

LET HER DREAM 2025

**The Rise of the Gender
Dream Deficit in Sport**

**WOMEN
N
SPORT**



Published January 2026

#LetHerDream

CONTEXT

At Women in Sport, we believe sport has the power to transform girls' and women's lives, building resilience, courage self-belief and a sense of belonging. Yet, we know that gender stereotypes and institutional bias continue to hold girls and women back, not only from fully participating in sport but also from reaching their full potential in life.



This report is the sixth in our series tracking how the rising visibility of women's sport is shaping the attitudes and aspirations of young people aged 13–24 in the UK. This year's survey was conducted after the Women's Euros and Women's Rugby World Cup 2025, the latter hosted in England, where the Red Roses won the final in front of a record-breaking crowd and a BBC peak audience of 5.8 million.¹ It capped a landmark year for women's sport: the Lionesses retained their UEFA Women's Euro title, and World Rugby set out a Blueprint for Growth to turn visibility into sustained participation, investment and cultural change.²

Sport brings joy, connection, self-belief and long-term health benefits, yet too many girls still miss out. Girls are less physically active than boys, and there is a 24% gender gap in team sport participation – seven in ten boys play team sports, less than half of girls do.³ Persistent gender stereotypes, concerns about safety, and the lack of much-wanted single-sex opportunities and spaces continue to hinder their sense of belonging. These barriers start young, intensify through puberty and the transition into adulthood, and compound over time – shaping not just whether girls take part, but how they feel and thrive in the spaces where sport happens.

Nearly half of girls don't feel comfortable changing for PE, and 15% have skipped school to avoid it entirely.⁴ Girlguiding's latest Girls' Attitudes Survey found that 46% of girls aged 11–16 have experienced boys making comments that women's sport is inferior to men's, rising to 53% of girls aged 17–18. One in three girls receive sexist comments when playing sport.⁵ Over a third of girls (36%) say inequality and discrimination negatively impact their mental health.⁵ At the same time, cultural conversations about sexism, misogyny and gender inequality have become more visible in mainstream media, with programmes such as *Adolescence* bringing these issues into sharper public and political focus.⁶

This sits against a wider generational backdrop in which many young people, particularly girls, are becoming increasingly aware of fairness and equality at a time of growing political and social division, and more vocal about the inequalities they see in daily life.⁴ Meanwhile, two-thirds of Gen Z (ages 13–28) say they can go days without going outside, linked to rising loneliness and anxiety.⁷ Together, these insights highlight the urgent need for safe, inclusive and supportive spaces for girls to move, play and connect.

In 2024, the Paris Olympics demonstrated the power of visibility to inspire young people.⁸ The Olympics visibly celebrated gender equality and ethnic diversity across a multitude of sports on a global scale, a feat that is difficult to emulate. The Games coincided with a spike in aspirations, with a substantial rise in boys' and girls' sporting dreams.

Just over a year later and following an incredible summer of women's sport, aspirations have substantially dropped, especially for girls. This sharp decline reinforces that visibility alone is not enough – the right structures, environments and culture is needed. As women's sport continues to rise in profile and public conversation, the challenge now is to ensure that this is matched with improved access, investment, support, and equality at all levels of sport and participation.⁹

This report explores how girls and young women, boys and young men are experiencing this moment in women's sport, what is shifting in their attitudes and aspirations, and what they believe still stands in the way of progress. We took the opportunity to explore attitudes to rugby in more depth given the greater visibility of women's rugby in 2025.

*Throughout the report we use the terminology girls and boys for simplicity.

1 The Independent (2025) [England's Rugby World Cup Triumph Makes History](#)

2 World Rugby (2025) [World Rugby Launches 'A Blueprint for Growth - Women's Rugby' - The Most Comprehensive Fan, Data and Commercial Analysis Ever Undertaken in the Women's Game](#)

3 Sport England (2024) [Sport England \(2025\) Active Lives Children and Young People Survey: Academic Year 2024-2025](#)

4 Sky and Public First (2023) [How Sport Gives Every Girl a Better Chance: Game Changing](#)

5 Girlguiding (2025) [Girls' Attitudes Survey 2025](#)

6 BBC (2025) [Drama Shines Light on 'Growing Problem' - PM](#)

7 The Independent (2025) [Touch Grass: How Gen Z Stopped Going Outside & Why it Matters](#)

8 Women in Sport (2024) [Chasing the Olympic Dream: Closing the Dream Deficit in Sport](#)

9 Weed, M., Coren, E., Fiore, J., Wellard, I., Mansfield, L., Sian, K. and Chatzidimitriou, K. (2015) 'The Olympic Games and Raising Sport Participation: A systematic Review of Evidence and an Interrogation of Policy for a Demonstration Effect', *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 15(2), pp. 195–213.

SUMMARY



Despite an incredible summer of women's sport, with major tournament wins for the Lionesses and Red Roses, girls' dream rates have fallen.

The surge in visibility for women's sport during this year's summer of sport has inspired pride and excitement among young people. As well as the Women's Euros, many girls tuned in to support the Red Roses, to enjoy the spectacle, and to watch women's sport they rarely see. This heightened exposure has helped inspire girls and boys alike, but it has also intensified girls' awareness of the inequalities they continue to face.

Girls are sending a clear message that progress is not fast enough. This year, they expressed a stronger demand for more local opportunities, more single-sex spaces and opportunities, greater diversity and choice, and better representation, not just in the media, but on the pitch and the sidelines. Rising visibility has also cast light on just how hard it is for girls to reach the top of sport and the obstacles female athletes must navigate once they are there, from underfunding and lower pay to the lack of professional pathways and support.

Crucially, aspirations have fallen sharply. After last year's Paris Olympic uplift, girls' dream rates dropped from 38% to 23%, widening the gender dream gap from 21% to 30% — the largest since tracking began. This drop is couched within a persistent confidence and belonging gap that societal norms and stereotypes create for girls.

This year's findings also reveal a divergence in how girls and boys interpret the growth of women's sport. Girls are deeply inspired by what they see, but that inspiration sits alongside a sharper awareness of the inequalities and obstacles ahead. Boys feel the excitement too, yet many still do not

recognise the extent of the barriers girls face. Boys were also more likely to worry that growing support for women's sport could negatively impact the men's game, and almost twice as likely to believe that women are not as good at sport — attitudes that girls are acutely aware of and that reinforce their sense of inequality. This split in perception highlights how visibility is landing differently: for girls, it illuminates both possibility and injustice; for boys, it brings excitement, and for some, a possible threat.

The findings make one message clear: increased visibility has a powerful effect on inspiring girls and boys to be more active, to try or explore new sports, but it does not address the persistent barriers that hold girls back from doing so. Visibility sparks belief, but without tackling the structural and cultural barriers around safety, belonging and opportunity, many girls still don't feel able to step into new spaces or feel that the pathways ahead are truly possible for them.

While visibility has opened doors, it has also highlighted how far there is still to go. Girls want to feel valued, supported and represented — and until belonging and opportunity gaps are meaningfully addressed, visibility alone will not translate into equal participation. Nor will it sustain dreams. Yet the cultural shift underway, with both girls and boys increasingly engaged and inspired by women's sport, shows that there is a growing demand for lasting change.

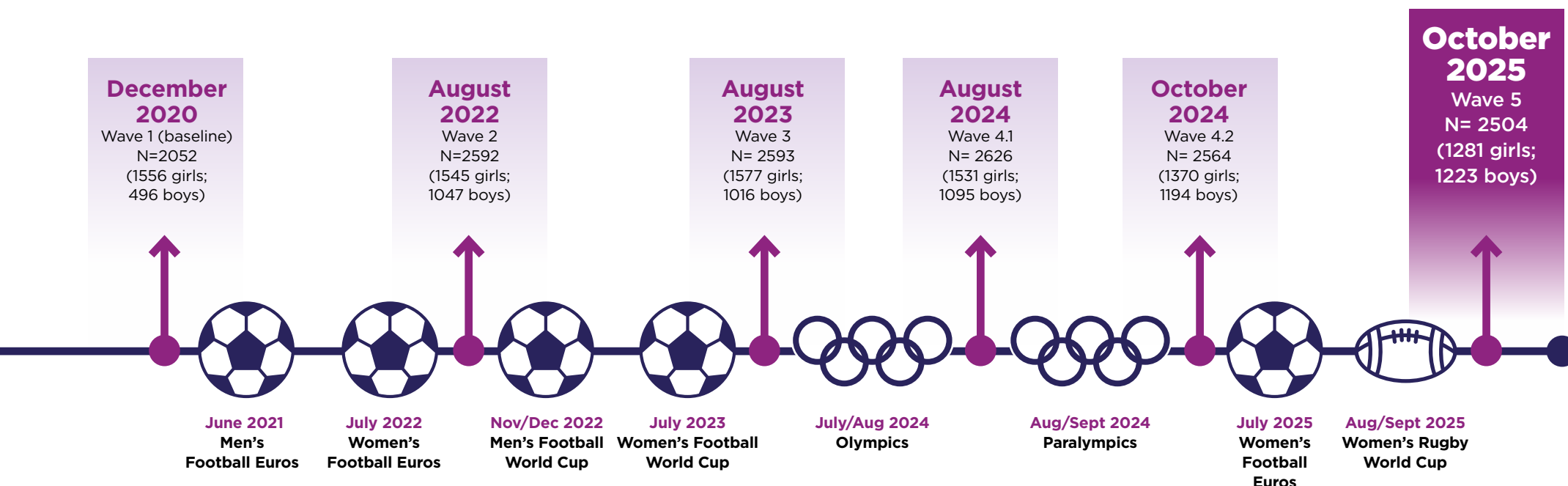
KEY INSIGHTS

The Dream Deficit

- Girls' dream rates have plummeted — falling to 23%, down from 38% in 2024, widening the gender dream gap to its largest level since tracking began (30%). Girls who “love sport” have been most impacted, with a drop in dream rates of 35%, compared to a decline of 15% for boys.
- Aspirations have fallen across every ethnic group this year – Black girls continue to dream the most (38%), despite a substantial 22% fall from 2024, while ‘White Other’ girls dream the least (17%). Mixed Race girls experienced the steepest drop of all groups (-27%).
- Gender stereotypes around girls in sport remain the biggest barrier to girls' aspirations. Beliefs that sport isn't important for girls, that girls aren't expected to be good at sport, and that they are less encouraged to excel have all risen this year, reversing previous progress. Other structural barriers include limited local opportunities, lack of support, and insufficient investment.
- The summer of women's sport inspired but also revealed how unequal sport still is:
 - Girls are far more likely than boys to feel that women's sport is just as important as men's, yet still judged as lower quality and not taken as seriously.
 - Boys are almost twice as likely to say that women are not as good at sport, and to worry that the growth of women's sport could harm the men's game.



OUR DREAM DEFECIT WORK TO DATE



Methodological Note:



- Women in Sport commissioned Savanta to carry out nationally representative surveys of young people aged 13-24.
- For ease of reporting, we refer to this age group as 'girls' and 'boys' throughout the report.
- Some survey questions were not asked in every wave and were specific to particular events or points in time.
- Arrows in graphs and tables indicate statistically significant differences between girls and boys.
- Green/red stats in graphs and tables indicate significant differences over time.
- All statistics in this report have been rounded, so totals may not always add up to exactly 100% due to rounding adjustments.

FEWER GIRLS 'LOVE' SPORT AND 7 IN 10 WANT MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE PART IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION



Q. How would you describe yourself in relation to sport and physical activity?*	GIRLS					BOYS				
	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025
I love sport and take part lots already	20%	21%	19%	26%	16%	32%	39%	36%	39%	41%
I love sport but want opportunities to do more	28%	30%	28%	34%	30%	31%	29%	29%	37%	30%
I don't take part much but want to do more	37%	37%	36%	28%	42%	26%	21%	23%	15%	23%
I don't take part much and don't want to do more	15%	13%	17%	12%	12%	11%	10%	12%	8%	6%

*Green figures highlight significant positive changes from the previous year, while red figures highlight significant negative changes from the previous year

THE DREAM DEFICIT

FALLING DREAMS: GIRLS' ASPIRATIONS IN SPORT ARE AT AN ALL-TIME LOW

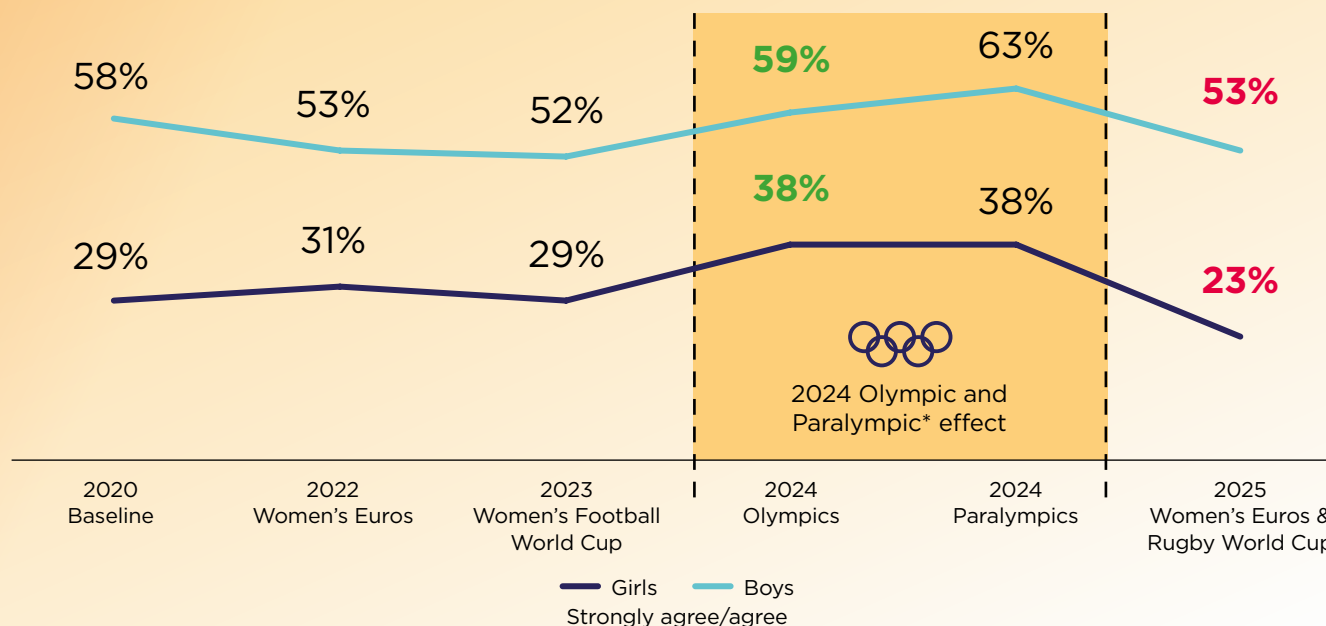


Between 2020-2023, girls' dream rates remained relatively stable before a 9% spike in 2024 following the Paris Olympics. In 2025 however, girls' dreams have fallen by 15% - the lowest level we've ever recorded. Boys' dream rates have been consistently higher with a similar rise post-Olympics and Paralympics, and have now dropped back to their 2022 levels. As a result, the gender dream gap has widened sharply, rising

from 21% in 2024 to 30% in 2025, the largest gap we have seen since tracking began.

Dreaming also falls with age for girls but remains relatively stable for boys. Just 27% aged 13-16 dream of reaching the top in sport (vs 52% of boys), dropping to 22% among 17-19s (vs 51% of boys) and 23% among 20-24s (vs 55% of boys).

Girls & boys who dream about becoming a top athlete or sportsperson



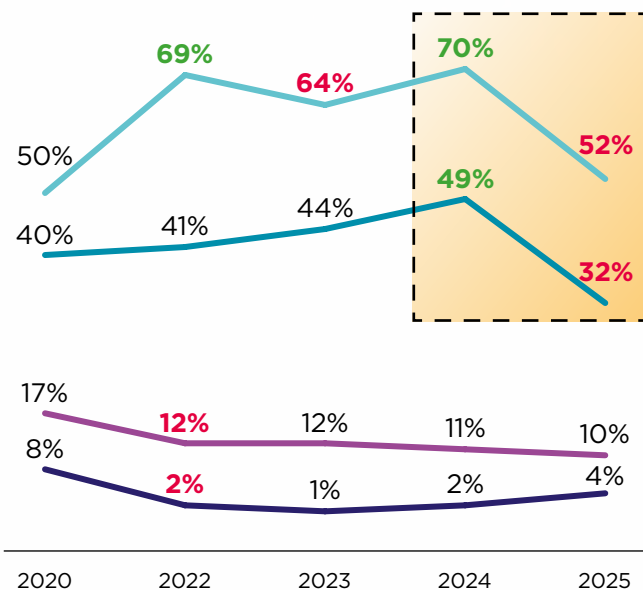
*Data from our Paralympic report is included here for completeness but is not comparable to other findings, and therefore not used elsewhere in the report. This is due to a non-representative sample boost in disabled children and young people.

DREAMING HAS FALLEN SHARPLY FOR GIRLS WHO 'LOVE SPORT'

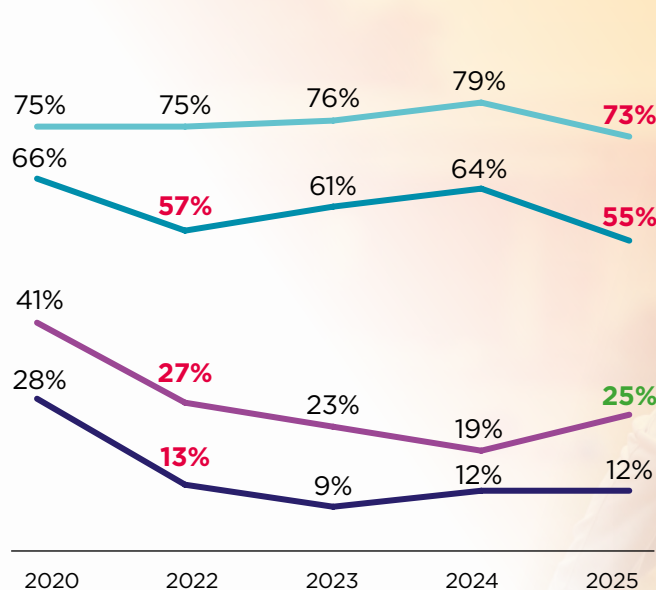
Dreaming of becoming a top athlete has fallen this year across almost all engagement groups, and especially for girls who *love sport*. Among those who “love sport and take part lots”, girls’ dream rates have dropped steeply by 18% compared to a 6% decline for boys. Similarly, for those who “love sport but want to do more”, girls’ dream rates have fallen by 17% vs 9% for boys.

Among young people “who don’t take part much but want to do more”, boys’ dreams rose slightly from 2024 (19% to 25%), while girls’ remained low and stable (11% to 10%). Dreaming among those who “don’t take part and don’t want to” remains very low for both girls and boys.

Girls’ dream rates over time by engagement



Boys’ dream rates over time by engagement



Love sport & take part lots already Don't take part much but want to do more
Love sport but want to do more Don't take part much & don't want to

Strongly agree/agree

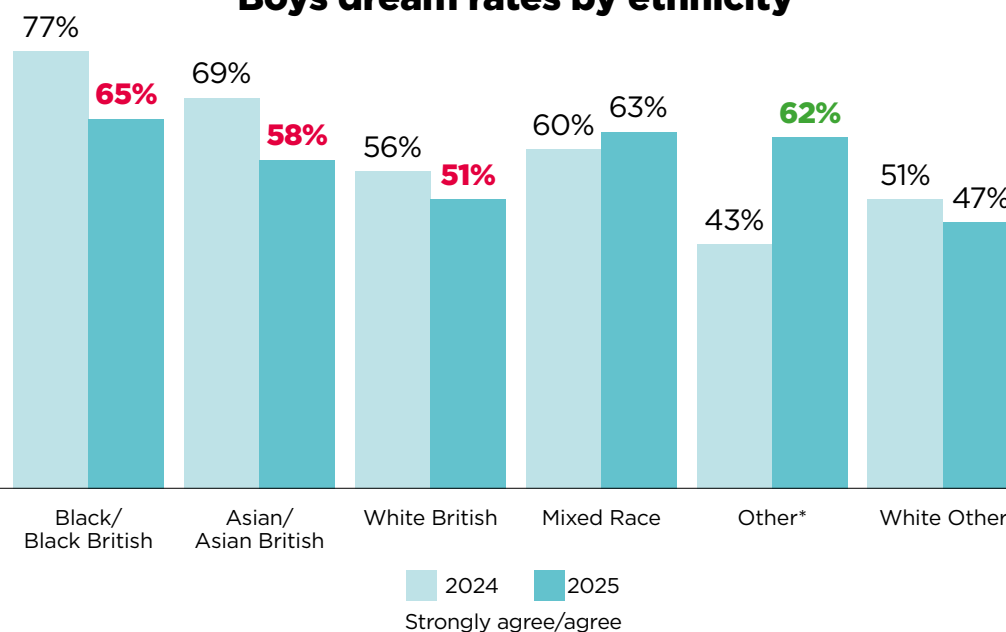


DREAMING HAS FALLEN FOR ALL GIRLS FROM DIFFERENT ETHNICITIES, BUT BLACK GIRLS STILL DREAM THE MOST

Girls dream rates by ethnicity



Boys dream rates by ethnicity



*Caution should be exercised when interpreting data for the 'Other' group, as the sample size for both girls and boys is below n=30.

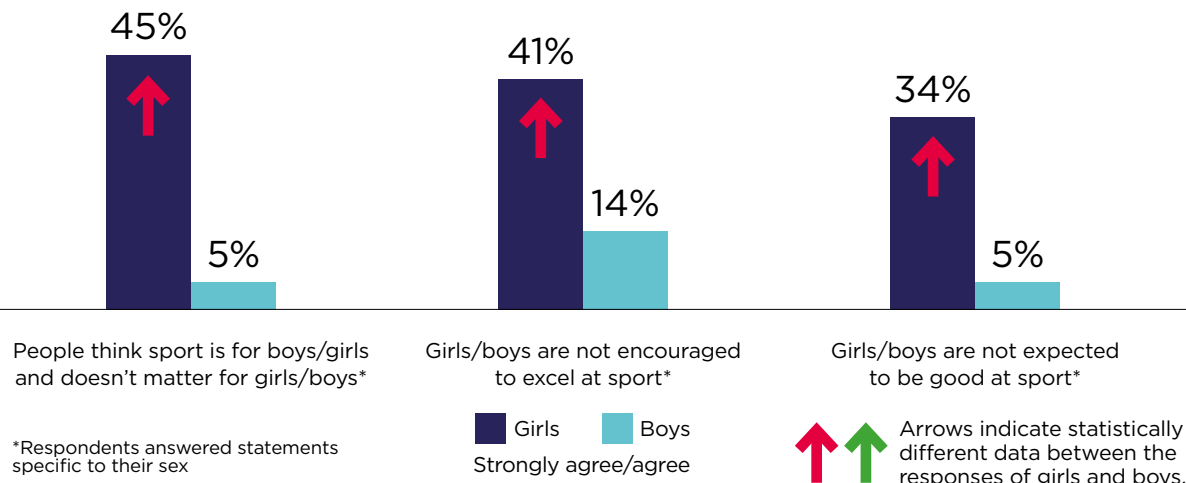


Dreams of reaching the top of sport have fallen for girls across every ethnic group this year but the scale of decline varies sharply. Black girls continue to dream the most in 2025 (38%), despite a substantial 22% drop from 2024. Mixed Race girls have experienced the steepest fall this year, with dreams falling by 27%, followed closely by 'White Other' girls, whose aspirations fell by 26%. Asian girls and White British girls have also seen notable declines, though smaller in scale (14% and 11% respectively).

While the pattern of decline is similar for most boys, their dream rates remain far higher than girls across every ethnic group underscoring a persistent gender gap. Black boys continue to dream the most (65%), followed closely by Mixed Race boys (63%) and those from 'Other' ethnic groups (62%).

GENDER STEREOTYPES ARE RISING AND LIMITING GIRLS' SPORTING DREAMS

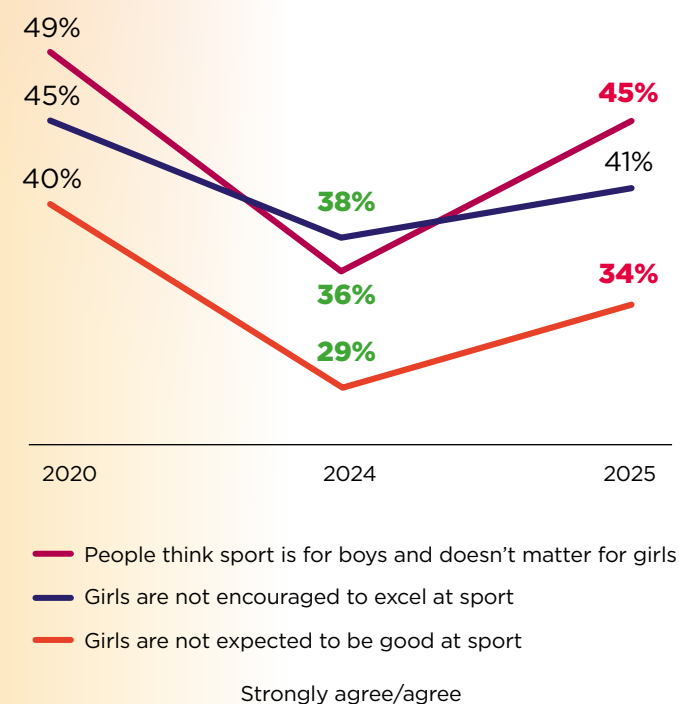
Barriers to girls' & boys' aspirations in sport



From 2020 - 2023 there was a gradual decrease in girls perceiving these negative attitudes around them, indicating a positive shift in how society values girls in sport. In 2025 however, more girls and young women are feeling the negative impact of gender stereotyping again, and far more than boys.

The impact of such messages about girls in sport is evident across all levels of engagement, but one group of girls feels it most keenly. Girls who "don't take part much but want to do more" are the most likely to say people think sport is for boys and doesn't matter for girls (48%), and that girls are not encouraged to excel in sport (46%).

Barriers to girls' aspirations in sport over time



Even if they reach the top, they're [female athletes] never recognised as much as their male counterparts."

(Girl, aged 20)

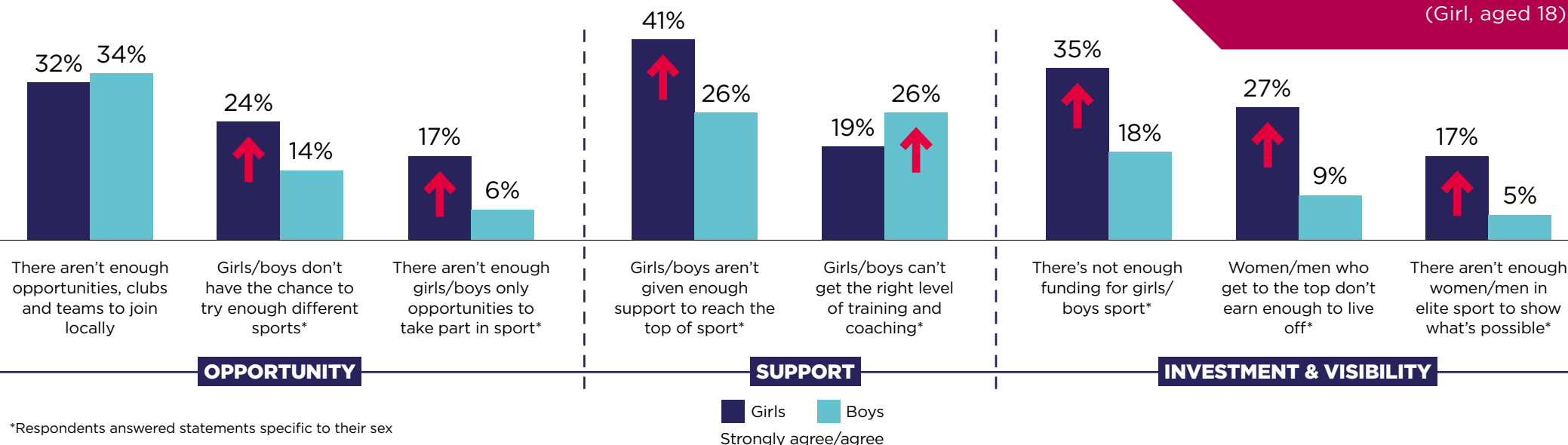


Starting from a young age, girls are often put down by other boys in sport, so they feel offput."

(Girl, aged 18)

GIRLS BELIEVE MORE INVESTMENT, OPPORTUNITY AND SUPPORT WILL HELP THEM REACH THE TOP IN SPORT

Barriers to girls' & boys' aspirations in sport



Girls sports tends to be less supported. And men's sports are way more popular."

(Girl, aged 18)

The biggest barriers girls believe prevent them from reaching the top focus on support, funding and access. The main concern is that girls aren't given enough support to reach the top (41% vs. 26% of boys). Investment also remains a major issue, with 35% of girls saying there isn't enough funding for girls' sport – lower than 41% in 2020, but still far higher than boys currently (18%). Perceptions around local opportunities have also worsened for girls, rising from 28% in 2024 to 32% in 2025 (similar to boys), and almost a

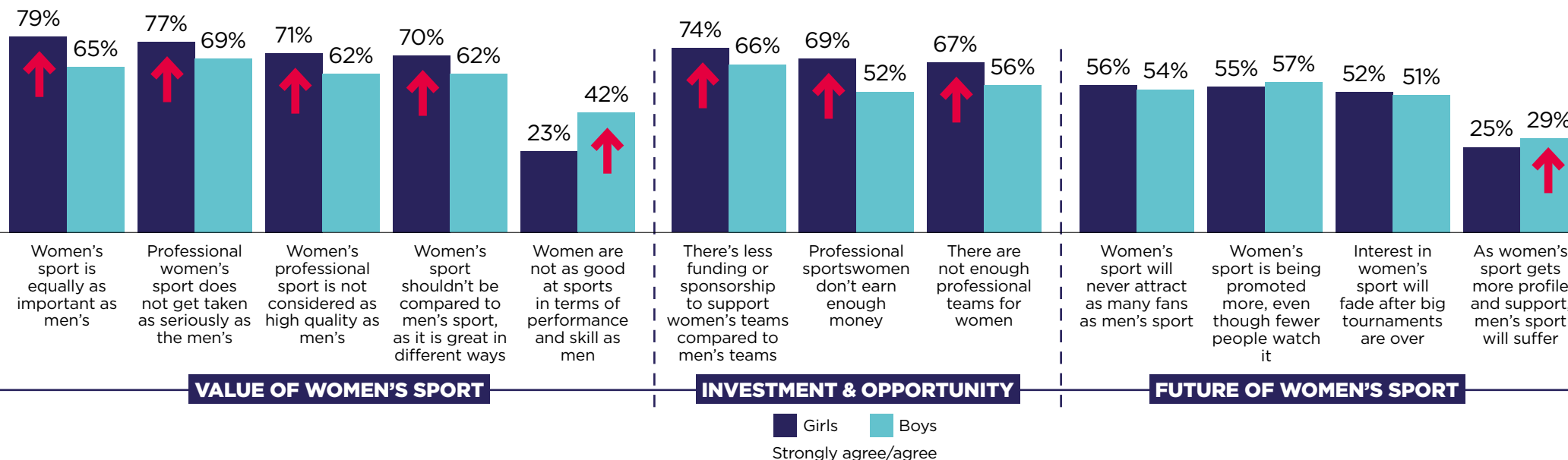
quarter agree that girls don't have the chance to try different sports. This suggests that girls' awareness of the lack of grassroots opportunities on the ground may be increasing as visibility and demand grow.

Boys are significantly more likely than girls to say they can't get the right level of training and coaching, which is perhaps unsurprising given that girls are less likely to be participating in the first place.



THE SUMMER OF WOMEN'S SPORT HAS INSPIRED BUT ALSO REVEALED HOW UNEQUAL THE SPORTING LANDSCAPE STILL IS

Girls' & boys' attitudes to women's professional sport



This summer's wider visibility of women's sport hasn't just inspired - it's also highlighted how much further we still have to go to achieve equality.

Girls, in particular, are far more likely than boys to agree that women's sport is just as important as men's (79% vs. 65%) yet still not taken as seriously (77% vs. 69%), with less funding (74% vs. 66%) and fewer opportunities for women to compete at the top. Girls are also more likely to feel that professional sportswomen don't earn enough (69% vs. 52%) and that women's sport is still judged as lower quality (71% vs. 62%).

Whilst girls are more aware of the inequality and challenges women's sport faces, there is a similar level of scepticism. Over half of both boys and girls believe women's sport will never attract as many fans as men's and that interest will fade after major tournaments end.

Boys are significantly more likely than girls to express concern about the perceived negative impact on men's sport as women's sport grows - 42% of boys also agree that women are not as good as men in terms of performance and skill, up by 5% from 2023.



They don't provide enough funding for women sports because they focus on men."

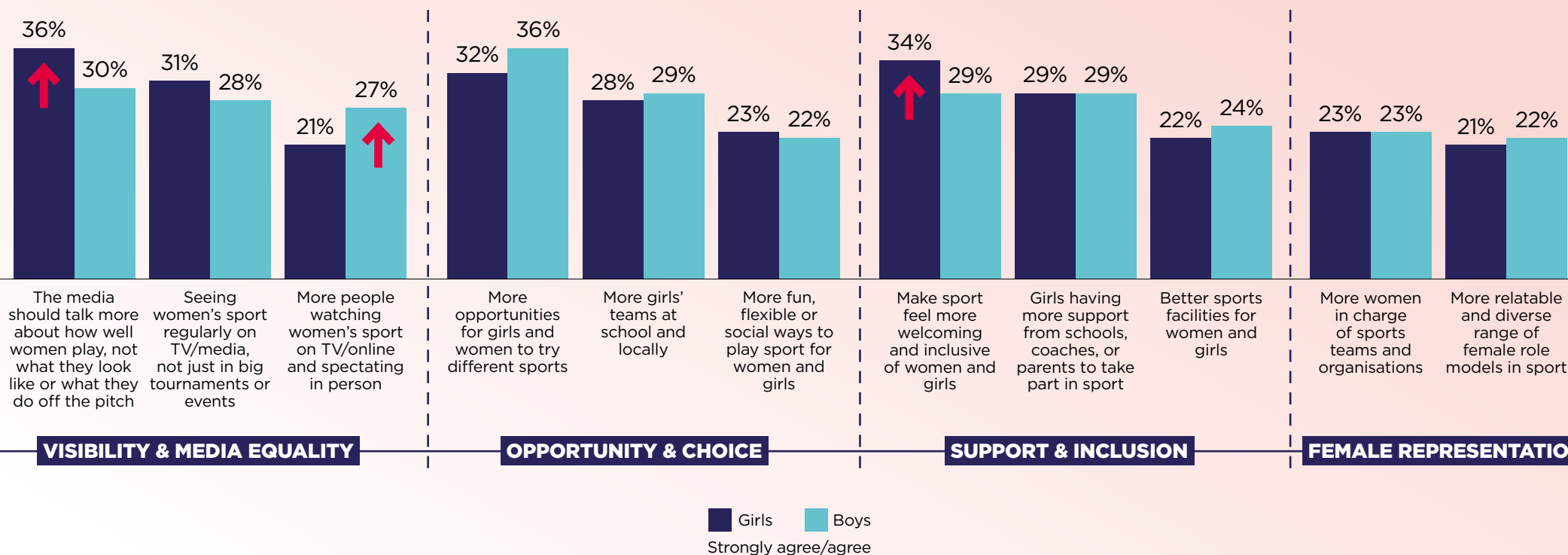
(Girl, aged 19)

"It is so hard to become an elite athlete... a lot of people will not even try to bother to become one."

(Boy, aged 24)

WHAT WOMEN AND GIRL'S SPORT NEEDS NEXT - INSPIRATION WON'T THRIVE OR SURVIVE WITHOUT SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Girls & boys top 3 priorities for the growth of women & girls' sport



When we look at young people's top three priorities for ensuring women and girls' sport keeps growing and thriving, boys and girls are largely in agreement that there is no single fix. Girls and boys select a broad spread of actions, suggesting that progress in their eyes depends on tackling multiple issues, and that different solutions matter in different contexts.

Even so, several priorities rise to the top for girls: ensuring media focus on women's performance rather than their appearance and seeing women's sport more regularly, making sport feel more welcoming and supportive, and giving girls and women more opportunities to try different sports.

Taken together, these priorities show young people want sustained visibility, meaningful access and environments where girls and women genuinely feel they belong, to turn this inspirational summer of women's sport into lasting change.

ENGAGEMENT WITH WOMEN'S RUGBY WORLD CUP 2025

KEY INSIGHTS

Women's Rugby World Cup 2025

- RWC 2025 had a positive impact on young people, with around 9 in 10 of those who watched saying it was exciting and showed that women can achieve anything in sport, and 8 in 10 feel it challenged stereotypes. It was especially powerful for girls, who were much more likely to feel proud, inspired and that rugby isn't just for men.
- RWC 2025 overwhelmingly inspired young people and also sharpened girls' awareness of the inequalities in sport. Girls are far more likely to feel frustrated that women's rugby isn't shown more often, or treated equally to the men's game. More girls than boys felt the tournament deserved even more attention.
- 74% of girls feel motivated to be more active and 64% are more likely to try or play rugby in future. For those who don't currently play, key barriers to acting on this include, fears around injury, a lack of girls-only opportunities, not knowing enough about the game and not feeling confident to try.
- Around three-quarters of girls and boys say single-sex opportunities are important in rugby, where safety, fairness and equality are front of mind. Girls say single-sex spaces are crucial for building their self-belief and belonging, their physical and psychological safety and performance. Single-sex opportunities is the top factor girls say would encourage them to play rugby.



1 IN 5 GIRLS WATCHED RWC, AND WERE MORE LIKELY THAN BOYS TO WATCH ALONE

Most watched or followed Women's events this summer*

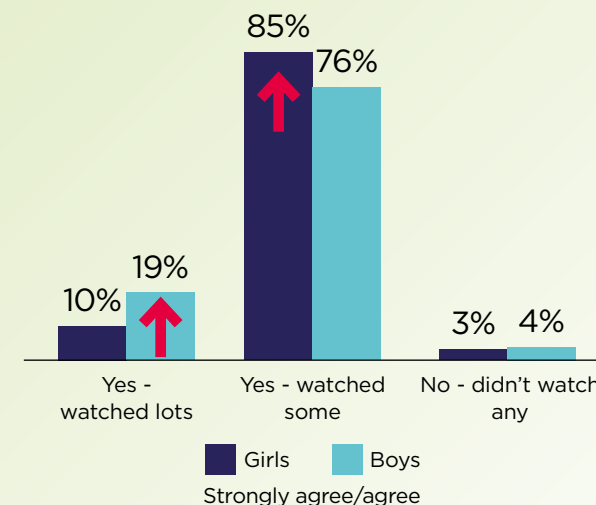
	GIRLS	BOYS
UEFA Women's EURO	33%	39%↑
Women's Rugby World Cup 2025	21%	18%
Wimbledon - Women's singles/doubles matches	20%↑	17%
World Aquatics Championships	7%	6%
Netball Super League Grand Final	7%↑	4%
Women's Tour of Britain	7%	6%
EuroBasket Women 2025	7%	7%
Volleyball World Championships	5%	6%
The Hundred	5%	7%↑
Didn't watch or follow any women's matches or events	39%	35%

* The question referred exclusively to women's events.

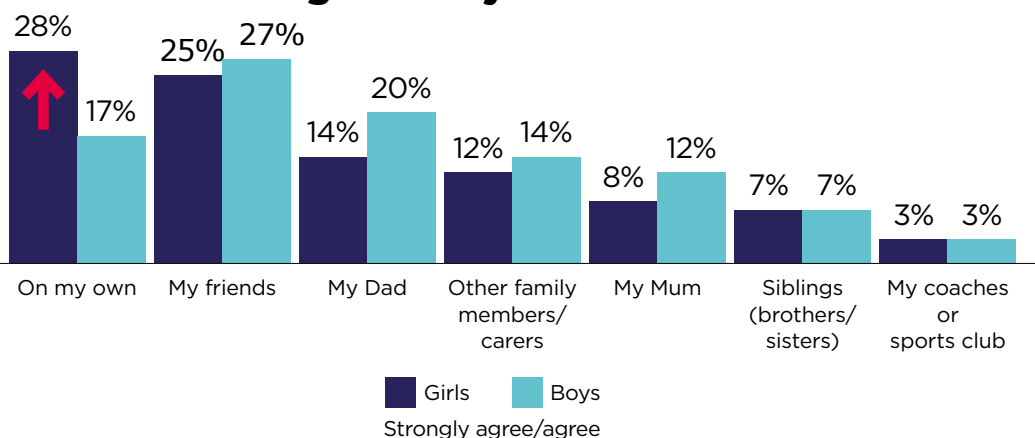


I never knew females participated in these type of sports. I think I've only seen women [in] cricket and women [in] football.
(Girl, aged 19)

Who watched RWC 2025 on TV/online



Who girls & boys watched with



Base = Watched/followed RWC 2025

Girls and boys were equally likely to have watched or followed RWC 2025, but there were significant differences in how they watched.

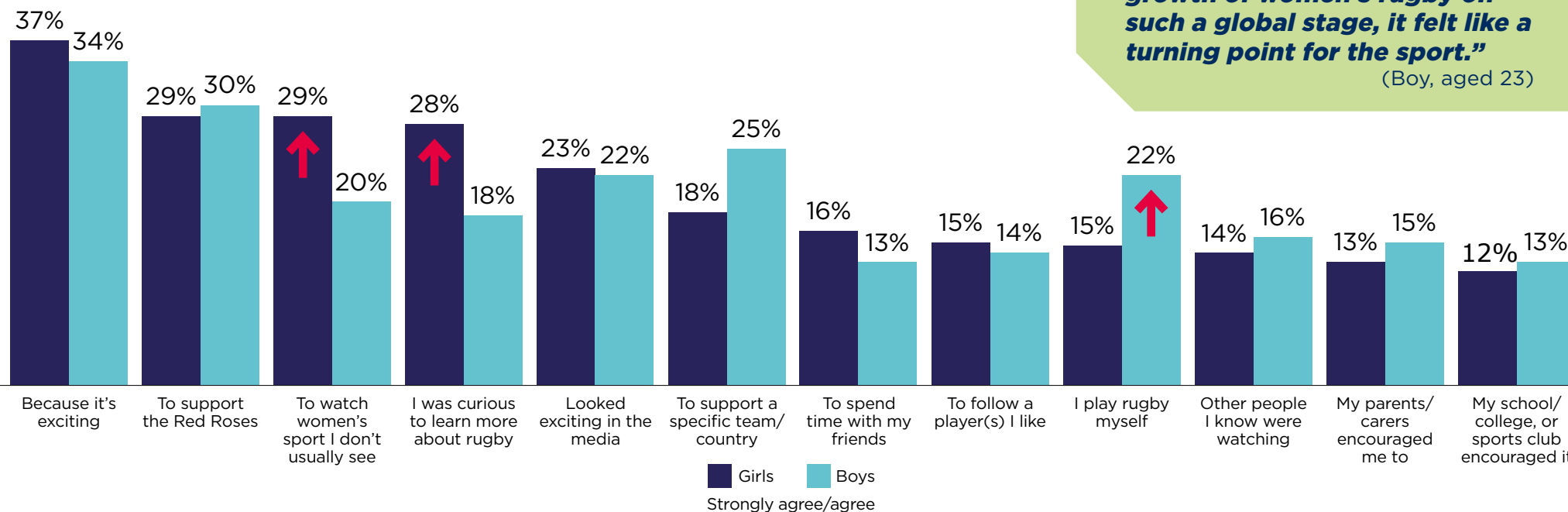
Although girls and boys were equally likely to watch with friends (27% vs. 25%), girls were most likely to watch on their own (28% vs. 17% boys), suggesting that watching sport is still less normalised as a social or family activity for girls.

In line with previous Dream Deficit findings, more boys than girls watched with their dad (20% vs 14% girls). However, unlike during the Paris Olympics, when girls were most likely to have watched with their mum (48%), very few mums and daughters watched RWC 2025 together (8% girls vs 12% boys and mums).

Boys were also more likely to have watched a lot (19% vs 10%), while girls were more likely to have watched some (85% vs 76%).

RWC 2025 SPARKED INTRIGUE AND DISCOVERY FOR GIRLS

Girls & boys' motivations for engaging with the RWC 2025



Base = Watched RWC 2025



Seeing stadiums packed with passionate fans, celebrating the growth of women's rugby on such a global stage, it felt like a turning point for the sport."

(Boy, aged 23)

Girls and boys watched RWC 2025 for similar core reasons, the excitement and to support the Red Roses, but girls were more engaged by a sense of intrigue and discovery. Girls were significantly more likely to watch to see women's sport they don't normally get to see (29% vs. 20%) and to learn more about rugby (28% vs. 18%).

Boys, meanwhile, were more likely to watch because they already play or to support a national team. Overall, girls' motivations focus on access, curiosity and representation, while boys' motivations reflect established ties to the game.

Among those who didn't watch, reasons generally centred around lack of interest in rugby and/or sport in general, being too busy, or simply not knowing the tournament was on.

THE RED ROSES WIN AND THE FINAL WERE THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS OF RWC 2025

We asked girls and boys what were the most memorable moments of RWC 2025, the most dominant theme is England winning the tournament and the atmosphere of the crowds at the final. Other strong themes are record-breaking crowds, women's empowerment/inspiration, memorable players/tries, and family/community watching.

WINNING AND SUCCESS

Overwhelmingly, "winning", "England winning", "lifting the trophy" are the most mentioned moments.

“

"England winning the World Cup and lifting the trophy at Twickenham." (Girl, aged 24)

"My reaction when England won for the first time." (Boy, aged 22)

"The women winning for England." (Girl, aged 24)

"The final and watching them achieve greatness." (Girl, aged 18)

"Watching the final match, when the intensity and passion from both teams were at their peak. The atmosphere was electric." (Boy aged 18)

FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

Responses about women's courage, strength, resilience, empowerment, and inspiration. Seeing women succeed in a "male-dominated sport" and women supporting each other.

“

"It made me believe that women are just as powerful as men." (Girl, aged 18)

"Seeing women compete properly in sport was inspiring." (Boy, aged 18)

"Women coming together to support women." (Girl, aged 18)

"Seeing the players give everything they had right until the last whistle was truly inspiring." (Boy, aged 18)

PLAYERS & HIGHLIGHTS

Named players: Ilona Maher, Ellie Kildunne, Sadia Kabeya, Jess Breach, Bianca Silva. This included mentions of specific tries, tackles, or "last-minute" moments.

“

"Sadia Kabeya's strength, skills and talent - Player of the Match." (Boy, aged 24)

"Brazil scoring their first ever Rugby World Cup try - Bianca Silva's stunning run." (Boy, aged 22)

"Jess Breach 4 tries against Samoa." (Girl, aged 21)

RECORD-BREAKING CROWDS & ATMOSPHERE

Multiple mentions of the record-breaking Twickenham crowds and atmosphere being a "generational moment".

“

"The record-breaking crowd...it was a statement that women's rugby had broken into the mainstream." (Boy, aged 19)

"The fans in the crowds, especially the young girls." (Girl, aged 20)

"England women's made history." (Girl, aged 19)

FAMILY & COMMUNITY WATCHING

Mentions of watching with family (Mum, Dad, siblings, daughter) and friends.

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"Watching it with my daughter." (Girl, aged 20)

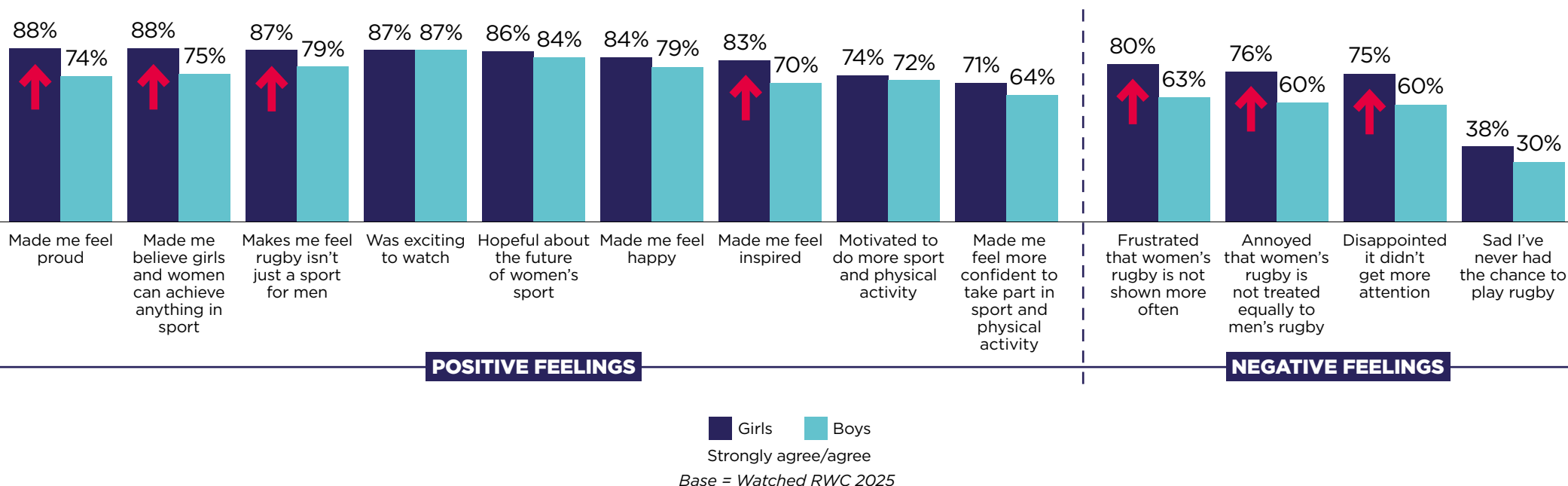
"Watching it with my brother who plays rugby." (Girl, aged 19)

"Watching with all my female family." (Girl, aged 19)

RWC 2025 ENTERTAINED, INSPIRED AND HIGHLIGHTED FRUSTRATIONS AROUND GENDER INEQUALITY



How girls & boys feel about RWC 2025



The impact of RWC 2025 on young people was overwhelmingly positive - and especially powerful for girls. Girls who watched were significantly more likely than boys to say the tournament made them feel proud (88% vs. 74%), believe that girls and women can achieve anything in sport (88% vs. 75%), and feel that rugby isn't just for men (87% vs. 79%). Girls were also more likely to say they felt inspired (83% vs. 70%), showing the emotional lift they took from seeing women on the world stage.

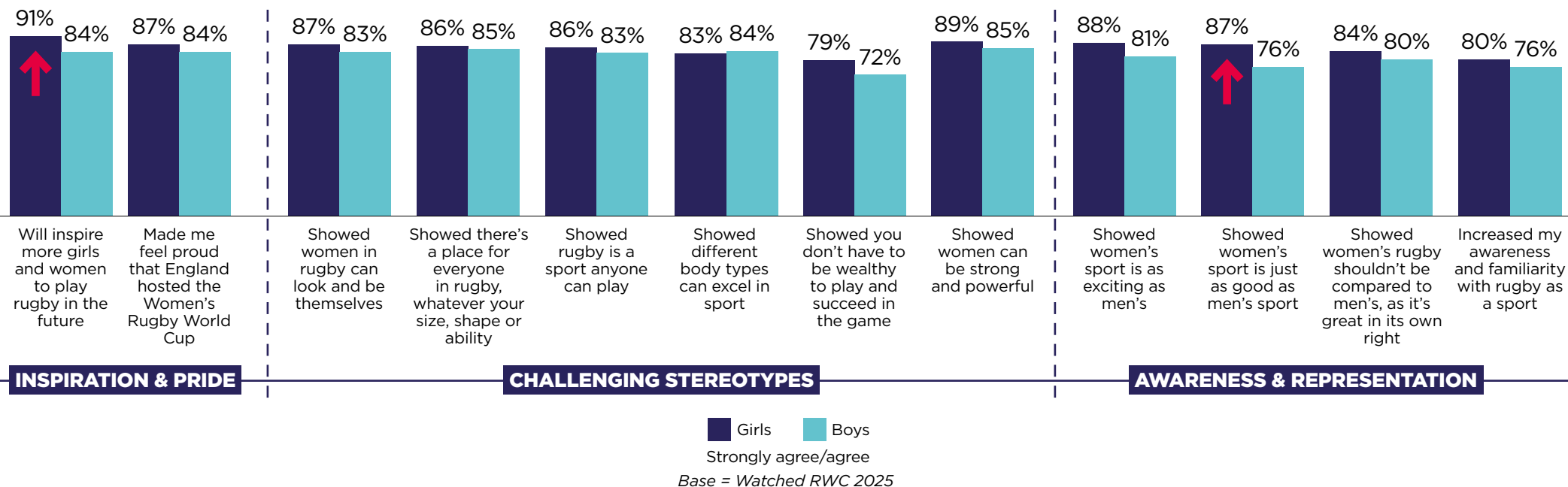
At the same time, positives were shared across boys and girls. Boys were just as likely as girls to say it was exciting (87%), made them feel hopeful about the future of women's sport (84% boys; 86% girls), and made them feel happy (79% boys; 84% girls). This suggests that women's sport resonates strongly with all young people, not just girls.

But with increased visibility also comes sharpened frustrations. Girls were far more likely than boys to feel frustrated that women's rugby isn't shown more often (80% vs. 63%) or treated equally to the men's game (76% vs. 60%), and to be disappointed by the lack of attention the tournament received (75% vs. 60%). Positively, 6 in 10 boys shared these frustrations, despite it not reflecting their lived experience.

RWC 2025 CHALLENGED STEREOTYPES IN RUGBY AND WOMEN'S SPORT



Girls' & boys' perceptions of the impact of Women's Rugby World Cup



Boys and girls reported overwhelmingly positive takeaways from the tournament, with around 8 in 10 saying women's rugby helped to challenge stereotypes around the game and women's sport more broadly.

It showed them that different body types can excel, that rugby is a sport anyone can play, and that there's a place for everyone in rugby, whatever their size, shape or ability.

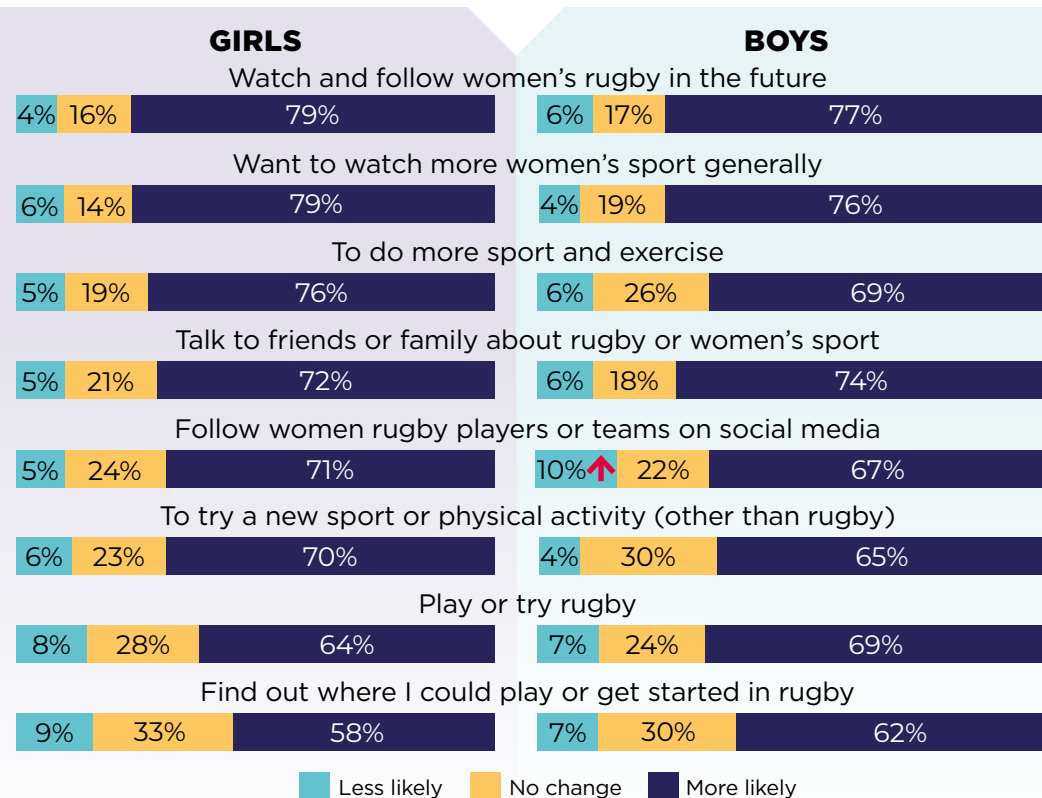
For many, RWC 2025 also reinforced that women's rugby is great in its own right (80% boys vs. 84% girls) and that women in sport can look and be themselves (83% boys vs. 87% girls). While overall agreement is high between the sexes, there are specific areas where girls express stronger conviction. Girls are more likely than boys to strongly agree that women's rugby should not be compared to the men's game and is great in its own right (55% vs. 44%), and that it showed women can be strong and powerful (63% vs. 53%). These findings show that the visibility

of women's sport can expand boys' and girls' understanding of what sport looks like and who it is for – 9 in 10 girls believe RWC 2025 will inspire more girls and women to play rugby in future.

Although the perceived impact is similar across girls and boys, gaps are evident. One in four boys don't see women's and men's sport as equal in quality, and boys are less likely to say RWC 2025 showed women's sport is just as good (76% vs 87%) and just as exciting (81% vs 88%) as the men's.

GIRLS ARE INSPIRED TO FOLLOW WOMEN'S SPORT AND BE MORE ACTIVE

The impact of RWC 2025 on girls & boys



Base = Watched RWC 2025

Note: figures do not add up to 100% because 'don't know' responses are not included

The impact of RWC 2025 on future intentions was very similar for girls and boys, with around 7 in 10 feeling more motivated to watch, follow and engage with women's sport and women's rugby in future.

However, boys report being more likely to try rugby specifically and find out where they can get started, whilst girls are more motivated to engage with sport and exercise more broadly, and try a new sport other than rugby.



As a result of watching RWC 2025...

	GIRLS	BOYS
People in my life would support me if I decided to play rugby	74%	83%↑
I feel confident I could learn how to play rugby	68%	83%↑
I could be good at rugby if I tried	68%	78%↑
I would feel welcome if I joined a rugby session	61%	79%↑
If I played rugby, I would feel like I belonged	61%	73%↑
I know people I could play rugby with if I wanted to	59%	74%↑
I know enough about rugby to feel comfortable giving it a go	59%	75%↑
People like me are encouraged to take part in rugby	58%	73%↑

Strongly agree/agree
Base = Watched RWC 2025

Girls are feeling just as inspired as boys by RWC 2025, but more boys than girls believe they would feel welcome if they went to play.

A good proportion of girls see rugby as a possible space for them as a result of RWC 2025, but fewer girls than boys believe they would feel welcome and encouraged, and fewer girls know people to go with or feel they know enough about the game. Even when the desire to engage in sport is there, the conditions to act are not always equal. Girls won't act on their sporting intentions if they believe the environment they'll enter isn't one where they can feel welcome and supported to thrive. With this in mind, the final section of this report explores the key barriers preventing girls from engaging in rugby and what is needed to support girls' intentions into action.

TURNING INSPIRATION INTO ACTION FOR GIRLS

GIRLS FACE GREATER CHALLENGES TO ENGAGING IN RUGBY

The top issue for around a quarter of boys and just over a third of girls is the physicality of rugby. One in five girls and boys feel the sport is not for people like them or their body type.

Beyond this, girls perceive barriers differently to boys. For girls, lack of confidence in trying rugby and not knowing enough about the game are more significant issues than boys. And although social perceptions and stereotypes are not the top barriers for girls, they show some of the biggest gender gaps. Girls are more likely than boys to report concerns around rugby being too masculine, a fear of being judged, and that rugby is a man's game.



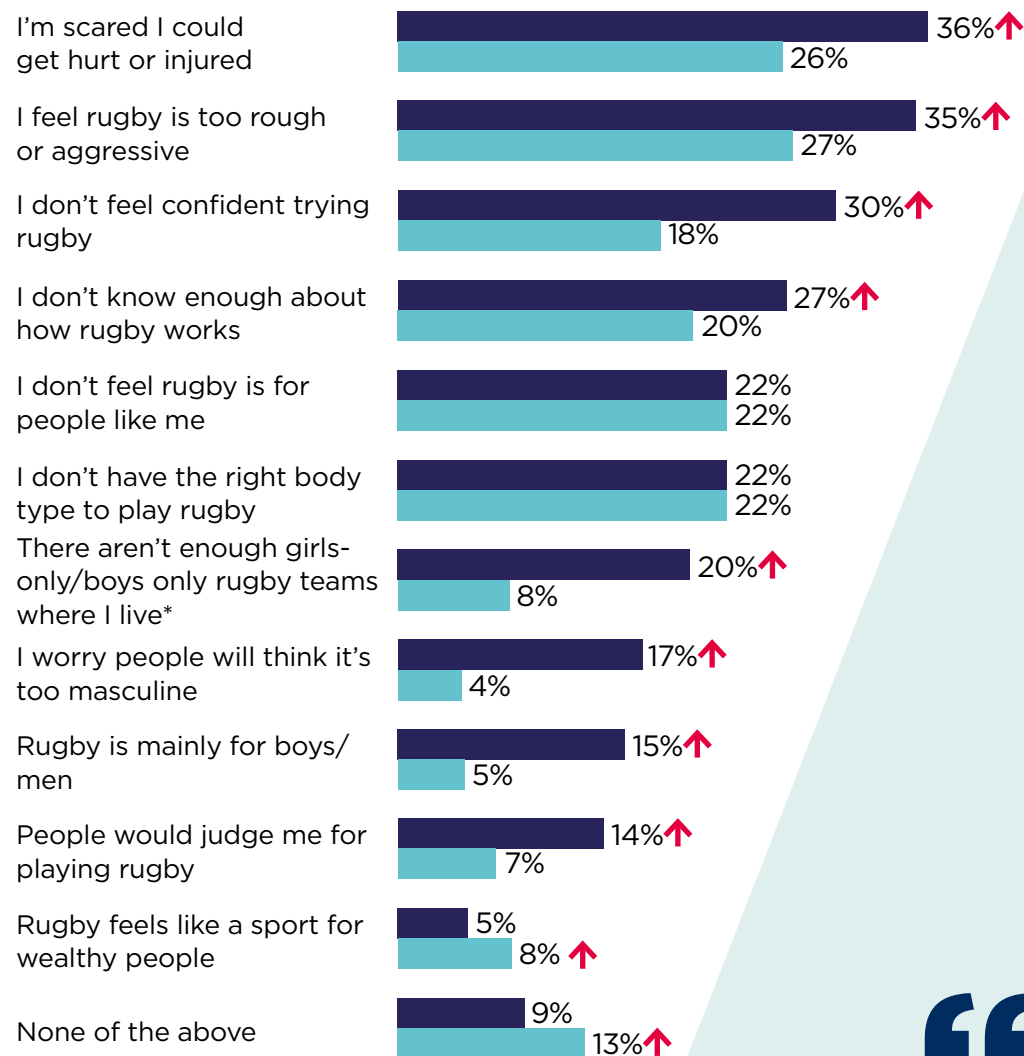
As it's such a physical sport I think that girls will be more confident to participate [in rugby] if it's only people of their own gender."

(Girl, aged 17)

A fifth of girls see a lack of single-sex opportunities as a barrier (compared to 8% of boys).

These findings underline how girls are disproportionately constrained not by appetite, but by what rugby is seen to be and who it is seen to be for.

Perceived barriers to rugby for those who don't currently play



Girls Boys
Strongly agree/agree

Base: Those who don't currently play rugby

*Respondents answered statements specific to their sex



In school we were told girls couldn't play rugby."
(Girl, aged 17)

GIRLS NEED MORE VISIBILITY, SUPPORT AND GIRLS-ONLY SPACES TO FEEL ENCOURAGED INTO RUGBY

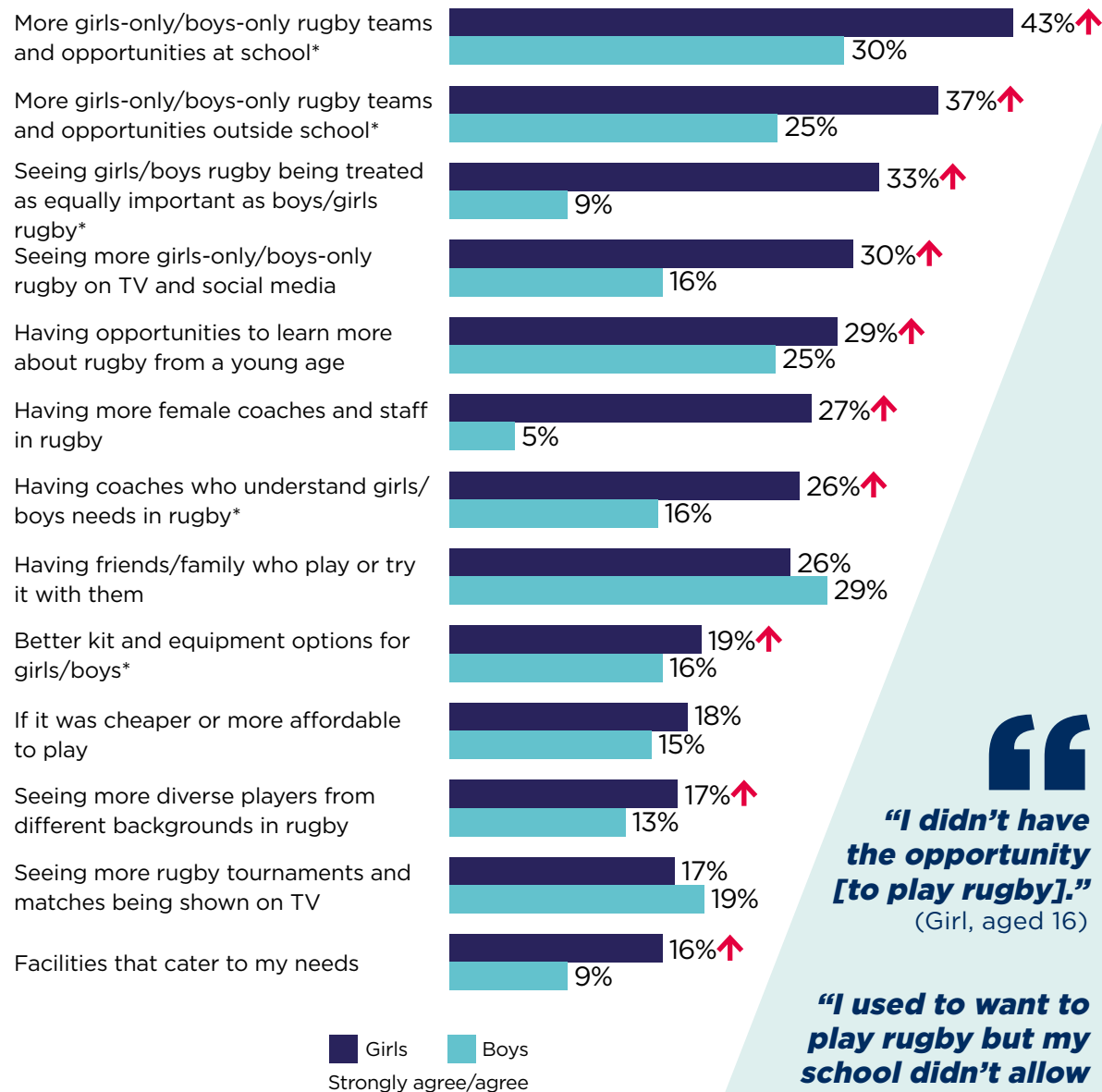
Girls *and* boys say more single-sex opportunities inside and outside school would encourage them to play rugby, but this matters far more for girls.

Greater visibility of the female game, representation and equality are also more important to girls: girls' rugby being treated equally to boys (33% vs 9%) and having more female coaches/staff on the ground (27% vs 5% boys). Heightened visibility may be sharpening this awareness. As girls see more women's sport on TV and in the media, they are also becoming more aware of the inequalities that still shape their own experiences.

Girls are also far more likely to want support shaped around their needs, from coaches who understand girls' rugby, to having facilities that cater to their needs. Put simply, more girls will be encouraged to participate in rugby not just by access but through feeling safe and well represented, in environments that are fair and designed with them in mind.



Girls & boys' drivers to rugby engagement



“I didn’t have the opportunity [to play rugby].”
(Girl, aged 16)

“I used to want to play rugby but my school didn’t allow the girls to play.”
(Girl, aged 18)

*Respondents answered statements specific to their sex

GIRLS AND BOYS EQUALLY RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF SINGLE-SEX OPPORTUNITIES IN RUGBY

Girls and boys (74% vs. 75%) are equally likely to say that it is important that rugby is played single-sex. Boys are more likely to say it is *very important*, while more girls say *somewhat important*.

When asked to explain why single-sex spaces and opportunities in rugby are important, the overwhelming reason was **biological differences**, which also linked to themes around **physical and emotional safety, fairness and equal opportunities**.

"It gives girls opportunity."

(Girl, aged 21)

"To be able to play safely."

(Boy, aged 13)

"Rugby is a rough sport."

(Girl, aged 13)

"FOR EQUALITY."

(Boy, aged 23)

"Boys might be too rough and cause more injuries to girls."

(Girl, aged 24)

"Boys and girls are naturally different, I feel like single gender teams puts everyone on an equal playing field, instead of differences based on natural strength."

(Boy, aged 19)

"I'd feel bad if I hurt a girl playing."

(Boy, aged 13)

"Because statistically and biologically there are differences in body mass."

(Girl, aged 18)

"Girls feel less self-conscious if they play with just girls."

(Girl, aged 13)

"Different sexes, different strengths."

(Boy, aged 14)

Girls & boys who believe it is important that rugby is played single-sex



Girls

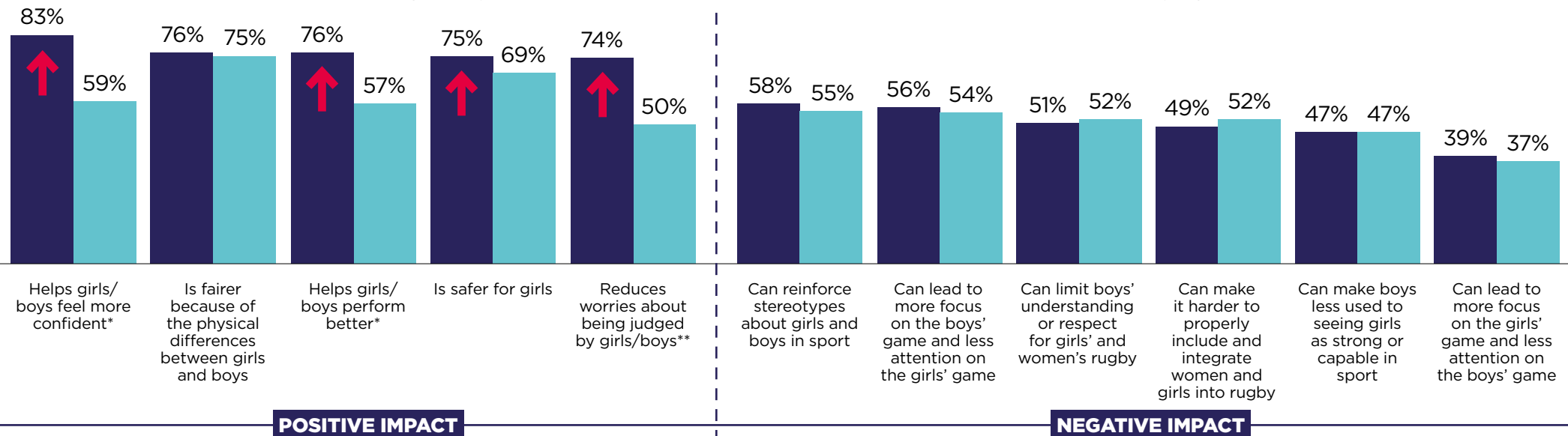
Boys

- Not at all important
- Not that important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat important
- Very important

SINGLE-SEX OPPORTUNITIES SUPPORT GIRLS' SAFETY, CONFIDENCE AND PERFORMANCE



Why single-sex teams & competitions are important in rugby



*Respondents answered statements specific to their sex

** Respondents answered statements relating to the opposite sex

Girls Boys
Strongly agree/agree

Base = Those who agreed single-sex opportunities are important

Girls and boys both see value in single-sex rugby, but for girls the reasons why are far more pronounced. They are much more likely than boys to feel that playing with other girls supports their confidence (83% vs 59%) and to perform better (76% vs 57%). Three-quarters of girls say it reduces fear of judgement from boys, compared to half of boys who say the same about girls.

Crucially, girls and boys are closely aligned in agreement that single-sex is safer for girls (75% vs 69%) and fairer because of the physical differences between girls and boys (76% and 75%). Fear of being hurt or injured is the top barrier to girls engaging in rugby, a concern likely to be amplified in mixed-sex settings where physical differences will exist, even before

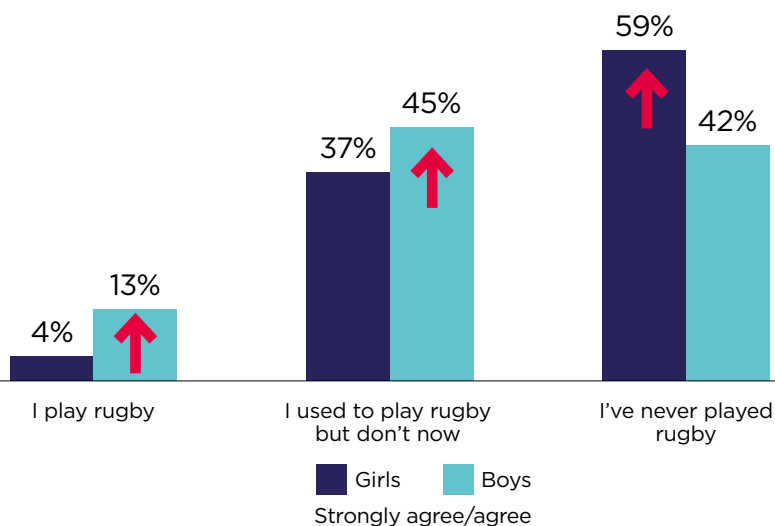
puberty. Due to early gender stereotyping, most young girls will also have less well-developed skills than boys. The combined impact puts girls at a competitive disadvantage.

Rightly, safety regulations in rugby union and rugby league require contact formats to be single-sex from age 12+. Widening single-sex opportunities to all formats and all ages would help to encourage more girls to engage and stay involved.

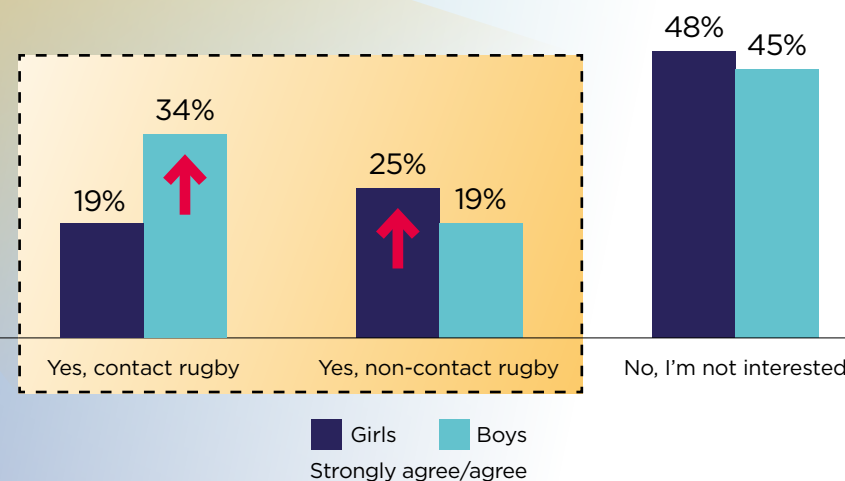
Girls-only opportunities are vital for girls of all ages for their physical, psychological and social needs.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS' RUGBY

Girls' & boys' rugby engagement



AROUND 2 MILLION GIRLS SAY THEY WOULD PLAY RUGBY IF OFFERED THE CHANCE



Base = Those who don't currently play rugby

*Note: Figures are estimated by applying survey results to the UK female population of England and Wales aged 13-24 (around 4.78 million, based on ONS [2021 Census data](#) and [2024 Great Britain population estimates](#)).

Of those who don't currently play, 44% of girls would try or play if they had the chance. While there is consistent appetite for non-contact rugby across all age groups, just 11% of 13-16-year-old girls would try contact rugby (vs. 30% of boys), but interest grows among older girls, reaching 20% for those aged 17-19 and 20-24 (vs. 30% and 40% of boys respectively).

These findings highlight the scale of opportunity to encourage more girls into rugby and sustain the legacy of RWC 2025, if the culture and opportunities available to them meet their needs.



In our survey, boys were significantly more likely than girls to play rugby currently and to have played rugby in the past. In contrast, girls were much more likely to have never played.

Of those who have played, the format of play reveals a much bigger gender split. Boys' rugby experience is overwhelmingly contact (82%), while girls' experience is much more mixed, with over half having played non-contact formats (52%) and a similar number having played contact (57%).

RECOMMENDATIONS



The rise of women's sport – a foundation to dream?

The rise in visibility of women's sport – on TV, online and across mainstream media – is creating a cultural shift in sport that we have not seen before. Girls and boys are seeing more women in sport excel, lead and redefine what is possible, with joyous moments like the Red Roses win fuelling excitement, pride and discovery. Many girls and boys described Women's Rugby World Cup 2025 as a generational moment: it challenged stereotypes and disrupted gender norms, showcased the quality and diversity, and compelled many young people to rethink who rugby is for, and what women can achieve in sport.

Despite the progress made and the incredible summer of women's sport, heightened visibility also brings sharper awareness of the unequal landscape women and girls in sport must still navigate – from pervasive gender stereotypes, media scrutiny and misogynistic and racist abuse, to pay gaps, underinvestment and limited opportunities at grassroots that don't meet their needs, especially in team sports. This instability in women's sport mirrors what girls are seeing in wider society, where conversations about sexism, misogyny, and gender equality are becoming more prominent. This is shaping how girls understand their place in the world and in sport, and how boys make sense of a sporting landscape that *should* be equally enjoyed by women and girls, as much as it is by men and boys.

Against this unequal and uncertain backdrop, dream rates have plummeted this year, and especially for girls who love sport, following an all-time high after the Paris Olympics. Our research indicates that visibility alone is not enough to keep girls dreaming, we must do more so all girls can aspire in sport, whether that is to try a new sport, or to reach the top.

Women and girls need assurance that sport and society is changing for the better – a meaningful and consistent commitment to gender equality so that they can dream, play and belong. We need to:

1. Make women's sport consistently visible and value it in its own right.

Girls want to see women's sport regularly, not only during major events. Coverage should focus on skill, performance and achievement, not appearance or off-field narratives. Consistent exposure normalises women's sport and helps build belief, aspiration and support across all young people.

2. Reform the culture in and around sport for women and girls at all levels.

Stereotyping, sexism and misogyny, whether online or in everyday life, shape girls' expectations and experiences long before they ever step onto a pitch. Education and behaviour change are essential, alongside stronger safeguarding against abuse. The culture surrounding women and girls' sport must be one where they feel safe, respected and equal.

3. Transform investment in grassroots opportunities for girls. Girls need and want accessible, female-friendly environments: more local opportunities, more girls-only teams, better facilities and more female coaches who understand their needs. Investment must match demand — especially in team sports where girls' participation is much lower than boys.

4. Guarantee girls the single-sex environments they need to thrive, not just survive. Girls-only teams and spaces in school and community sport are core to girls' safety, development and confidence, especially in team sports. Girls are clear: these spaces help them perform better, worry less about judgement from boys, and feel like they belong. Providing girls-only opportunities is essential for equality and long-term retention.

Because women and girls belong in sport

**We would love to hear how
you have used this research.**

Get in touch with us at:

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