- [Disability and crime](#)
- [Disability, well-being and loneliness](#)

Aims of this work

This work aims to present comparable information that uses the Government Statistical Service's (GSS's) harmonised definition of disability alongside intersections with other protected characteristics.

Definition of disability

For the purposes of this analysis, a person is considered to have a disability if they have a self-reported long-standing illness, disability or impairment that causes difficulty with day-to-day activities. This definition is consistent with the Equality Act 2010 and the GSS's harmonised definition. For further information, see the [Glossary](#).

Definition of social participation

For the purposes of this bulletin, social participation has been measured using the following three domains:

- civic engagement and social action
- volunteering
- participation in groups, clubs and organisations

These measures provide evidence of social cohesion, community engagement and social action.

In this bulletin, we use the Community Life Survey (England only) to look at social participation in each of these domains in the 12 months prior to completing the survey.

Article scope

Across the other outcome measures explored in this series, disabled people generally have poorer outcomes than non-disabled people. Social participation is an area of life where outcomes for disabled people were found to be comparable and in some cases higher, compared with non-disabled people. This bulletin uses the Community Life Survey (CLS) to explore the social participation of disabled adults aged 16 years and over, covering the period 2014 to 2018 for England.

2 . Main points

- In the year ending March 2018, disabled people were more likely to have been involved in civic participation (45.5%) than non-disabled people (38.4%).
- The proportions of disabled and non-disabled people who were involved in civic activism, civic consultations and social action were similar.
- Disabled people were as likely to have been involved in a group, club or organisation (67.9%) as non-disabled people (71.9%) in the year ending March 2018.
- There are differences in participation in certain group types; the largest difference was in “sports or exercise” groups where, in the year ending March 2018, 27.6% of disabled people had participated in a group, compared with 43.1% of non-disabled people.
- For both types of volunteering (formal and informal), the proportions of disabled and non-disabled people who had participated were similar.

3 . Civic engagement and social action

Civic engagement includes:

- civic participation: engagement in democratic processes, both in person and online, including signing a petition, contacting a local official or attending a public rally (does not include voting)
- civic consultation: taking part in consultations about local services, both in person and online
- civic activism: involvement in activities in the local community such as being a local councillor, school governor, volunteer special constable or magistrate (for those aged 18 years or over); civic activism also includes involvement in decision-making about local services, both in person and online

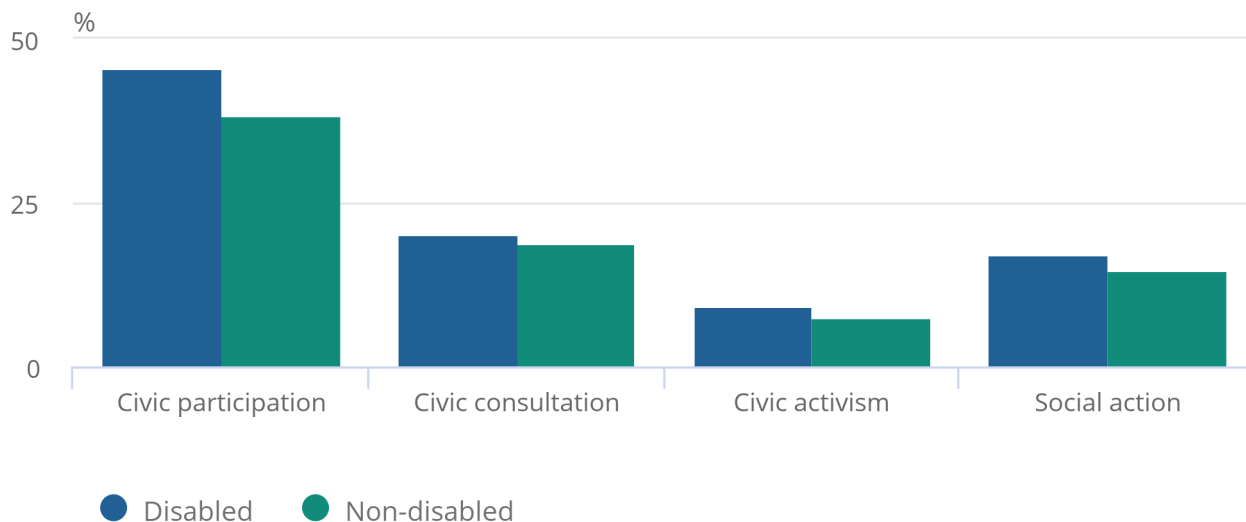
Social action is defined as involvement with issues affecting the local area by doing things like setting up a new service or amenity; stopping something happening in the local area; running a local service on a voluntary basis; or helping to organise a community event.

Figure 1: Disabled people are more likely to have been involved in civic participation than non-disabled people

Percentage of people who participated in civic engagements or social action by disability, England, 2017 to 2018

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Percentage of people who participated in civic engagements or social action by disability, England, 2017 to 2018



Source: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – Community Life Survey

A higher proportion of disabled people were involved in civic participation (45.5%) than non-disabled people (38.4%). Disabled people were also just as likely to have been involved in civic consultations, civic activism and social action as non-disabled people.

These findings were true regardless of condition severity. Disabled people whose ability to carry out day-to-day activities were “limited a lot” by their condition were just as likely to have been involved in all forms of civic engagements and social action as disabled people who were “limited a little”.

In the 16 to 24 years age group, disabled people are more likely to have been involved in civic participation than non-disabled people

Involvement in civic participation was 17.5 percentage points higher for disabled people than for non-disabled people in the 16 to 24 years age group. The only other group with a significant difference between disabled and non-disabled people was the 35 to 49 years age group, where civic participation was 13.8 percentage points higher for disabled people. The proportions of people who were involved in civic participation were not significantly different between disabled and non-disabled people for all other age groups.

For civic consultation, civic activism and social action, the proportions of disabled people who participated were not significantly different to those of non-disabled people in all age groups. See the [Disability and social participation dataset](#) for further information on the analysis of civic engagements and social action by disability and age.

Both disabled men and disabled women are more likely to have been involved in civic participation than for their non-disabled counterparts

The proportion of people who were involved in civic participation was higher for disabled people than non-disabled people, regardless of sex. The proportion of disabled men involved in social action (18.9%) was higher than that of non-disabled men (14.2%), but for women the figures for disabled (15.8%) and non-disabled (15.4%) people were similar.

For civic consultations and civic activism, participation was similar for disabled and non-disabled people, regardless of sex. See the [Disability and social participation dataset](#) for further information on the analysis of civic engagements and social action by disability and sex.

4 . Volunteering

Volunteering includes formal volunteering (providing unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations) and informal volunteering (providing unpaid help as an individual to people who are not a relative).

Disabled people are just as likely to have taken part in volunteering than non-disabled people

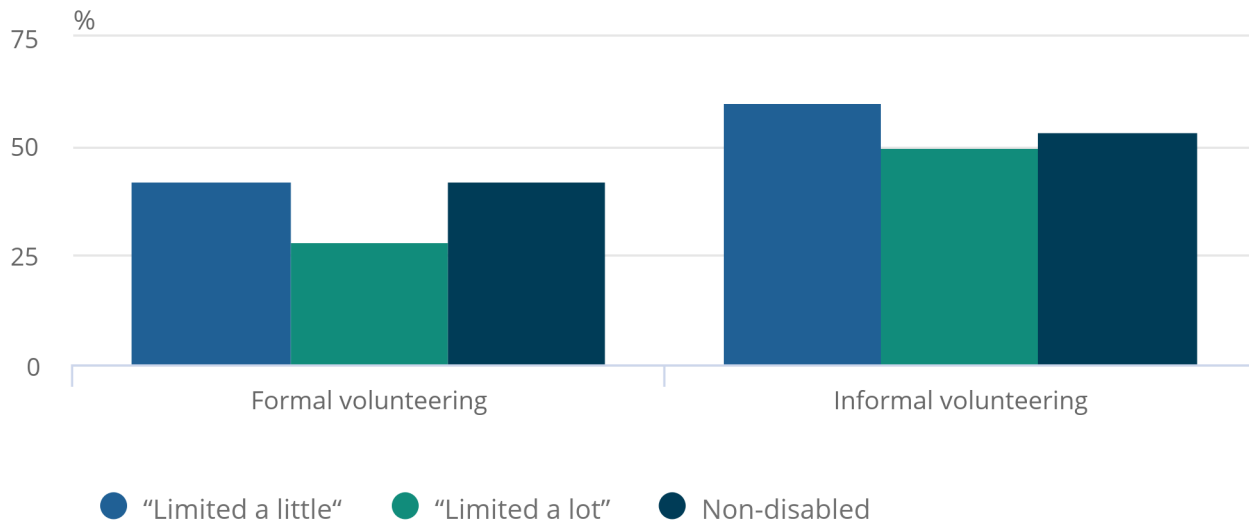
The proportions of disabled and non-disabled people who participated in volunteering were similar – this was true for both formal and informal volunteering. In the year ending March 2018, 37.7% of disabled people had taken part in formal volunteering in the previous 12 months compared with 41.9% of non-disabled people. For informal volunteering, 56.9% of disabled people participated compared with 53.5% of non-disabled people.

Figure 2: Disabled people “limited a lot” by their condition are less likely to have participated in formal volunteering than non-disabled people

Proportion of people who participated in volunteering by condition severity, England, 2017 to 2018

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Proportion of people who participated in volunteering by condition severity, England, 2017 to 2018



Source: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – Community Life Survey

For formal volunteering, the proportion of disabled people whose ability to carry out day-to-day activities is “limited a little” by their condition was the same as that of non-disabled people at 41.9%. However, the proportion of disabled people whose ability to carry out day-to-day activities is “limited a lot” by their condition who participated in formal volunteering (28.5%) is lower than that of both those “limited a little” and non-disabled people.

Informal volunteering shows a different picture to formal volunteering. For informal volunteering, the proportion of disabled people whose ability to carry out day-to-day activities is “limited a little” by their condition (60.1%) was higher than that of both those “limited a lot” (49.7%) and non-disabled people (53.5%). Despite their limited ability, the proportion of disabled people whose day-to-day activities are “limited a lot” by their condition that participated in informal volunteering is comparable with that of non-disabled people.

Disability is a barrier to volunteering for many disabled people, especially those that are “limited a lot”

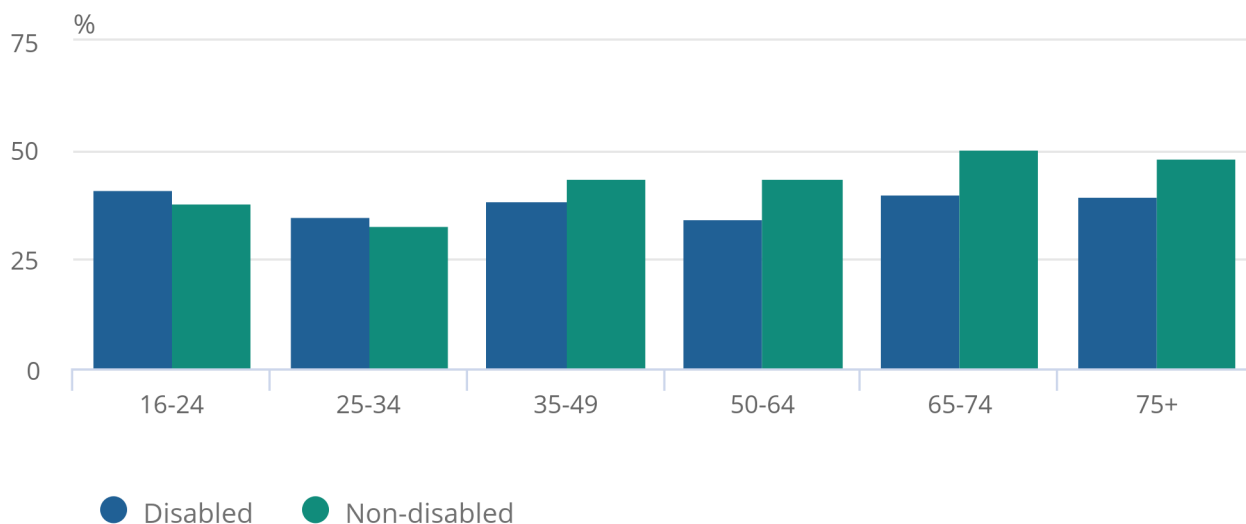
While the proportion of disabled and non-disabled people who did not participate in formal volunteering was similar, over a third (37.1%) of all disabled people who were not involved selected “I have an illness or disability that prevents me” as a reason why they had not participated. For disabled people whose ability to carry out day-to-day activities is “limited a lot” by their condition, this figure was 68.0%.

Figure 3: Disabled people in the 50 to 64 years and 65 to 74 years age groups are less likely to have participated in formal volunteering than non-disabled people

Percentage of people who participated in formal volunteering by disability and age group, England, 2017 to 2018

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Percentage of people who participated in formal volunteering by disability and age group, England, 2017 to 2018



Source: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – Community Life Survey

In the 50 to 64 years and 65 to 74 years age groups, the proportion of disabled people who took part in formal volunteering was significantly less than that of non-disabled people. In all other age groups, the proportions of people who took part in formal volunteering were not significantly different for disabled and non-disabled people.

Differences, between disabled and non-disabled people, in the proportion of people who participated in informal volunteering were not significant in any age group.

See the [Disability and social participation dataset](#) for further information on the analysis of formal and informal volunteering by disability and age and additional information on formal and informal volunteering by disability and sex.

5 . Participation in groups, clubs and organisations

Disabled people are just as likely to have been involved in a group, club or organisation as non-disabled people

The proportion of disabled people who were involved in at least one group, club or organisation (67.9%) is similar to that of non-disabled people (71.9%).

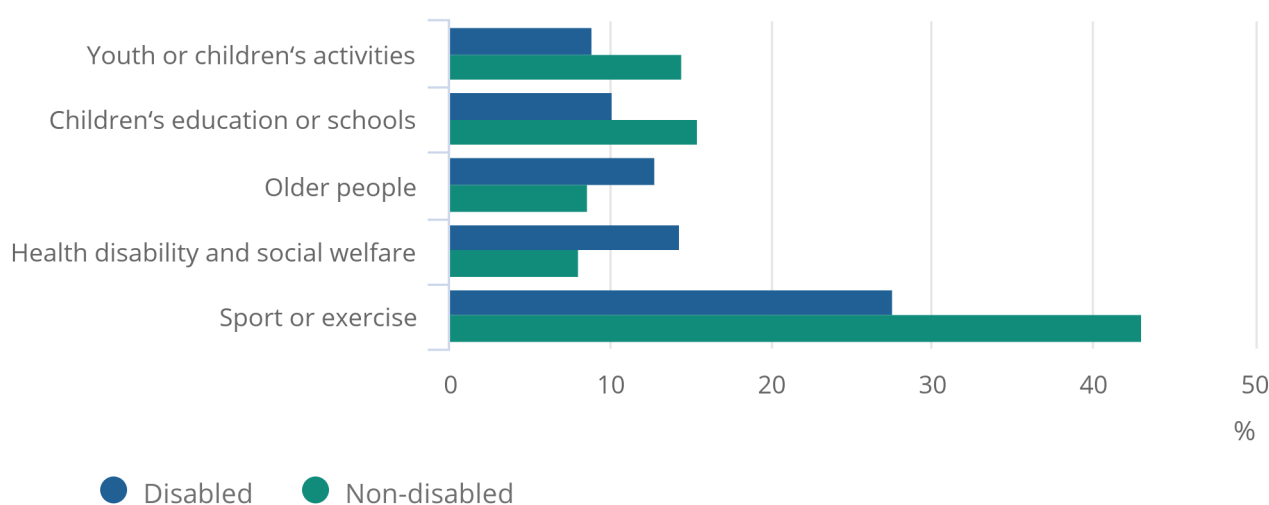
However, when focusing on involvement in different categories of groups, clubs and organisations, there are differences between disabled and non-disabled people in the proportions of people who participated in groups in a number of categories.

Figure 4: Participation in groups, clubs and organisations varies between disabled and non-disabled people for certain group categories

Percentage of people who participated in group categories where there are differences between disabled and non-disabled people, England, 2017 to 2018

Figure 4: Participation in groups, clubs and organisations varies between disabled and non-disabled people for certain group categories

Percentage of people who participated in group categories where there are differences between disabled and non-disabled people, England, 2017 to 2018



Source: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – Community Life Survey

Notes:

1. Involvement in sports or exercise groups includes taking part, coaching or going to watch.

The proportions of adults who were involved in groups for “Youth or children’s activities”, “Children’s education or schools” and “Sport or exercise” were lower for disabled adults than for non-disabled adults. The largest disparity was in “Sport or exercise” groups where the proportion of disabled people who participated was 15.5 percentage points less than that of non-disabled people. Despite this large disparity, the “Sport or exercise” category was the category with the highest participation for both disabled and non-disabled people.

Compared with non-disabled people, a higher proportion of disabled people were involved in a group, club or organisation in the “Health, disability and social welfare” or “Older people” categories.

There are a further 10 group participation categories, where disabled people were just as likely to have participated as non-disabled people. These 10 categories include “Religion”, “Local community” and “The environment or animals” (a full list of categories can be found in the [Glossary](#)).

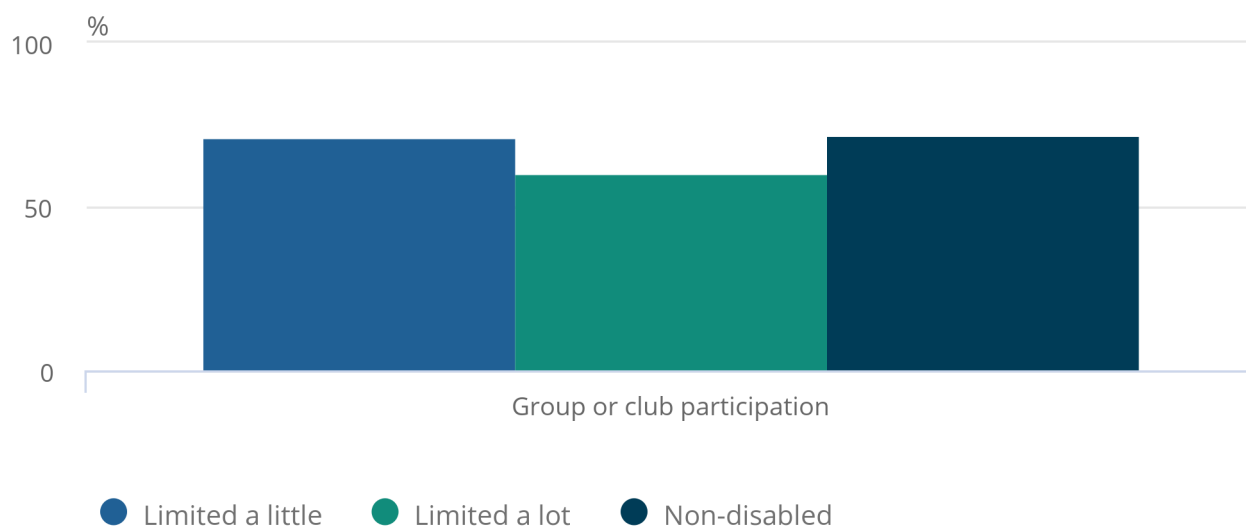
See the [Disability and social participation dataset](#) for further information on the analysis of group participation by disability.

Figure 5: Disabled people who are “limited a lot” by their condition are less likely to have participated in a group, club or organisation than non-disabled people

Percentage of people who participated in a group, club or organisation by condition severity, England, 2017 to 2018

Figure 5: Disabled people who are “limited a lot” by their condition are less likely to have participated in a group, club or organisation than non-disabled people

Percentage of people who participated in a group, club or organisation by condition severity, England, 2017 to 2018



Source: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport - Community Life Survey

Disabled people whose ability to carry out day-to-day activities are “limited a lot” by their condition were less likely to have participated in a group, club or organisation (60.4%) than non-disabled people (71.9%). The proportion of disabled people whose ability to carry out day-to-day activities are “limited a little” by their condition who participated in a group, club or organisation (71.3%) was similar to that of non-disabled people (71.9%).

Disabled people in the 50 to 64 years and 65 to 74 years age groups were less likely than non-disabled people to have participated in a group, club or organisation

The proportions of disabled people who had participated in a group, club or organisation were not significantly different to non-disabled people in any age groups, apart from the 50 to 64 years and 65 to 74 years age groups. In the 50 to 64 years age group, 63.4% of disabled people had been involved in a group, club or organisation compared with 72.3% of non-disabled people. In the 65 to 74 years age group, the proportion of disabled people who had participated in a group, club or organisation (68.7%) was also less than that of non-disabled people (78.2%).

See the [Disability and social participation dataset](#) for further information on the analysis of group participation by disability and age and additional information on group participation by disability and sex.

6 . Disability and social participation data

[Disability and social participation dataset](#)

Dataset | Released 2 December 2019

Tables for the proportion of disabled and non-disabled people in England who participate in civic engagements and social action; volunteering; and groups, clubs or organisations, with breakdowns of year, impairment severity, age and sex.

7 . Glossary

Disability

To define disability in this publication, we refer to the [Government Statistical Service's \(GSS's\) harmonised "core" definition](#). This identifies as disabled a person who has a physical or mental health condition or illness that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more that reduces their ability to carry-out day-to-day activities.

The GSS's definition is designed to reflect the definitions that appear in legal terms in the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#) and the subsequent [Equality Act 2010](#).

The GSS's harmonised questions are asked of the respondent in the survey, meaning that disability status is self-reported.

Severity

Disabled people whose ability to carry-out day-to-day activities is self-reported as "limited a lot" or "limited a little" by their impairment. Respondents were asked: "Does your condition or illness reduce your ability to carry-out day-to-day activities?" with the responses, "yes, a lot" and "yes, a little" being taken to indicate severity of disability.

Statistical significance

Any changes or differences mentioned in this publication are "statistically significant". The statistical significance of differences noted within the release are determined based on non-overlapping confidence intervals.

Civic participation

Civic participation refers to engagement in democratic processes, both in person and online, including contacting a local official (such as a local councillor or MP), signing a petition, or attending a public rally (this excludes voting).

Civic consultation

Civic consultation refers to taking part in a consultation about local services or problems in the local area through completing a questionnaire, attending a public meeting, or being involved in a face-to-face or online group.

Civic activism

Civic activism refers to involvement in activities in the local community, such as being a local councillor, school governor, volunteer special constable or magistrate (for those aged 18 years or over). Civic action also includes involvement (in person or online) in decision-making groups in the local area, for example, a group making decisions about local health or education services, a tenants' decision-making group, or a group set up to tackle local crime problems or to regenerate the local area.

Social action

Social action refers to involvement with issues affecting the local area by doing things like setting up a new service or amenity; stopping the closure of a service or amenity; stopping something happening in the local area; running a local service on a voluntary basis; or helping to organise a community event.

Formal volunteering

Formal volunteering refers to giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations.

Informal volunteering

Informal volunteering refers to giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not a relative.

Groups, clubs and organisations

Groups, clubs and organisations refers to involvement in a group, club or organisation, excluding giving money or anything that was a requirement of a job or organised through an employer.

A list of different categories of groups are provided, and respondents select any of the groups that they have been involved in in the previous 12 months. Respondents are asked to select all that apply from the following list:

- children's education or schools
- youth or children's activities
- education for adults
- sport or exercise (taking part, coaching or going to watch)
- religion
- politics
- older people
- health, disability and social welfare
- safety or first aid
- the environment or animals
- justice and human rights
- local community or neighbourhood groups
- citizen's groups
- hobbies, recreation, arts and social clubs
- trade union activity
- other

8 . Measuring the data

The Community Life Survey

The Community Life Survey is a household self-completion survey of approximately 10,000 adults aged 16 years or over in England. The survey can be completed either in a paper or online format; the question regarding disability status is only asked online. Data for the 2017 to 2018 year were collected between August 2017 and March 2018.

9 . Strengths and limitations

Participation

This article focuses on participation in three domains of social participation: civic engagement and social action; volunteering; and groups, clubs and organisations. In each domain, participation refers to any involvement in the 12 months prior to completing the survey. In some areas (such as formal and informal volunteering), the Community Life Survey also records participation in the four weeks prior to completing the survey – this data could be used to assess more regular participation in these areas. However, in order to be consistent across our analysis, we have looked only at involvement in the previous 12 months.

Uncertainty and quality

The results in this bulletin are survey-based estimates, so they are subject to a level of uncertainty as they are based on a sample rather than the whole population. Confidence intervals are provided around every estimate and give an indication of the range in which the true population value is likely to fall. The estimates in this bulletin are supported with confidence intervals at the 95% level. This means that if we repeated the sample, we would expect the true population value to fall within the lower and upper bounds of the interval 95% of the time (that is, 19 times out of 20).

10 . Related links

[Community Life Survey 2018-19](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 25 July 2019

Estimates from the 2018-19 Community Life Survey for adults in England.

[Social capital in the UK: May 2017](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 5 May 2017

How the UK is faring in four domains of social capital: personal relationships, social support networks, civic engagement, and trust and cooperative norms.

[National Survey for Wales: results viewer](#)

Results viewer | Released 20 June 2018

Results from all years of the National Survey for Wales with the option for selecting specific measures and breaking down by certain characteristics (disability breakdowns are available for some measures).

[Scotland's Wellbeing: national outcomes for disabled people](#)

Article | Released 31 July 2019

Analysis of the National Performance Framework outcome indicators from the perspective of disability in Scotland.

[The state of play: progress on Premier League clubs' accessibility](#)

Report | Released 16 May 2018

This report looks at whether Premier League clubs have met their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

[Diversity of candidates and elected officials in Great Britain](#)

Report | Released 8 March 2019

This report brings together the best current data on the protected characteristics of candidates standing in the 2016 and 2017 elections in Great Britain.

[Barriers to participation in standing for election to local government in Scotland](#)

Report | Released 8 March 2019

This report looks at the barriers to participation in standing for election to local government in Scotland.

[Disability pay gaps in the UK: 2018](#)

Article | Released 2 December 2019

Earnings and employment for disabled and non-disabled people in the UK, raw disability pay gaps and factors that affect pay for disabled people.