

Scottish Household Survey 2019

Visits to the outdoors – equalities data

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Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

1. Background

This short report looks at Scottish Household Survey data on frequency of visiting the outdoors for the period 2012 to 2019. It identifies patterns in **overall participation** (i.e. the proportion of adults who visit the outdoors at least once a year) and **weekly participation** (i.e. the proportion of adults who visit the outdoors at least once a week) among different population groups. Some [Scottish Recreation Survey](#) (ScRS) and [Scotland's People and Nature Survey](#) (SPANS) data are also included in the report to aid interpretation of the SHS data.

A question on frequency of visiting the outdoors has been included in the SHS since 2012 and the SHS is the data source used to monitor progress towards achievement of the Scottish Government's National Indicator, *To increase the proportion of people making one or more visits to the outdoors per week* (the ScRS fulfilled this role between 2006 and 2012). To provide an overall picture of visit behaviour as well as a useful variable for analysis, a question on frequency of visiting the outdoors is also included in SPANS.

Please note that the survey findings presented in this paper pre-date the Coronavirus pandemic.

2. Headlines

- At a population level, both overall and weekly participation in visits to the outdoors increased steadily between 2012 and 2018. A small dip in weekly participation was reported between 2018 and 2019, but weekly participation in 2019 remained higher than in 2017 and in any previous year since the time series began in 2006. The increase in weekly participation reported between 2017 and 2018 remains the largest year-on-year increase in the time series.
- It is estimated that an additional 343,000 adults visited the outdoors in 2019 compared to 2012; and that an additional 600,000 adults visited the outdoors on a weekly basis in 2019 compared to 2012.
- Since 2012, overall and weekly participation has increased among both men and women and across all age-groups. The greatest increases in overall participation have occurred among the youngest (aged 16 – 24) and oldest (aged 65 plus) age groups.
- Since 2012, overall and weekly participation has also increased among people living in Scotland's 10% most deprived areas.
- There has been no significant change since 2012 in overall participation among those with a long-term illness or disability although there has been an increase in weekly participation among this group (suggesting that those who are already visiting the outdoors are now doing so more frequently).
- There has been no significant change since 2012 in overall or weekly participation among members of the minority ethnic population.

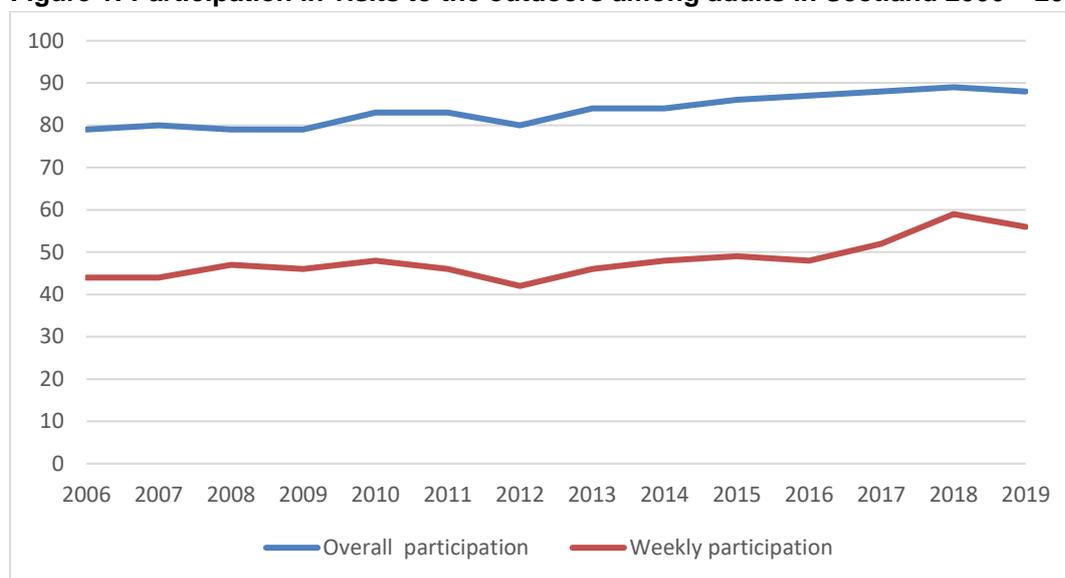
3. Participation trends – population level

3.1 There has been a significant increase in both the proportion of adults who visit the outdoors on an annual basis (up by 8 percentage points from 80% in 2012 to 88% in 2019) and on a

regular weekly basis (up by 14 percentage points from 42% in 2012 to 56% in 2019) (Figure 1). A small dip in weekly participation was reported between 2018 and 2019 (down from 59% to 56%) but weekly participation in 2019 remained higher than in 2017 and in any previous year since the time series began in 2006. The increase in weekly participation reported between 2017 and 2018 (up from 52% to 59%) remains the largest year-on-year increase in the time series.

3.2 Based on an adult population of 4.3 million (as at June 2019¹), this equates to an additional 343,000 adults visiting the outdoors in 2019 compared to 2012 and to an additional 600,000 adults visiting the outdoors on a regular weekly basis in 2019 compared to 2012. (Please note that it isn't possible to calculate the proportion of weekly visitors in 2019 who were previously occasional visitors or non-visitors as survey respondents are not asked how their current behaviour compares to their behaviour in previous years).

Figure 1: Participation in visits to the outdoors among adults in Scotland 2006 – 2019 (%)



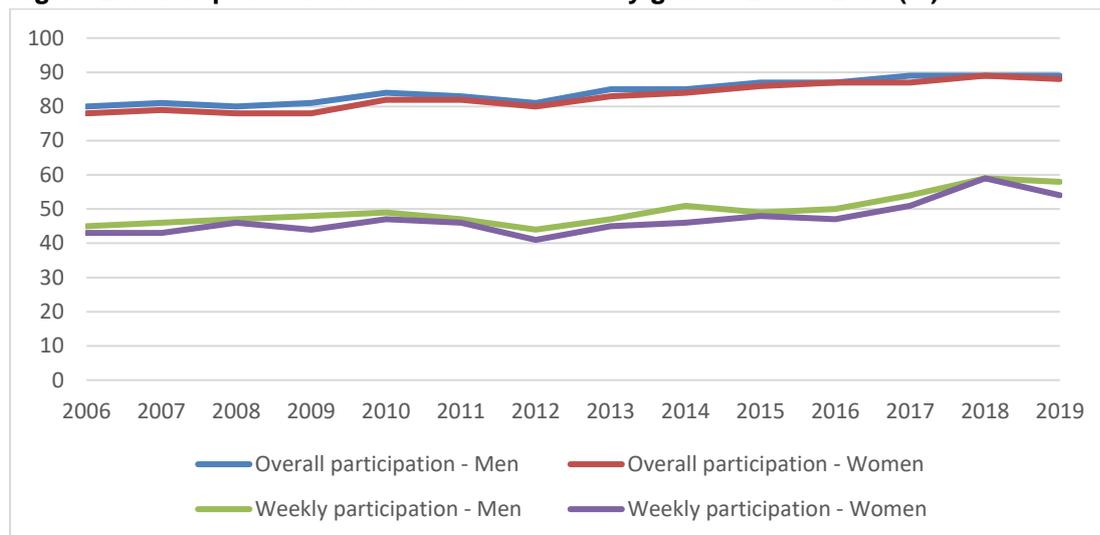
Source: Scottish Recreation Survey 2006 – 2011; Scottish Household Survey 2012 – 2019

4. Participation trends – population group

4.1 Overall and weekly participation in outdoor recreation has increased significantly among both men and women since 2012 (Figure 2). The proportion of men visiting the outdoors on an annual basis has increased by 8 percentage points (up from 81% in 2012 to 89% in 2019) while the proportion visiting on a regular weekly basis has increased by 14 percentage points (up from 44% to 58%). A similar pattern is found among women: since 2012 the proportion of women visiting the outdoors on an annual basis has increased by 8 percentage points (up from 80% to 88%) and the proportion visiting on a regular weekly basis has increased by 13 percentage points (up from 41% to 54%).

¹ <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates/mid-2019>

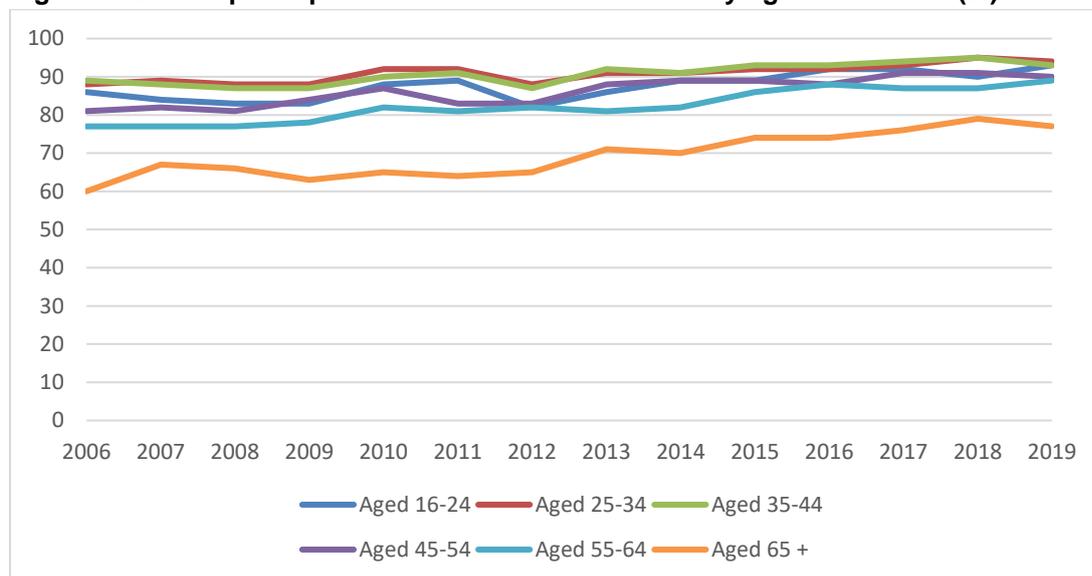
Figure 2: Participation in visits to the outdoors by gender 2006 - 2019 (%)



Source: Scottish Recreation Survey 2006 – 2011; Scottish Household Survey 2012 - 2019

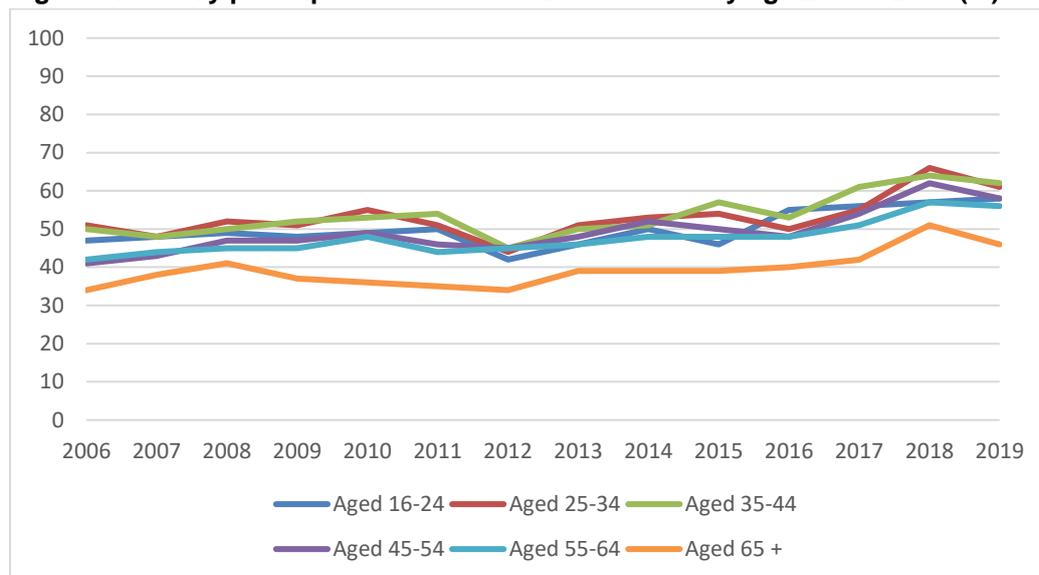
4.2 Overall and weekly participation in outdoor recreation also increased significantly across all age-groups between 2012 and 2019 (Figures 3 and 4). The greatest increases in overall participation have occurred among the youngest age group (up from 82% to 93% among 16-24 year olds) and the oldest age group (up from 65% to 77% among those aged 65 plus) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Overall participation in visits to the outdoors by age 2006 – 2019 (%)



Source: Scottish Recreation Survey 2006 – 2011; Scottish Household Survey 2012 - 2019

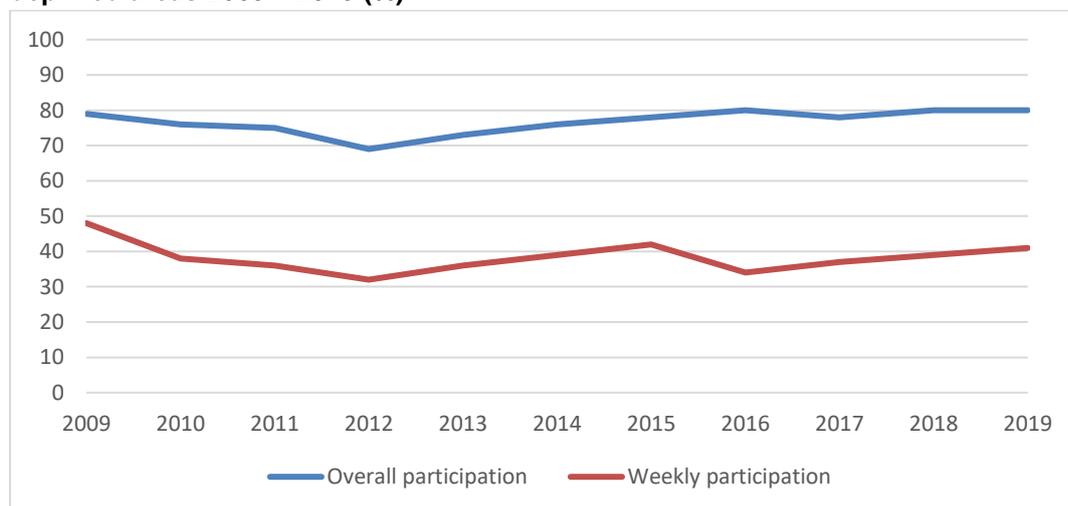
Figure 4: Weekly participation in visits to the outdoors by age 2006 – 2019 (%)



Source: Scottish Recreation Survey 2006 – 2011; Scottish Household Survey 2012 – 2019

4.3 Overall and weekly participation in outdoor recreation among adults living in the 10% most deprived areas in Scotland has also increased significantly since 2012 (Figure 5). Overall participation has increased by 11 percentage points, up from 69% in 2012 to 80% in 2019. Over the same period, weekly participation has increased by 9 percentage points (from 32% to 41%).

Figure 5: Participation in visits to the outdoors by SIMD: adults living in the 10% most deprived areas 2009 – 2019 (%)

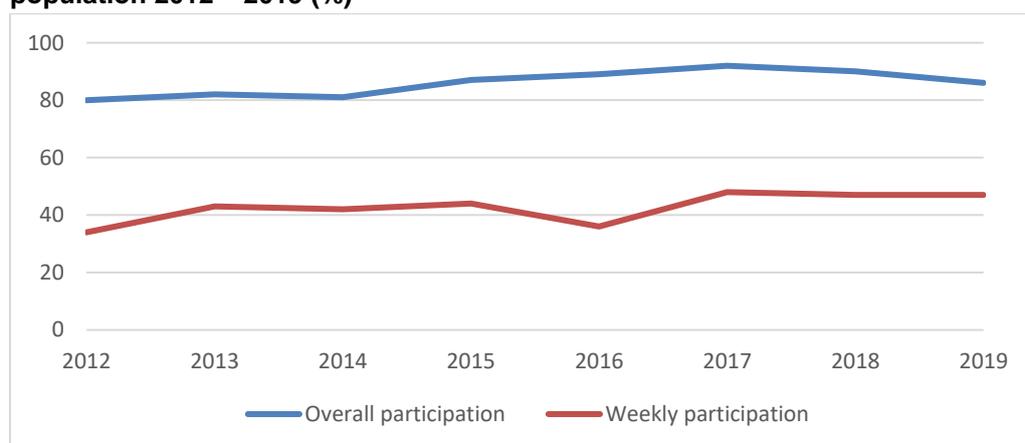


Source: Scottish Recreation Survey 2009 – 2011; Scottish Household Survey 2012 - 2019

4.4 The sample of respondents from the minority ethnic population taking part in the SHS is relatively small and so confidence intervals around the estimates shown in Figure 6, below, are wide. While the graph shows some variation in participation across the time series, none of these changes are statistically significant.

In 2019, the SHS estimated that 86% of adults in the minority ethnic population visited the outdoors, with 47% visiting on a regular weekly basis. The equivalent figures for the population as a whole are 88% and 56%, respectively, indicating that members of the minority ethnic population are just as likely as all adults to visit the outdoors, but less likely to visit on a regular weekly basis.

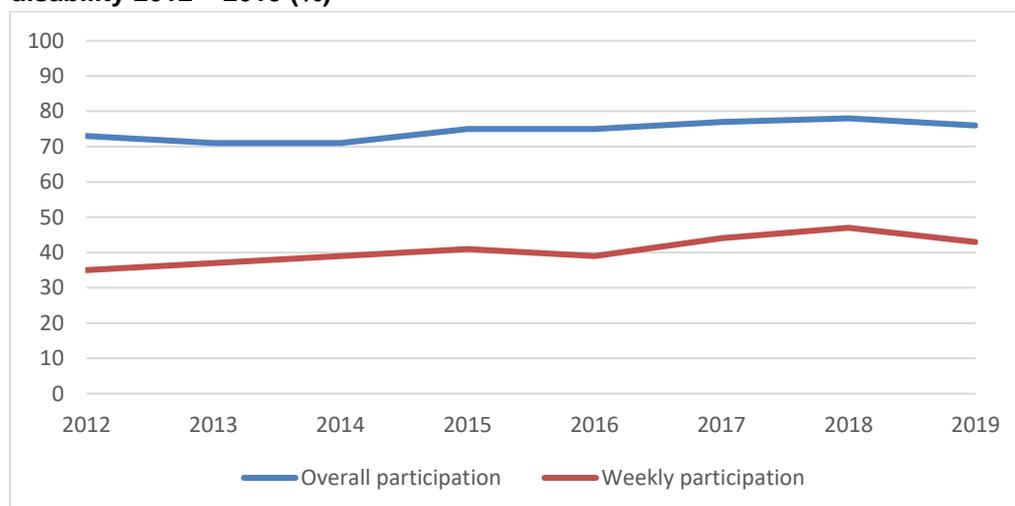
Figure 6: Participation in visits to the outdoors by ethnicity: members of the minority ethnic population 2012 – 2019 (%)



Source: Scottish Household Survey 2012 – 2019

4.5 There has been no significant change between 2012 and 2019 in overall participation in outdoor recreation among adults with a long-term illness or disability (73% and 76%, respectively). There has, however, been a significant increase in weekly participation among this group (up by 8 percentage points, from 35% in 2012 to 43% in 2019), suggesting that existing visitors with long-term limiting conditions are getting outdoors more often.

Figure 7: Participation in visits to the outdoors among adults with a long-term illness or disability 2012 – 2019 (%)



Source: Scottish Household Survey 2012 - 2019

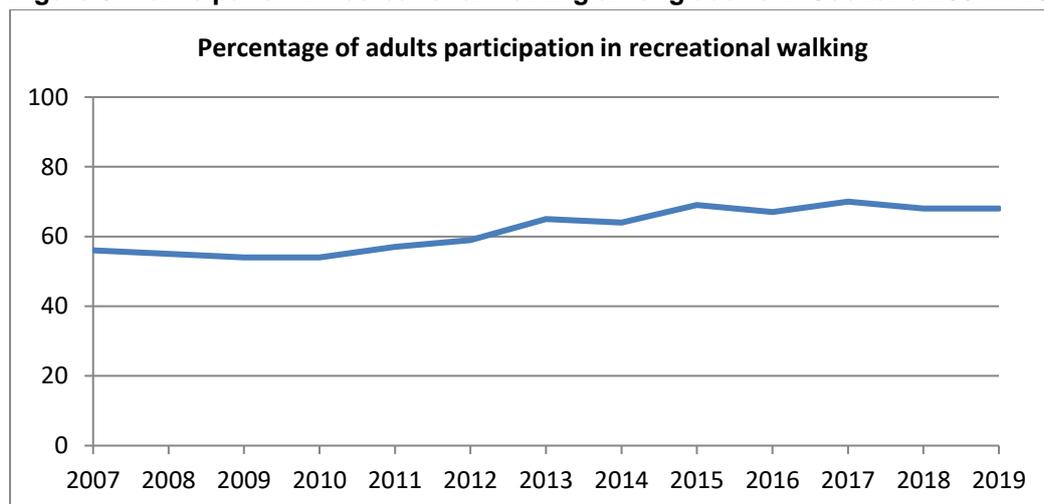
5. What's driving the increase in participation?

5.1 It is likely that a variety of inter-related factors have contributed to the increases in overall and weekly participation discussed above. There is evidence, for instance, of an increase in the proportion of people participating in recreational walking; an increase in the numbers of outdoor visits being taken close to home (suggesting that more people are finding opportunities to explore local nature); and an increase in the numbers of people walking to the destination of their outdoor visit rather than using a car. Increased investment in the provision of greenspace, paths and routes close to where people live may well be having an impact. Increased awareness of the health benefits associated with visiting the outdoors may also be playing a role ('health and exercise' is identified in SPANS as a main motivating factor for outdoor visits), along with increased provision of opportunities to participate in organised activities (for example, Health Walks, Park Run). Qualitative research commissioned by the Scottish Government and NatureScot in 2020 at the start of the Coronavirus pandemic (due to be published in May 2021) will help us better understand the drivers of recent increases in participation and also the impact of the pandemic on people's outdoor visit behaviour and engagement with nature².

5.2 The proportion of adults participating in recreational walking has increased significantly since 2007 although participation appears to have plateaued more recently (Figure 8). Sixty eight per cent of adults participated in 2019, up by 12 percentage points on 2007 (56%) and by 9 percentage points on 2012 (59%).

5.3 Recreational walking is the most prevalent sporting activity undertaken by adults in Scotland and the most popular activity irrespective of deprivation (although those in the least deprived areas participate significantly more than those in the most deprived areas). Participation in walking has also increased among all age groups since 2008. In 2019, participation was highest in the 16-34 and 35-59 age groups (72% in both), declining to 58% among those aged 60 and above.

Figure 8: Participation in recreational walking among adults in Scotland 2007 – 2019 (%)

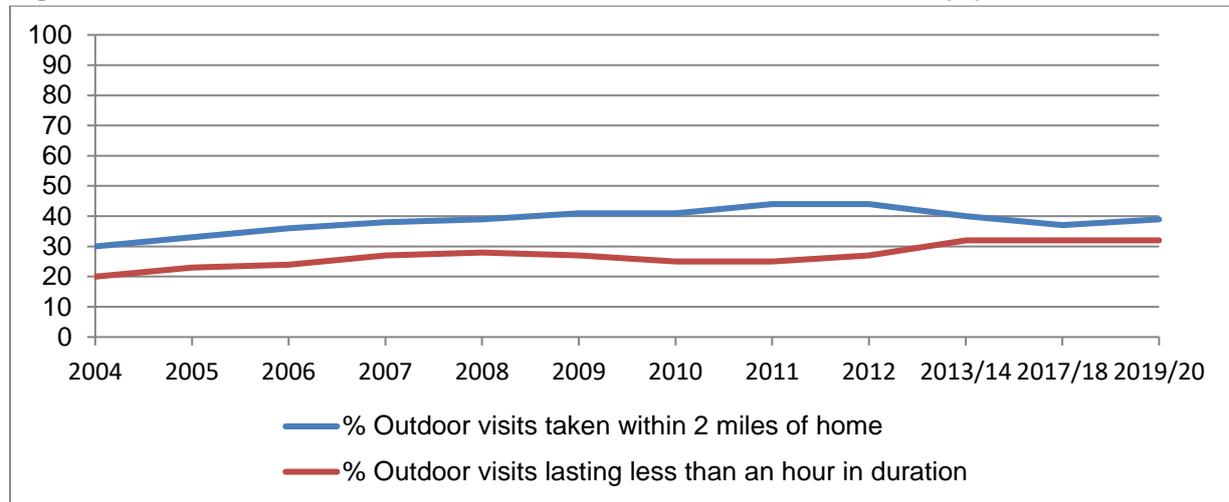


Source: Scottish Household Survey 2007 - 2019

² 'Understanding the drivers of increased participation in outdoor recreation in Scotland' will be published by the Scottish Government in May 2021.

5.4 The last ten years or so has also seen an increase in the proportion of shorter duration outdoor visits and visits taken close to home, suggesting that more people are finding opportunities to enjoy the nature on their doorstep (Figure 9). The proportion of visits taken within 2 miles of home increased from 30% in 2004 to 39% in 2019/20, with the average distance travelled on outdoor visits falling from 16 miles to just over 7 miles over the same period. At the same time, the proportion of visits lasting for less than an hour in duration increased from 20% in 2004 to 32% in 2019/20.

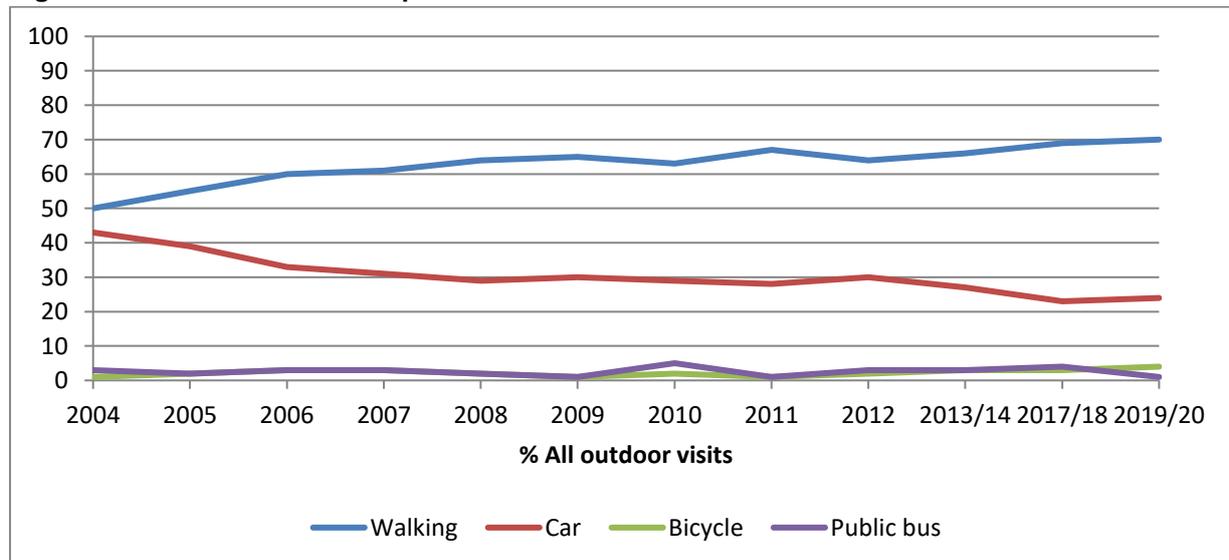
Figure 9: Distance travelled and duration of outdoor visits 2004 - 2019/20 (%)



Source: Scottish Recreation Survey 2004 – 2012; Scotland's People and Nature Survey 2013/14, 2017/18 and 2019/20

5.5 The increase in the proportion of shorter duration visits being taken closer to home has been accompanied by an increase in the proportion of visits being made entirely on foot and a corresponding decrease in the proportion involving the use of a car (Figure 10). Between 2004 and 2019/20, the proportion of outdoor visits where walking was the main method of transport used increased from 50% to 70% while the proportion of visits involving travel by car decreased from 43% to 24%.

Figure 10: Main means of transport used to reach the destination of outdoor visits 2004-2019/20



Source: Scottish Recreation Survey 2004 – 2012; Scotland's People and Nature Survey 2013/14, 2017/18 and 2019/20

5.6 The survey findings presented in this report pre-date the Coronavirus pandemic. Research undertaken by NatureScot³ in the first six months of the pandemic in 2020 indicates that many people visited the outdoors more frequently than usual during this period, reporting positive impacts on their mental and physical health and wellbeing. Based on their experience during the pandemic, around half of all adults expected to spend more time outdoors in future. But the research also highlighted persistent inequalities in participation and access to good quality local greenspace, especially among older people, less affluent individuals, those in poor health or with an illness/disability, and members of the minority ethnic population.

Aileen Armstrong
March 2021

³ [Enjoying the Outdoors: Monitoring the impact of Coronavirus and social distancing](#)