

# YOUTH SPORT PARTICIPATION TRENDS IN EUROPE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



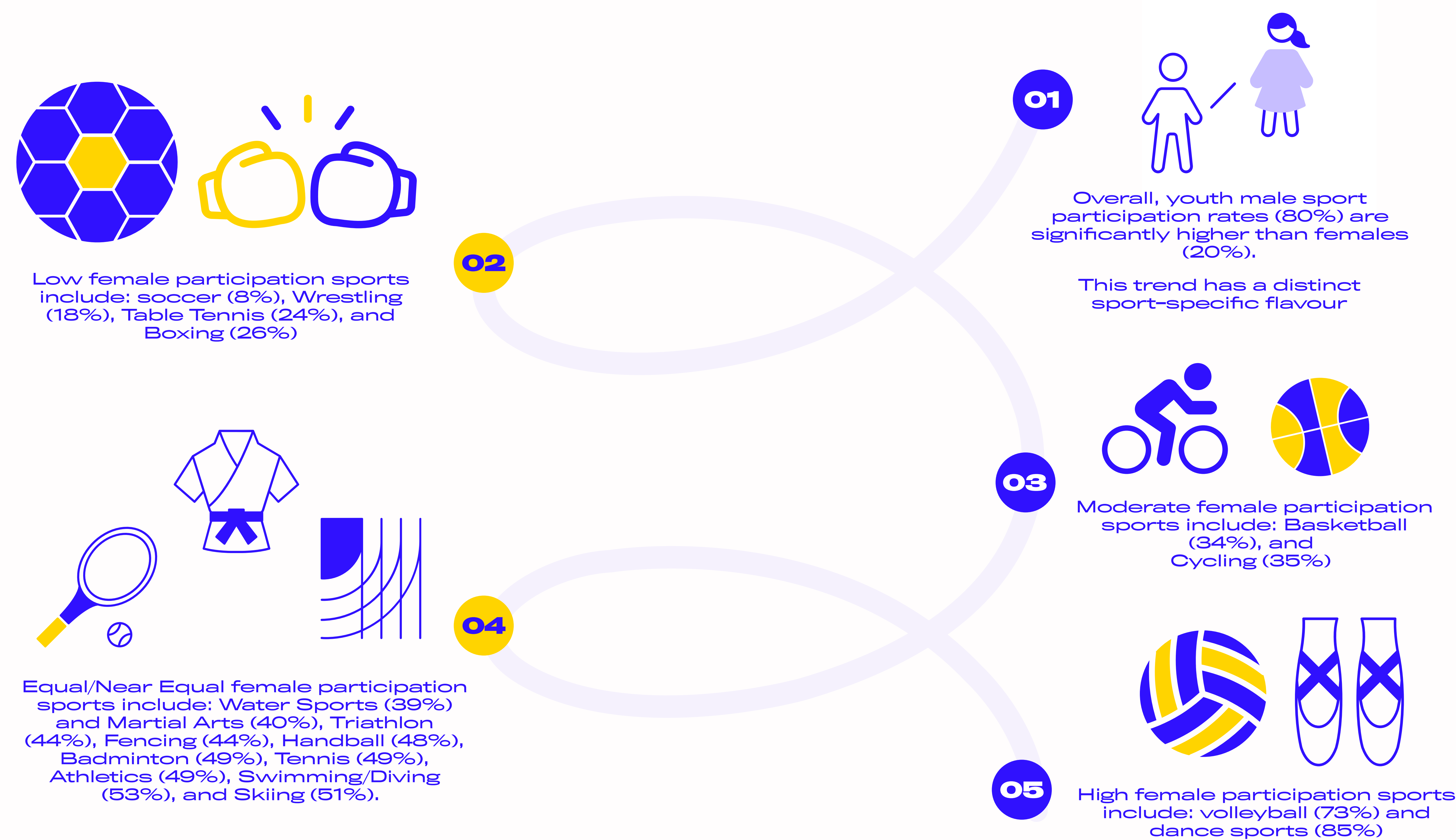
DR. STACEY EMMONDS  
DR. DAN WEAVING  
DR. SERGIO LARA-BERCIAL  
PROFESSOR KEVIN TILL

Children's physical activity levels and competence have declined steadily and globally over the last two decades. The impact of this decline in their physical and mental wellbeing, now and in the future, has been demonstrated in multiple studies.

ICOACHKIDS+ is an Erasmus+ Sport co-funded project part of the overall activities of the ICOACHKIDS Global Movement. It aims to enhance sport participation and reduce dropout for children aged 13-18, and to maximise sport's health enhancing properties. This will be achieved by conducting research into participation trends, the causes of dropout, and the features of holistic positive talent development environments. ICOACHKIDS+ will then develop relevant educational tools for coaches and clubs based on these findings.

This research report presents the findings of a unique, multi-country and multi-sport study investigating the participation rates of children in organised youth sport. Participation data were collected for the period 2017-2020 from 18 sports across 27 countries. In total over 5.5 million children were sampled in this study.

## PARTICIPATION:



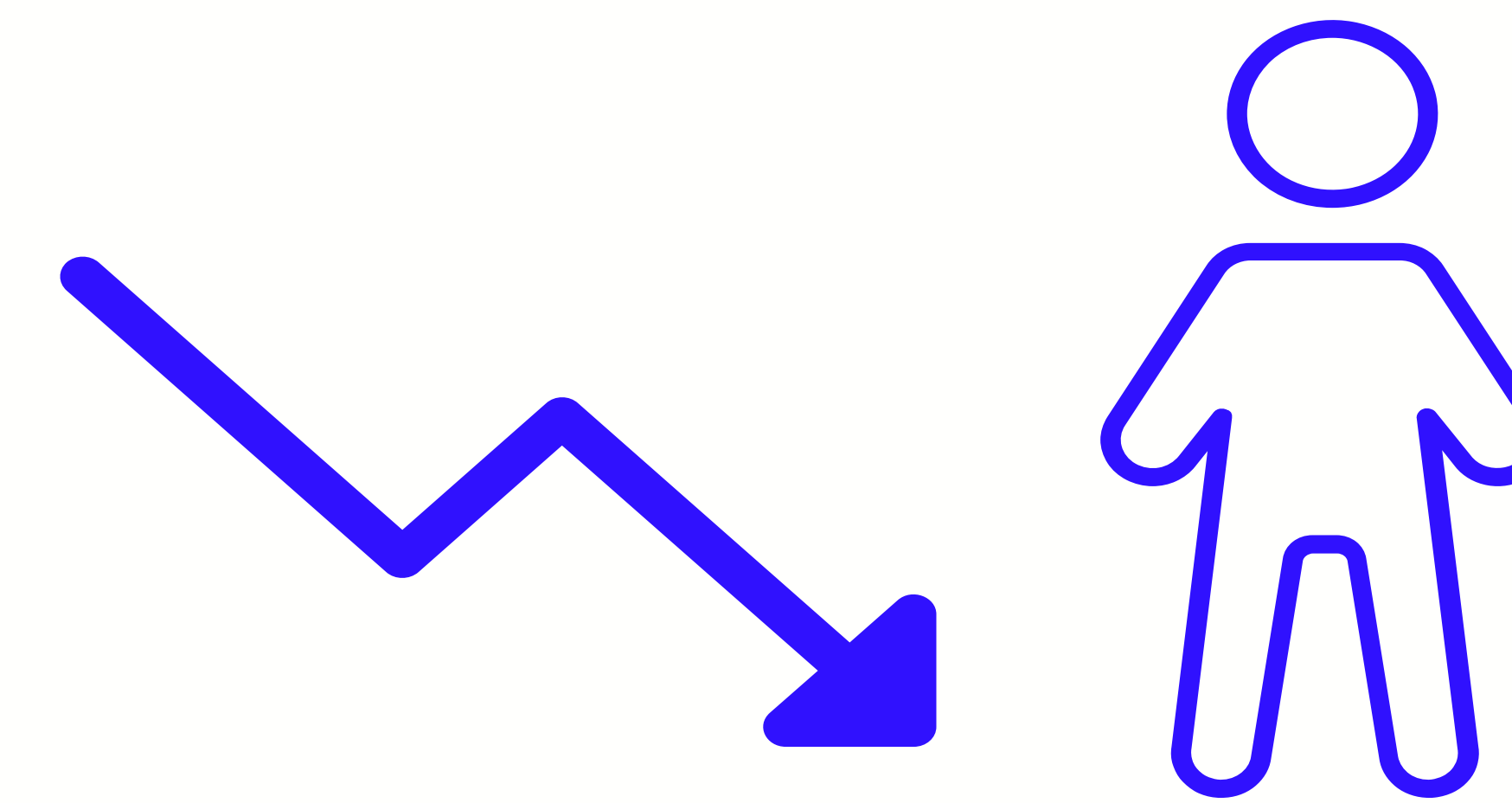
### U12-U14



Overall participation peaks for both males and females at the U12 to U14 level.

## DROPOUT:

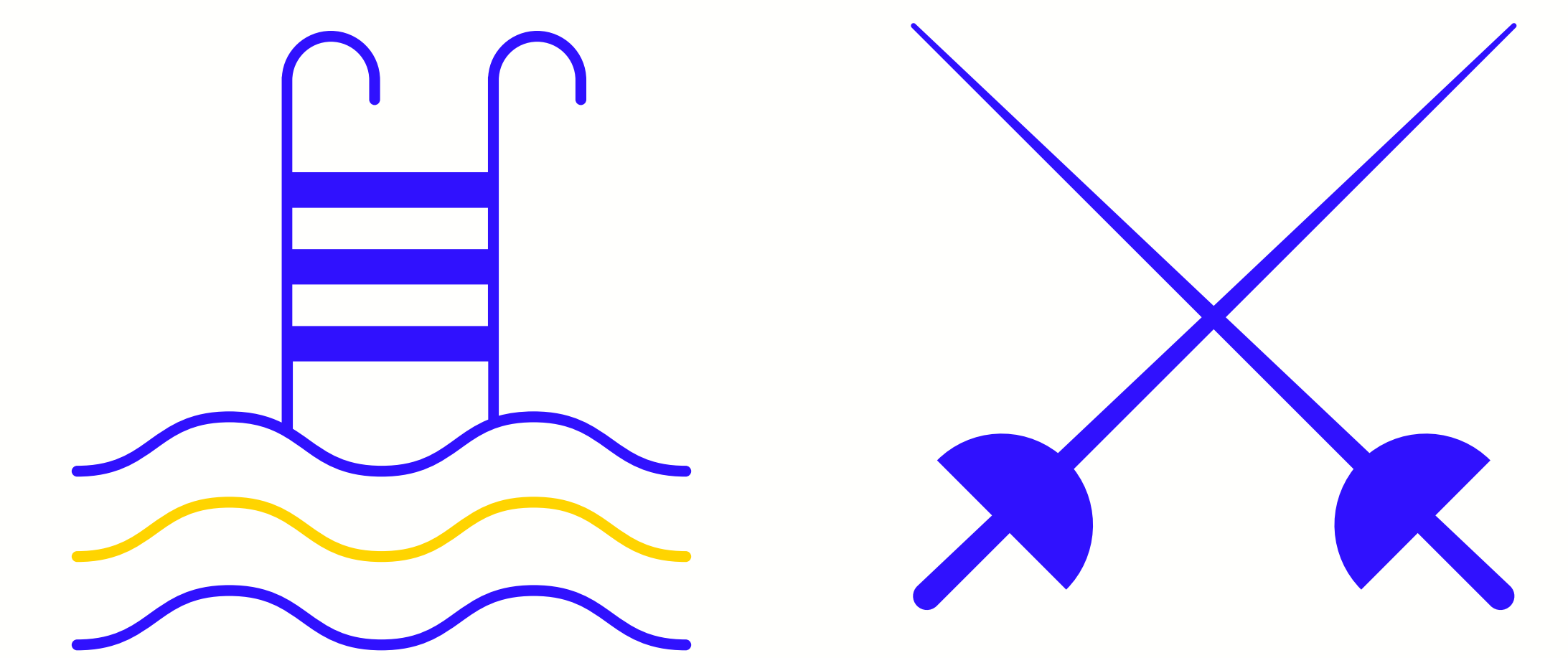
### MALES



### U14-U18

Participation decreases significantly for youth males from U14-U18s in most sports

### Not one-size-fits all



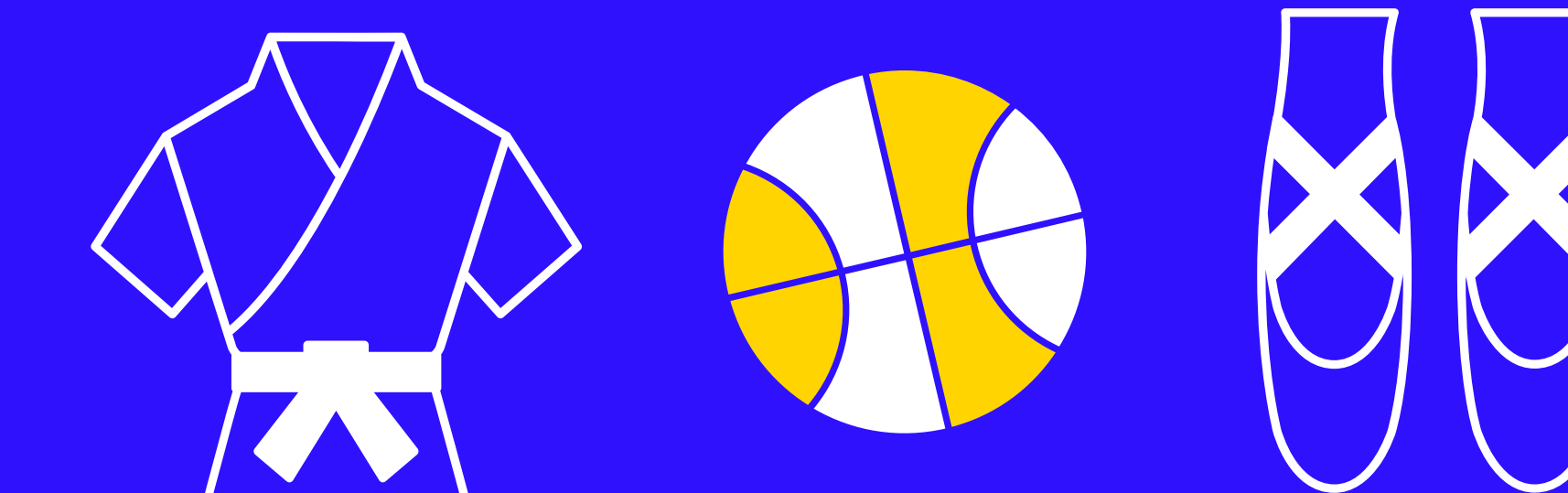
This trend is also sport and age-specific: Basketball (30% reduction from U12 to U18), Fencing (42% from U12 to U18), Martial Arts (67% from U8 to U18), Swimming/Diving (75% from U8 to U18), and Cycling (92% from U14 to U18).

### FEMALES

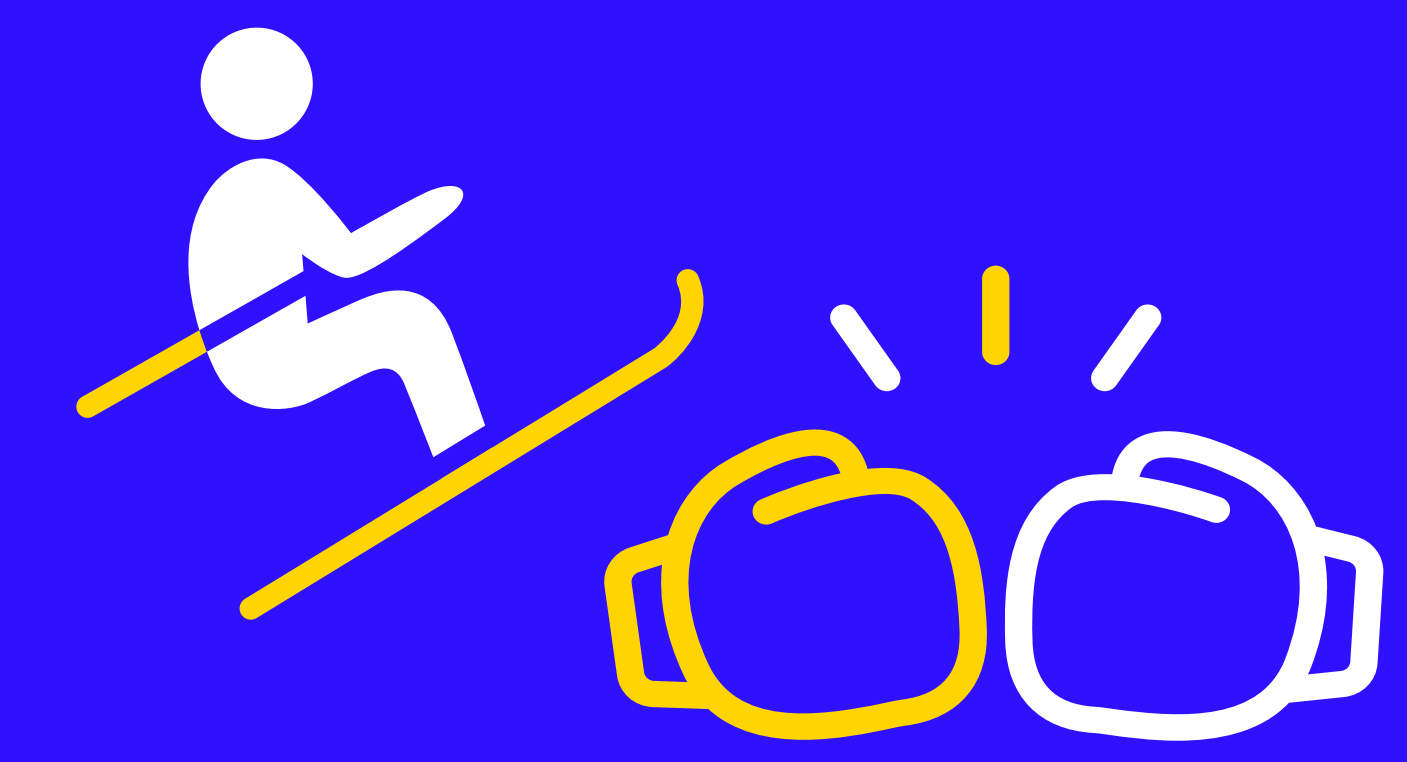


### U14-U18

Youth female participation significantly decreases between U14-U16 but increases again between U16-U18 in some sports.



The largest decreases are seen in Basketball (41% from U12 to U18), Wrestling (52% from U8 to U18), Water Sports (54% from U14 to U16), Martial Arts (55% from U8 to U16), Dance Sports (57% from U8 to U16), Swimming/Diving (71% from U8 to U18).



The largest increases are seen in Skiing (55% from U16 to U18) and Boxing (86% from U8 to U18).

These findings across multiple sports and countries confirm that there is a need to further understand sport participation trends. This is especially true of the participation declines observed for youth males post 14 years of age, and for youth females between 14 and 16 years. It is also paramount to understand the return to sport observed in youth females between 16 and 18 years.

However, in order to achieve this greater comprehension of the phenomena of participation, dropout and re-engagement, sports and countries must do better in relation to how they collect participation data.

The difficulty in accessing data experienced during this research, and the heterogeneous way in which data is collected make progress in this area very difficult. The creation of standardised participation registration systems, including individual identifier numbers for each participant, would facilitate tracking real participation in order to gain a more accurate picture of these phenomena.

Moreover, participation, dropout and re-engagement appear to be highly personal and context-specific events. More needs to be known about the different factors that influence participation patterns for different people in different sports and contexts. The next ICOACHKIDS+ research report will take on this challenge.



#### DISCLAIMER:

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute any endorsement of the contents which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.