



L-Università ta' Malta  
Centre for Resilience &  
Socio-Emotional Health



Kummissarju għat-Tfal  
Commissioner for Children



# Healthy Spaces Co-creating Child-friendly Towns and Villages

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# Children's warning signals



Like the canaries used to warn coal miners by growing more distressed when the toxic levels in the mines were rising too high, our children were amongst the first to draw our attention about the state of our environment, that cars, traffic and building construction were increasingly encroaching and limiting their leisure time spaces (eg Cefai & Galea, 2016, Cefai, 2017).

# Objectives of the study



- This study is the result of the joint collaboration between the University of Malta, the Commissioner for Children and the Environment & Resources Authority (ERA)
- Its aim is to explore the views of children, parents and community stakeholders on how Maltese towns and villages may provide more child-friendly spaces for their children and families, and consequently drive key stakeholders to create such spaces in collaboration with the children and young people themselves.
- Particular attention was given to the voices of the children and young people themselves.
- The project focused on areas such as safety and security, recreational, play and social spaces for children and young people, nature spaces, cleanliness, and inclusive spaces.

# Overview of study



The project consists of three studies:

- A survey with school children, parents and stakeholders.
- Focus groups with children, young people, parents and stakeholders.
- An applied case study where the children are the leading participants in bringing about a positive change in their locality through the development of green and child-friendly recreational spaces in their locality.

# Today's presentation

- This presentation focuses only on the survey with primary and secondary school children.
- The whole study will be published and presented in a national conference early next year.



# Survey Sample



- The sample included school children from Year 4 to Year 6 (primary school level) and Year 9 to Year 11 (secondary school level) in state, church and independent schools around Malta and Gozo (as well as parents and stakeholders).
- 92 primary and 45 secondary schools (state, church and independent schools) were invited to participate, 28 primary schools and 29 secondary schools accepted to participate and following parental consent, sent a link to the online questionnaire. The survey was also circulated on school students' tablets, scout groups, EkoSkola and Agenzija Zghazagh.
- The final sample consisted of 651 primary school responses and 412 responses from secondary school students.

Primary School Students			Secondary School Students		
	N	%		N	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Gender</b>		
Male	326	51.6%	Male	136	33.6%
Female	306	48.4%	Female	269	66.4%
<b>Age</b>			<b>Age</b>		
8 years	117	19.4%	12 years	25	6.4%
9 years	201	33.4%	13 years	108	27.8%
10 years	217	36.0%	14 years	124	32.0%
11 years	67	11.1%	15 years	100	25.8%
			16 years	31	8.0%
<b>Nationality</b>			<b>Nationality</b>		
Maltese	574	89.5%	Maltese	372	91.0%
EU (non-Maltese)	26	4.1%	EU (non-Maltese)	26	6.4%
Other	41	6.4%	Other	11	2.7%
<b>Region</b>			<b>Region</b>		
Southern Harbour	161	26.0%	Southern Harbour	54	13.3%
Northern Harbour	115	18.5%	Northern Harbour	81	19.9%
South Eastern	138	22.3%	South Eastern	78	19.2%
Western	83	13.4%	Western	66	16.2%
Northern	31	5.0%	Northern	29	7.1%
Gozo	92	14.8%	Gozo	99	24.3%
<b>Duration</b>			<b>Duration</b>		
Less than one year	28	4.4%	Less than one year	7	1.7%
1-5 years	114	17.8%	1-5 years	50	12.2%
6 years +	497	77.8%	6 years +	354	86.1%

# Questionnaires



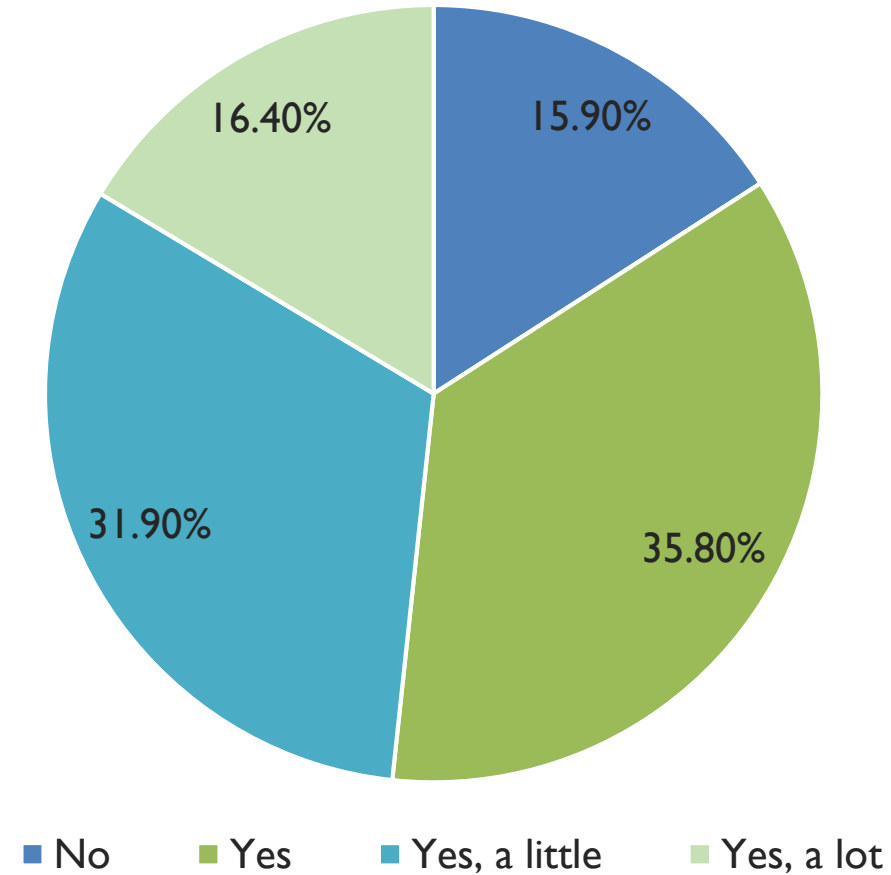
- The questionnaires explored the following areas
  - open areas where children play and spend their time
  - open natural or green areas close to where they live
  - cleanliness
  - safety
  - involvement in the life of their locality
  - satisfaction with the various aspects of their locality
  - areas that they would like to improve
- Data collection took place between December 2020 and June 2021- 2 anonymous surveys were designed to collect information from primary and secondary school students respectively



# Children 8-11 years

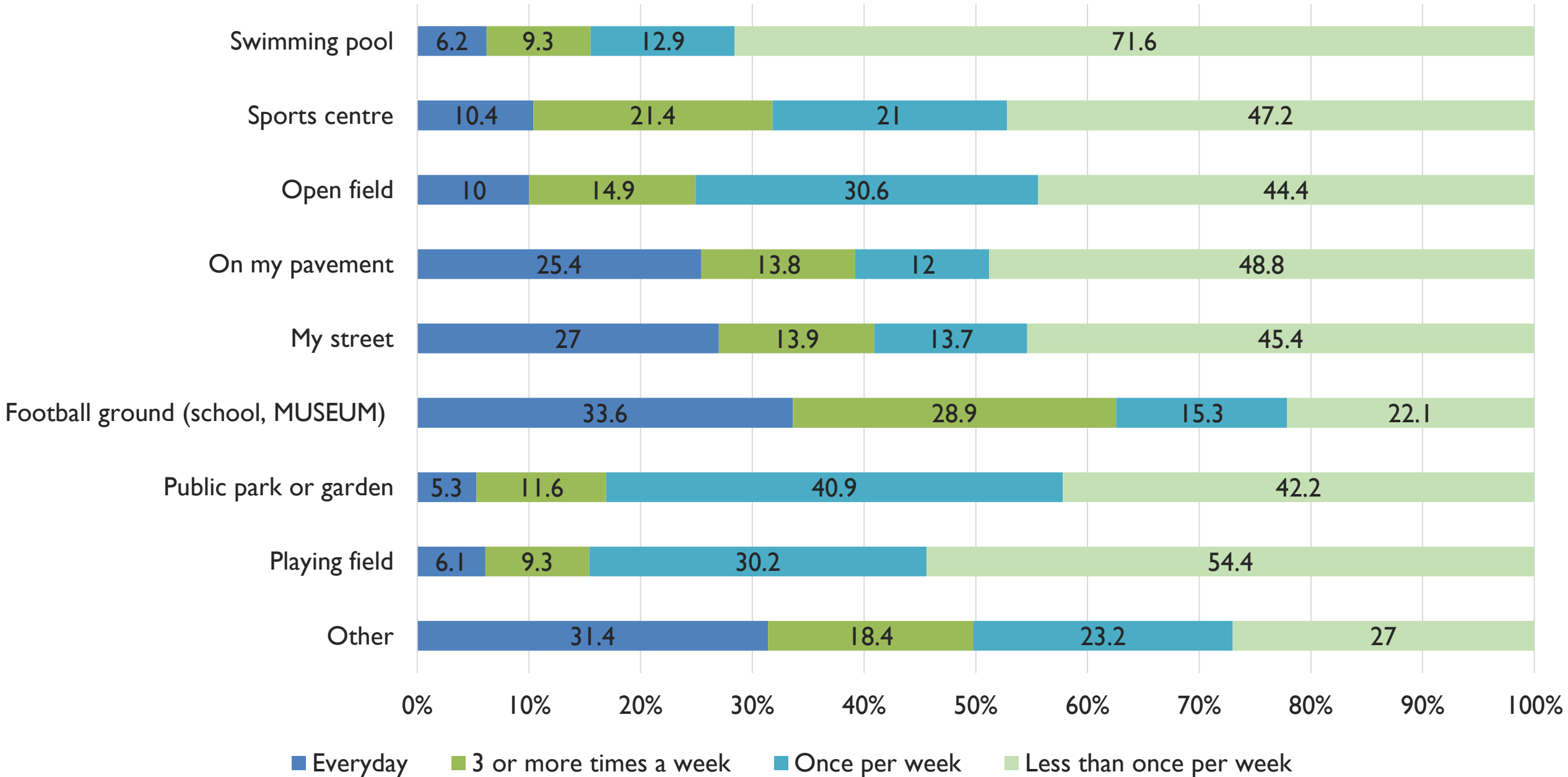


Do you have enough open areas to play in, where you live?



Region: **Gozo** and **South Eastern** region have more open play areas in contrast to Southern Harbour and Northern regions.

# Play time places



# Play time places

- Gozitan children are more likely to go to the playing field and football ground at least once a week or more often, in contrast to those from the South Eastern.
- Males are more likely to go to the playing field and football ground at least once a week or more often than females, while females are more likely than males to go to the swimming pool at least once a week or more often.
- Non-Maltese children visit playing fields and public parks and gardens more frequently than Maltese children.

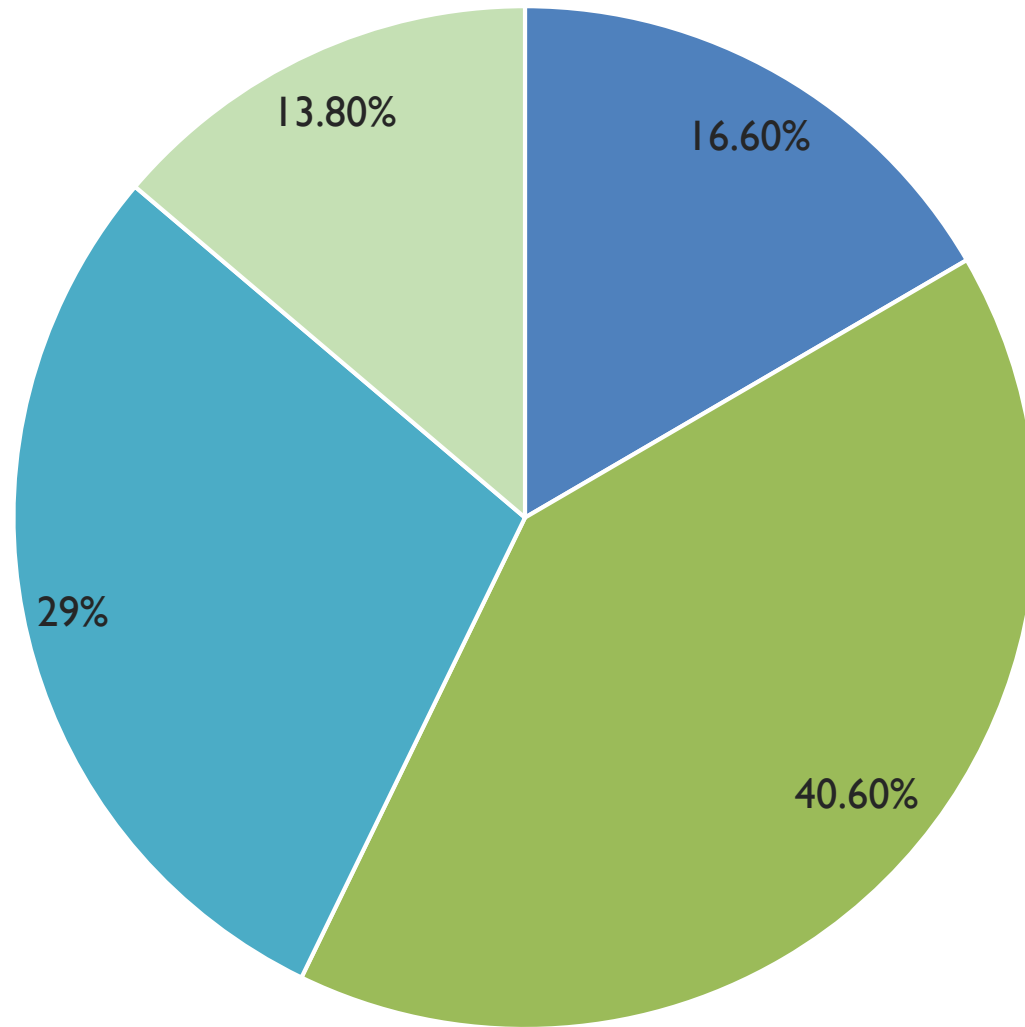
# Where do I like to play most

	N	%
Football ground (school, MUSEUM)	313	48.1%
Public park or garden	289	44.4%
Playing field	286	43.9%
Swimming pool	241	37.0%
Open field	223	34.3%
Sports centre	188	28.9%
My street	125	19.2%
On the pavement	67	10.3%

# Where do I like to play most?

- Participants from the Western region ticked 'open field' more frequently (44.6%) than those from other regions, with participants from the Northern region choosing this category the least frequently (22.6%).
- Over half of non-Maltese participants (56.7%) indicated that they like playing in public parks or gardens, compared to 43.0% of Maltese participants, whilst 50.2% of Maltese participants like playing in football grounds, compared to 35.8% of non-Maltese participants.

Do you discover and learn new things when playing in these areas?



■ No

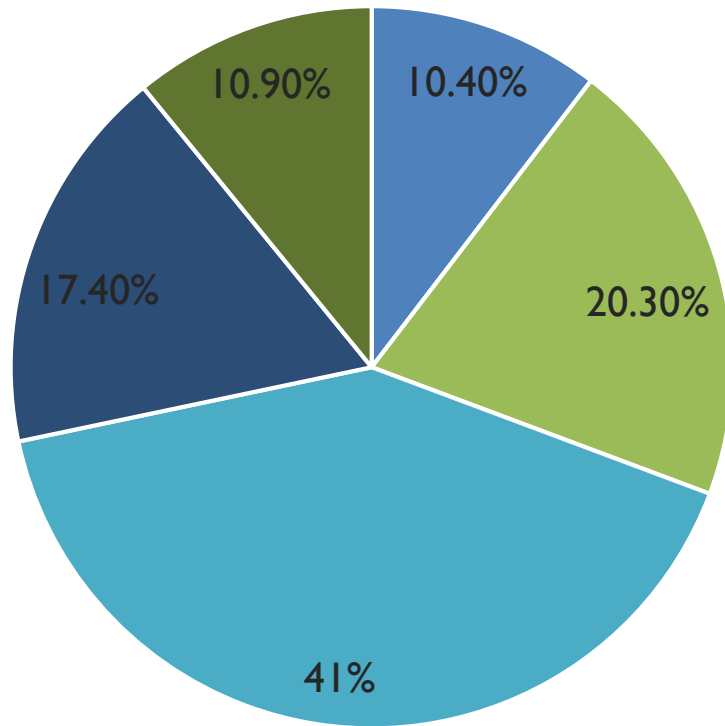
■ Yes

■ Yes, a little

■ Yes, a lot

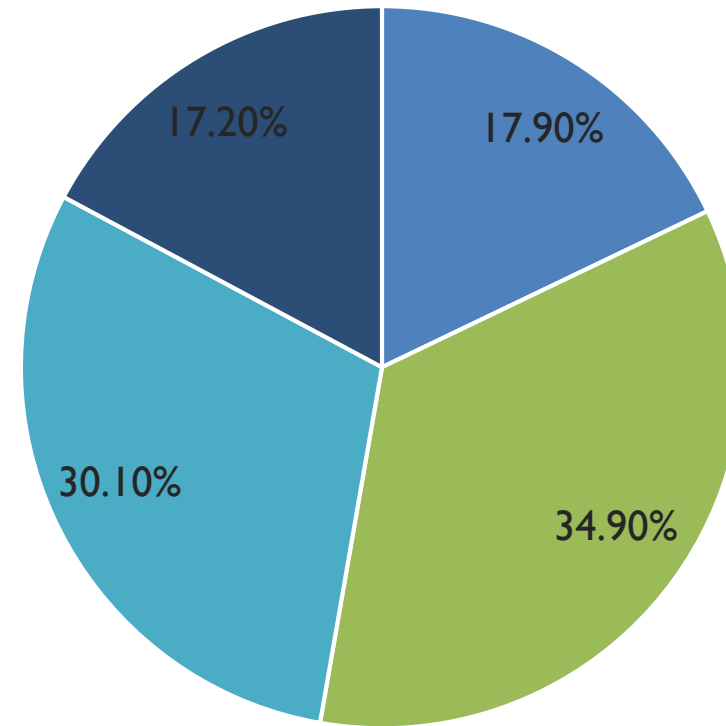
# Walking and cycling

How often do you walk and cycle in the area where you live?



■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Frequently ■ Always

Are there enough walking and cycling routes where you live?



■ No ■ Yes ■ Yes, a little ■ Yes, a lot

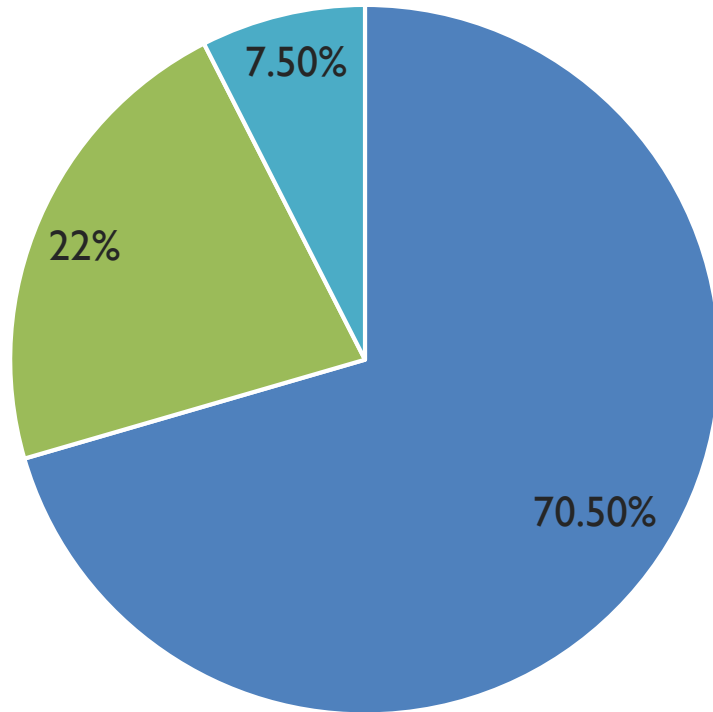


# Walking and cycling

- Participants from Northern Harbour are more likely than those from other regions to report 'never' walking or cycling in the area where they live (17.3%) whilst a quarter of participants in the Northern region (25.0%) always walk and cycle in the area where they live.
- Whilst 14.1% of boys and 7.1% of girls never walk and cycle in the area where they live, 27.8% of boys and 28.8% of girls do so frequently or always.
- Almost a quarter of participants in the Northern Harbour (23.5%) do not believe that there are enough walking and cycling routes where they live, compared to just 6.9% of those from Gozo.
- More non-Maltese participants do not believe that there are enough walking and cycling routes where they live (28.6%, compared to 16.7% of Maltese participants).

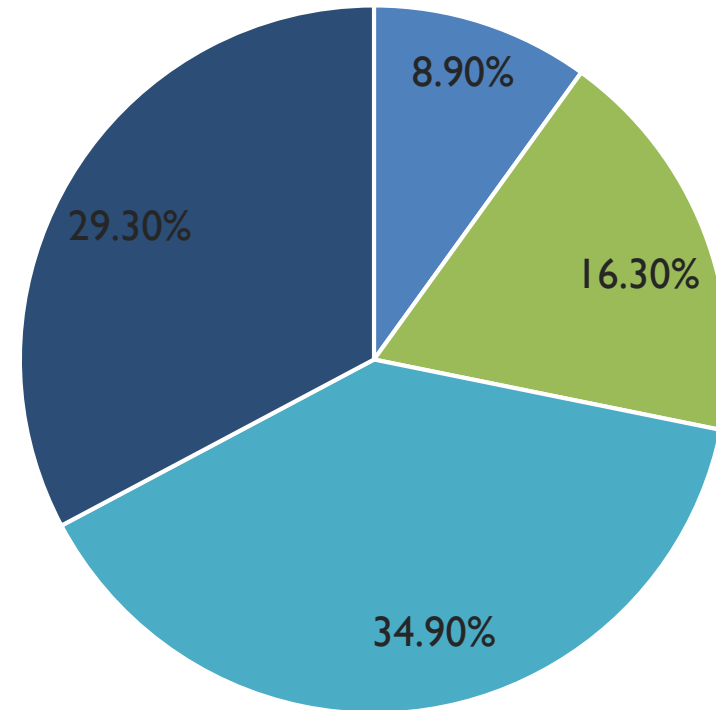
# Nature areas

Is there a garden, park or natural open area close to your house?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

How often do you go there?



■ Everyday ■ 3 or more times a week  
■ Once per week ■ Less than once per week

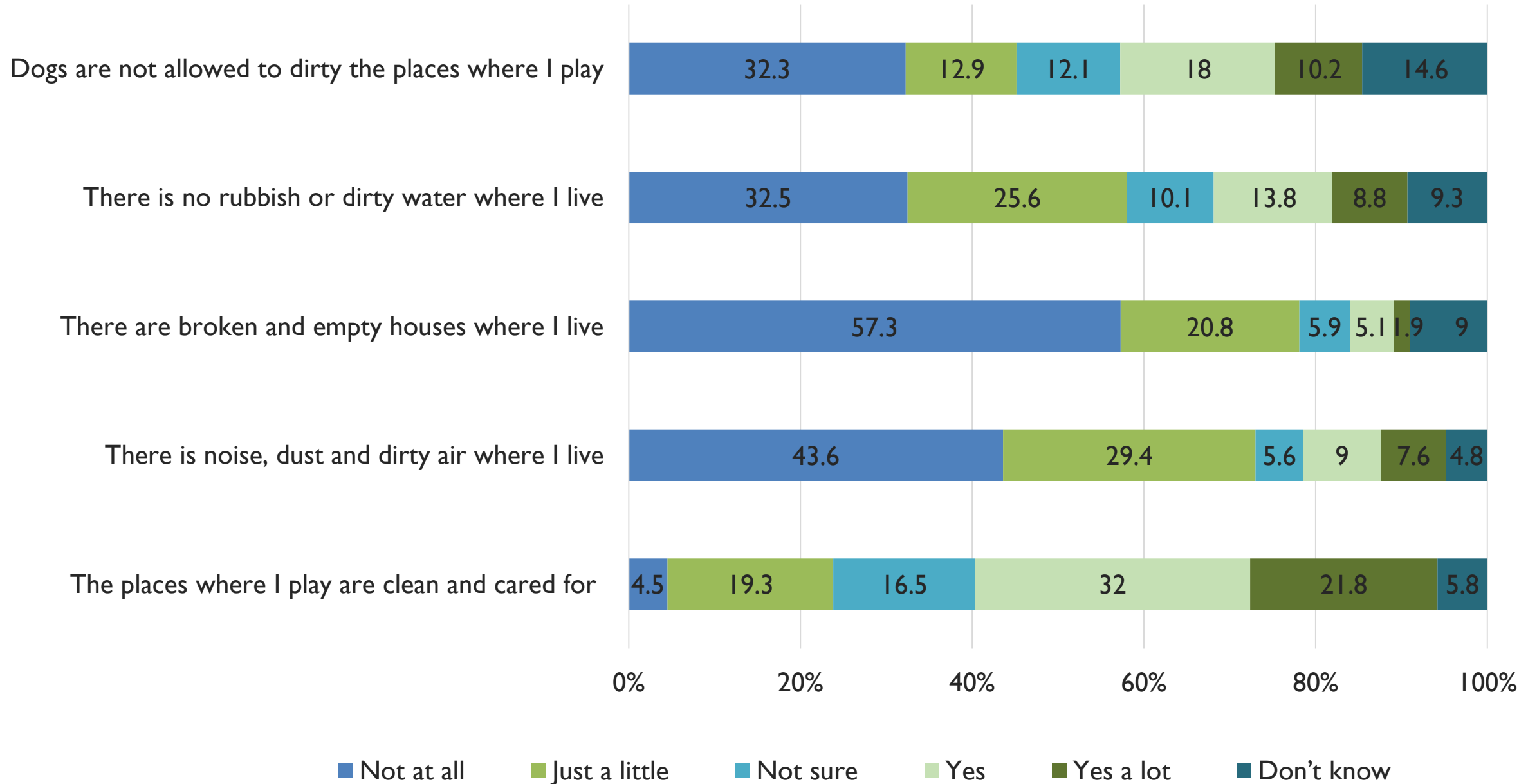
# Nature areas

	N	%
On foot	369	56.7%
By car	191	29.3%
By bicycle	136	20.9%
Other	49	7.5%
By public transport	9	1.4%

# Nature areas

- More Maltese participants indicated that there is a garden, park or natural open area close to their house (72.5%, compared to 52.3% of non-Maltese participants).
- Participants from the Western region go to green areas on foot more often than those from other regions (63.9% compared to 32.3% of those from the Northern region), while those from Gozo go by bicycle more frequently than children from other regions (30.4% compared to 13.0% from the Northern Harbour).
- More girls indicated that they visit green areas on foot (62.1% compared to 52.8% of boys).
- More non-Maltese participants travel to green areas by public transport (4.5% compared to 1.0% of Maltese participants), as well as by some 'other' means of transport (14.9% compared to 6.6% of Maltese participants).

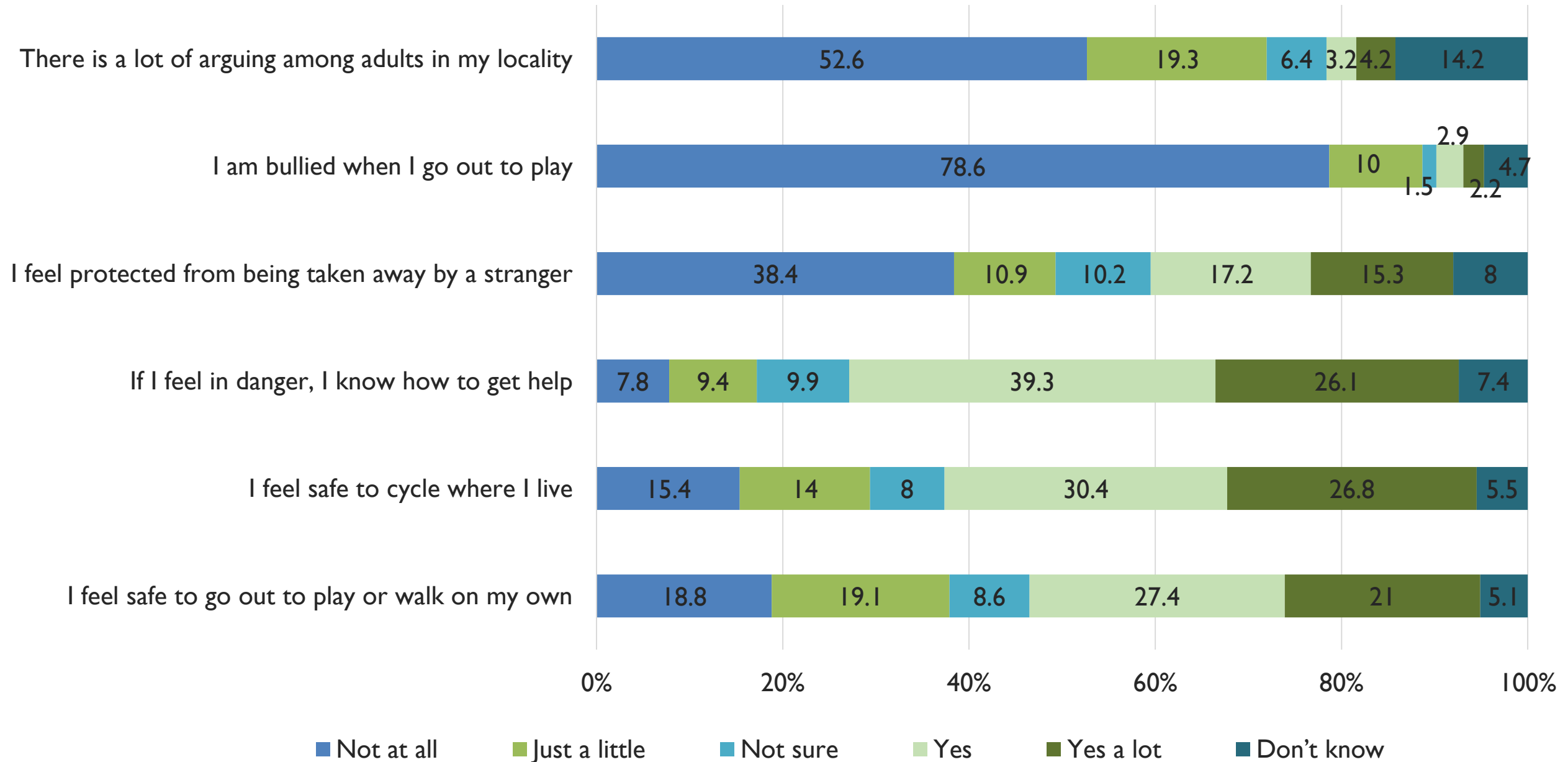
# Cleanliness



# Cleanliness

- Participants from Gozo scored higher ( $M=3.86$ ) on whether the places where they play are clean and cared for, whilst those from the Northern region scored the lowest ( $M=3.27$ ).

# Safety in the area where I live

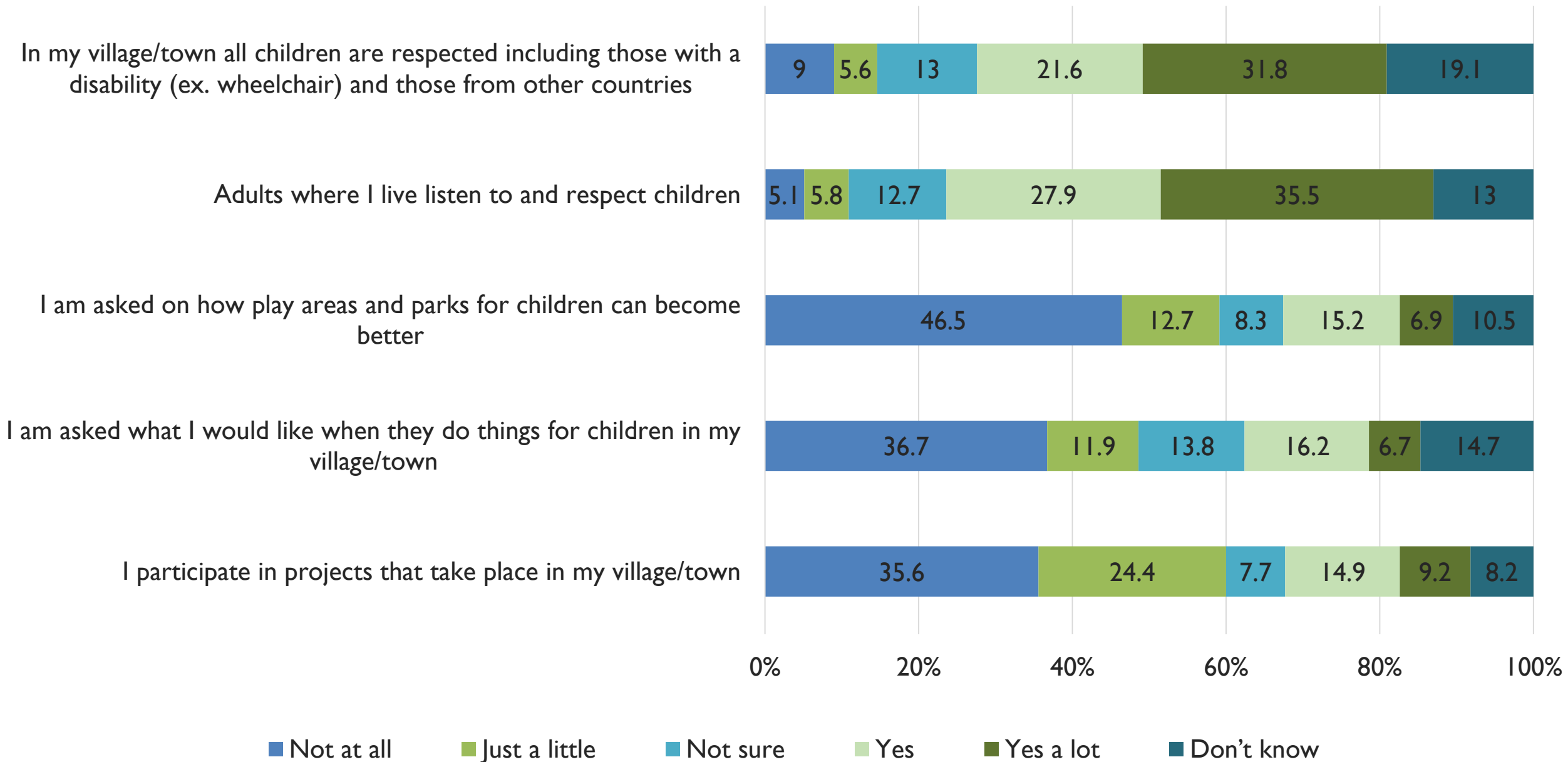


# Safety in the area where I live

- Participants from the Southern Harbour scored higher ( $M=1.89$ ) on whether there is a lot of arguing among adults in their locality, whilst those in Gozo scored lower on average ( $M=1.38$ ).
- Males feel safer than females to go out to play or walk on their own and to cycle where they live.



# Life for a child where I live



# Life for a child where I live

- Participants in Gozo scored highest on whether they participate in projects that take place in their town/village, whilst those in the Western region scored the lowest.

# Five most and least satisfied aspects of my hometown/village

Most satisfied (Completely satisfied & satisfied)			Least satisfied (Not at all satisfied & dissatisfied)		
	%	R		%	R
Places where I can play and do sports	75.8%	1	Opportunities to be asked about what I would like to change in my village/town	32.5%	1
Parks, gardens and other open areas where I can enjoy nature (trees, plants, animals, water)	74.9%	2	Safety from strangers or other people	27.6%	2
The space where I can cycle	69.0%	3	Opportunities to help with projects to change my village/town	27.5%	3
All children (boys/girls, children with disability, children from other countries) have the opportunity to participate in what happens in my village/town	66.9%	4	Safety from cars and traffic	27.2%	4
Play and nature areas can also be used by children with a disability	64.6%	5	Safety from bullying by other children	26.5%	5

# How satisfied I am where I live

- Participants from Gozo appear to be the most satisfied in most of the areas, such as with the places where they can play and do sports, the parks, gardens and other open areas where they can enjoy nature, whilst those in the Southern Harbour scored the lowest.
- Gozitan children are also the most satisfied with the opportunities to participate in what happens in their home town (those from Southern Harbour scored the lowest), to help with projects to change their locality (those from the Northern Harbour and Northern regions scored the lowest) and to be asked about what they would like to change in their hometown (those from the Western region scored the lowest).

# Areas I would like to improve in my town/village

	N	%
Safety from cars and traffic	377	57.9%
Clean and healthy places (no rubbish, noise, dust, smells)	333	51.2%
Parks, gardens and other open areas where I can enjoy nature (trees, plants, animals, water)	301	46.2%
Places where I can play and do sports	298	45.8%
Play and nature areas can also be used by children with a disability	273	41.9%
The space where I can cycle	270	41.5%
Safety from strangers or other people	266	40.9%
Safety from bullying by other children	227	34.9%
All children (boys/girls, children with disability, children from other countries) have the opportunity to participate in what happens in my village/town	179	27.5%
Opportunities to help with projects to change my village/town	171	26.3%
Opportunities to be asked about what I would like to change in my village/town	133	20.4%

# Areas I would like to improve in my town/village

- Children from the Southern Harbour indicated that they would like more safety from cars and traffic (68.3%) more frequently than those from other regions.
- More female participants indicated that they would like increased safety from strangers or other people (45.4% compared to 36.5% of males).

*My Magic Wand!*



*One thing I would like to change in my  
hometown/village*

# Things I would like to change



- Reduce cars and pollution, (general, noise) and increase cleanliness (litter, rubbish) (180)
- Increase areas available for play, sports and cycling (88)
- Increase green spaces and nature (87)
- Improve safety in the locality (55)(streets, cars, strangers)
- Nicer locality and nicer houses (25)
- Respect others and to stop bullying (25)
- Increase number of shops (9)
- Make more places accessible for all children (8)
- Others: climate change, animal cruelty, more and nicer friends

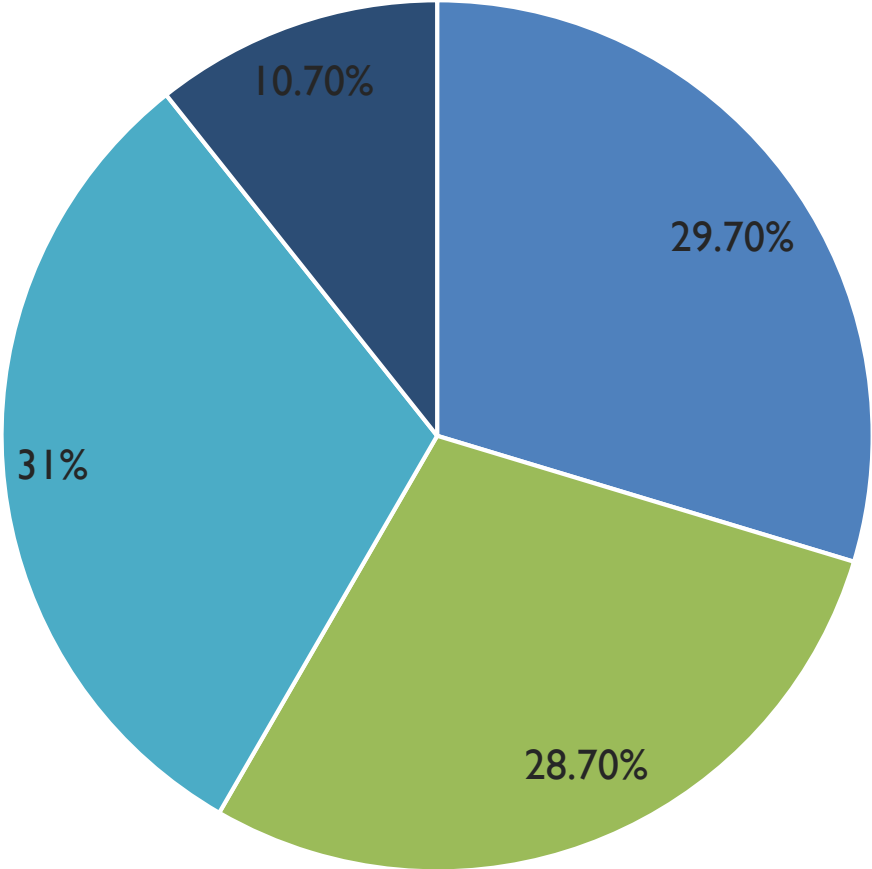


# Adolescents 12-16 years



# Enough spaces to play

Do you have enough open areas to play in, where you live?

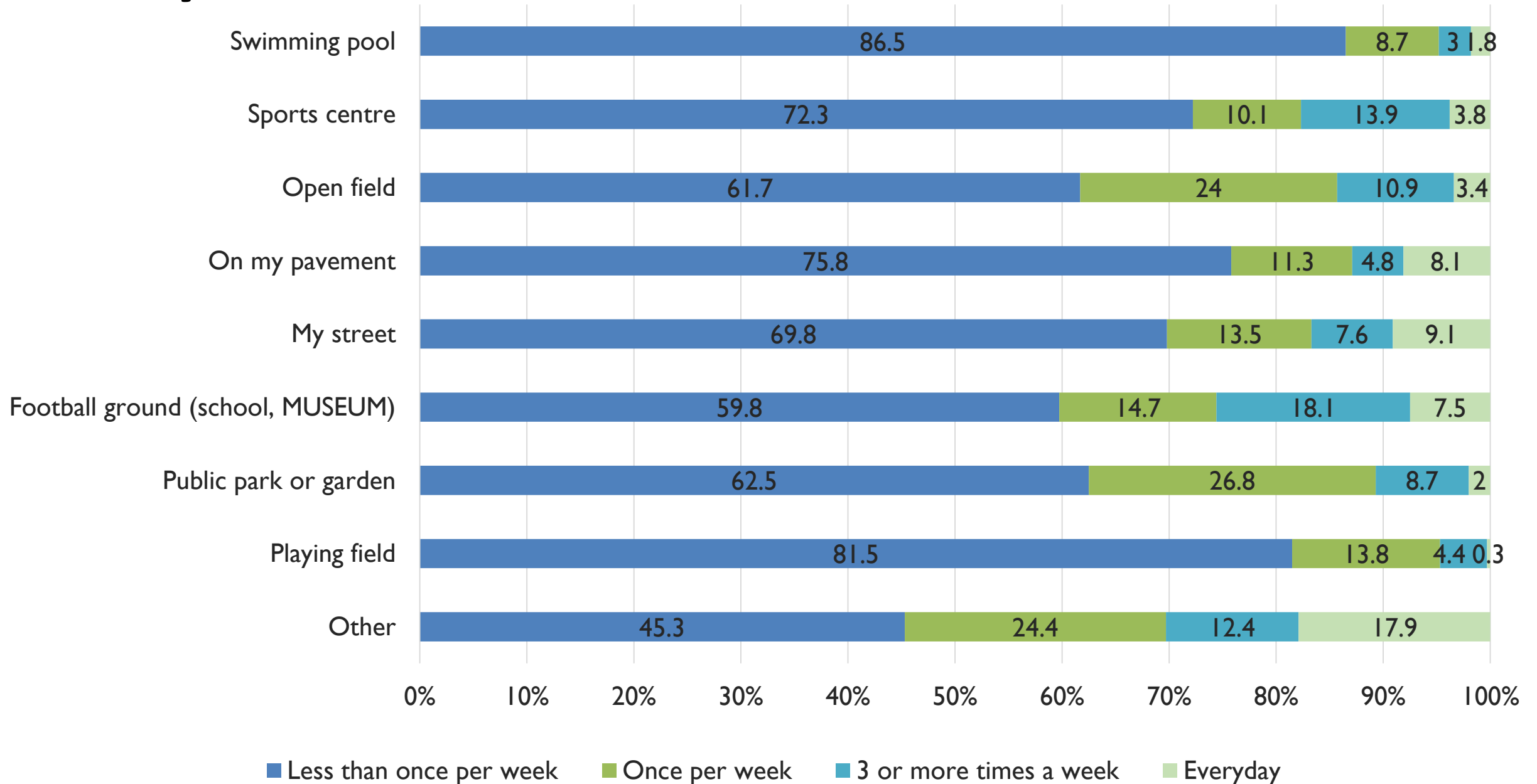


■ No    ■ Yes    ■ Yes, a little    ■ Yes, a lot

Only 39.4% said they have enough spaces to play, while 30% said no

Just under half of participants in the Southern Harbour (46.2%) and Northern Harbour (45.6%) believe that they do not have enough open areas to play in where they live, in contrast to Gozo (18.6%).

# Play areas



# Play areas

- Non-Maltese participants reported going to sports centres more frequently than Maltese participants.
- Males report going to football ground and sports centres more frequently than females.
- Participants in Gozo go and play more often in public parks/gardens, football ground, and in their street and pavement than those from other regions.

# Mode of transport to play areas

	N	%
On foot	271	65.8%
By car	197	47.8%
By bicycle	54	13.1%
By public transport	39	9.5%
Other	21	5.1%

# Transport to play areas

- More non-Maltese use public transport to go to play areas compared to Maltese participants.
- More female participants reported going to play areas on foot than males, whilst more males reported going to play areas by bicycle.
- Gozo residents use more bicycles than those in other regions.

# The places where I like to play most

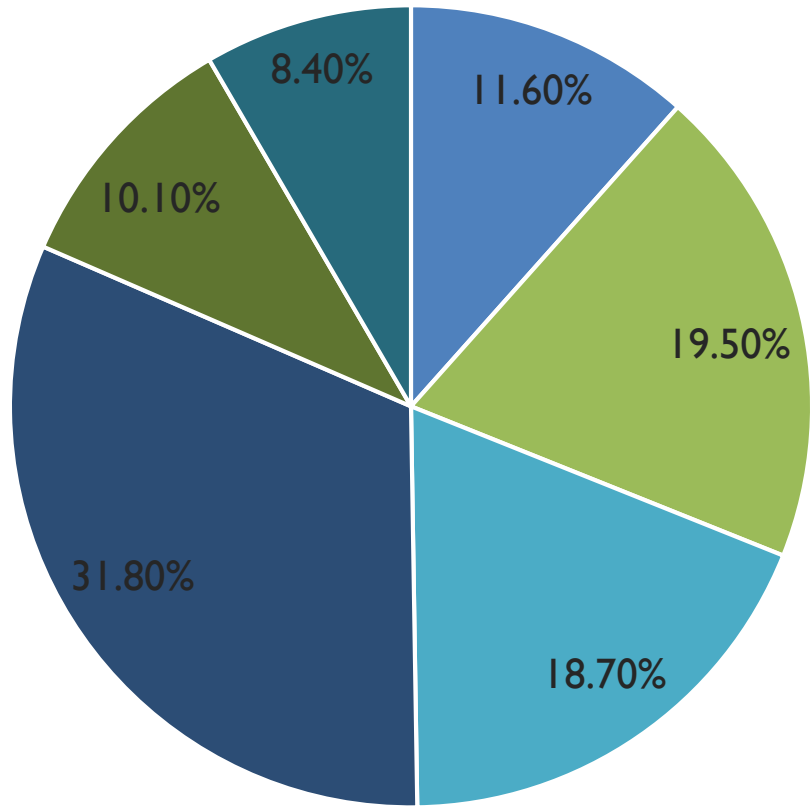
	N	%
Public park or garden	162	39.3%
Open field	146	35.4%
Football ground (school, MUSEUM)	102	24.8%
Playing field	101	24.5%
Sports centre	86	20.9%
Swimming pool	65	15.8%
Your street	47	11.4%
On your pavement	24	5.8%

# The places where I like to play most

- More Maltese participants indicated that they like playing in an open field.
- More girls indicated that they like playing in public parks, gardens and open fields, whilst more boys like playing more in football grounds and sports centres.
- Participants from Gozo enjoy playing in playing fields and on their pavements more than those from other regions.

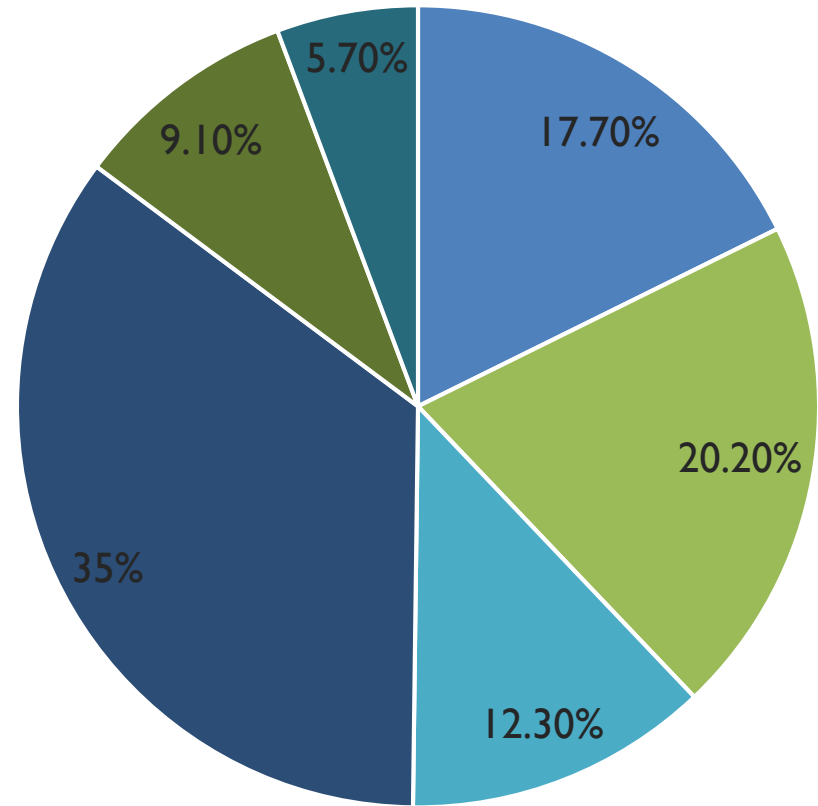


Is it possible to play different and new games and sports in these areas?



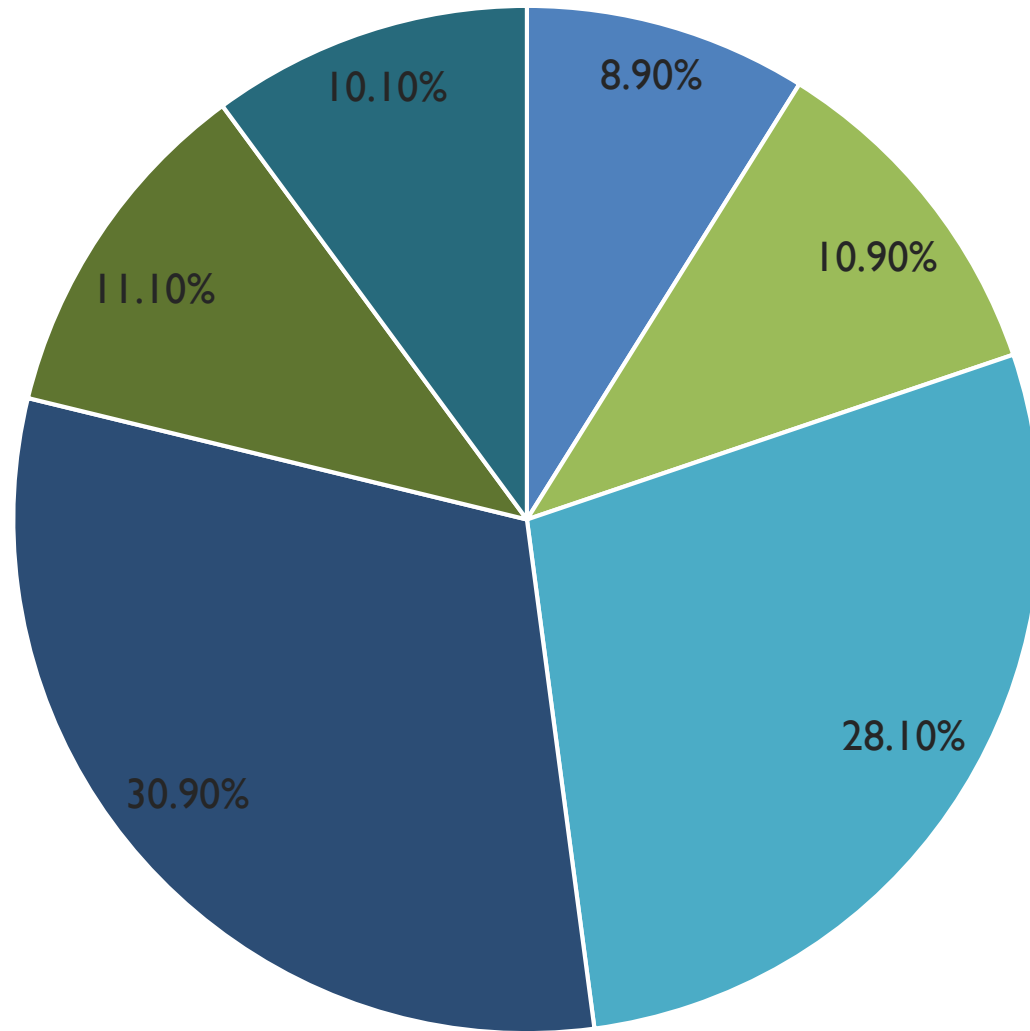
■ Not at all    ■ Just a little    ■ Not sure  
■ Yes    ■ Yes a lot    ■ Do not know

Do you discover and learn new things when playing in these areas?



■ Not at all    ■ Just a little    ■ Not sure  
■ Yes    ■ Yes a lot    ■ Do not know

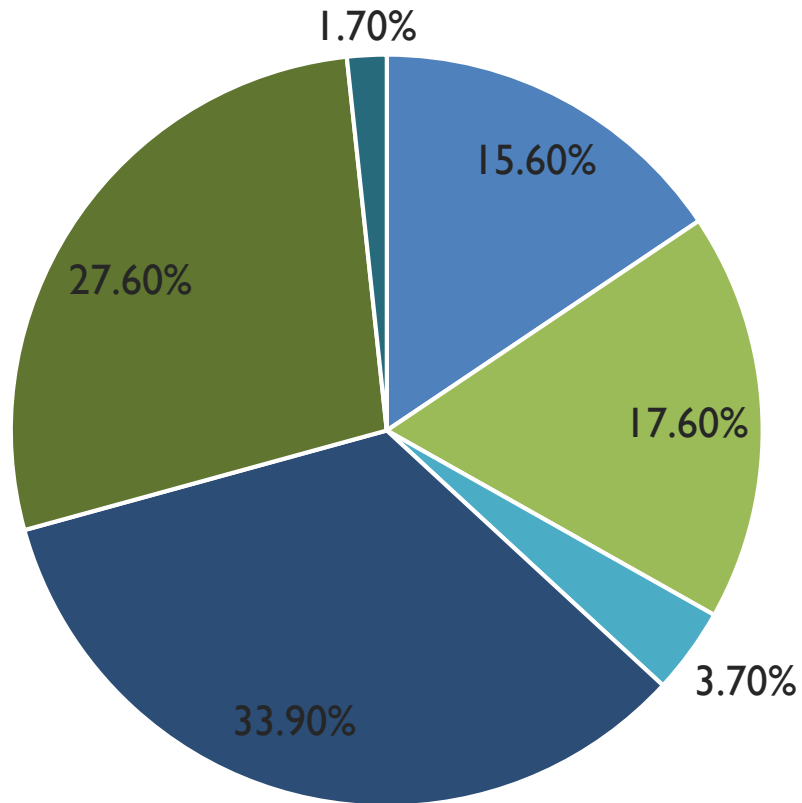
# Can children with a disability also use these play areas?



■ Not at all   ■ Just a little   ■ Not sure   ■ Yes   ■ Yes a lot   ■ Do not know

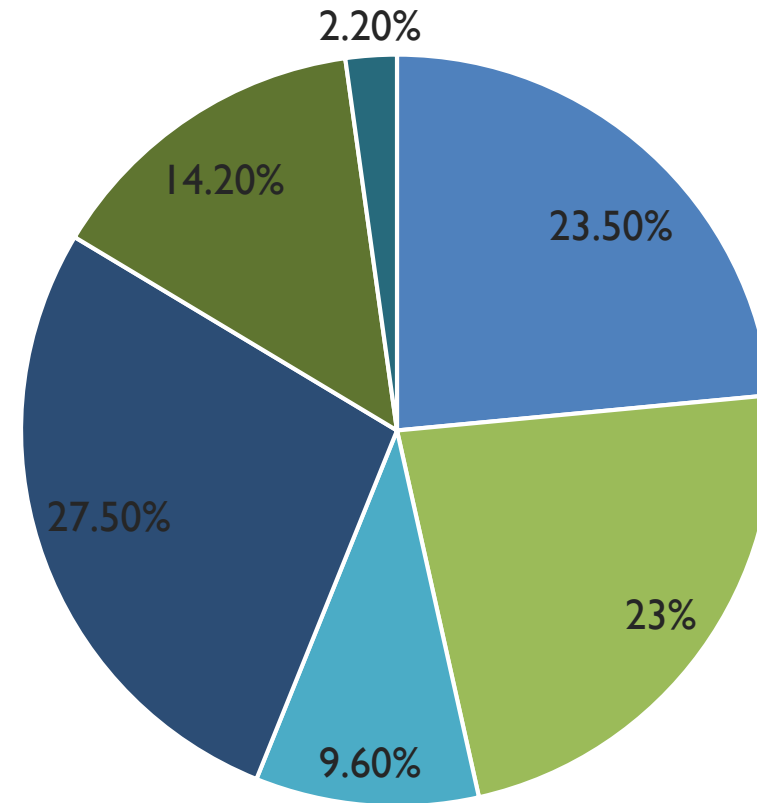
# Walking and cycling

Do you like to walk and cycle in the area where you live?



■ Not at all    ■ Just a little    ■ Not sure  
■ Yes    ■ Yes a lot    ■ Do not know

Are there enough walking and cycling routes where you live?



■ Not at all    ■ Just a little    ■ Not sure  
■ Yes    ■ Yes a lot    ■ Do not know

# Walking and cycling

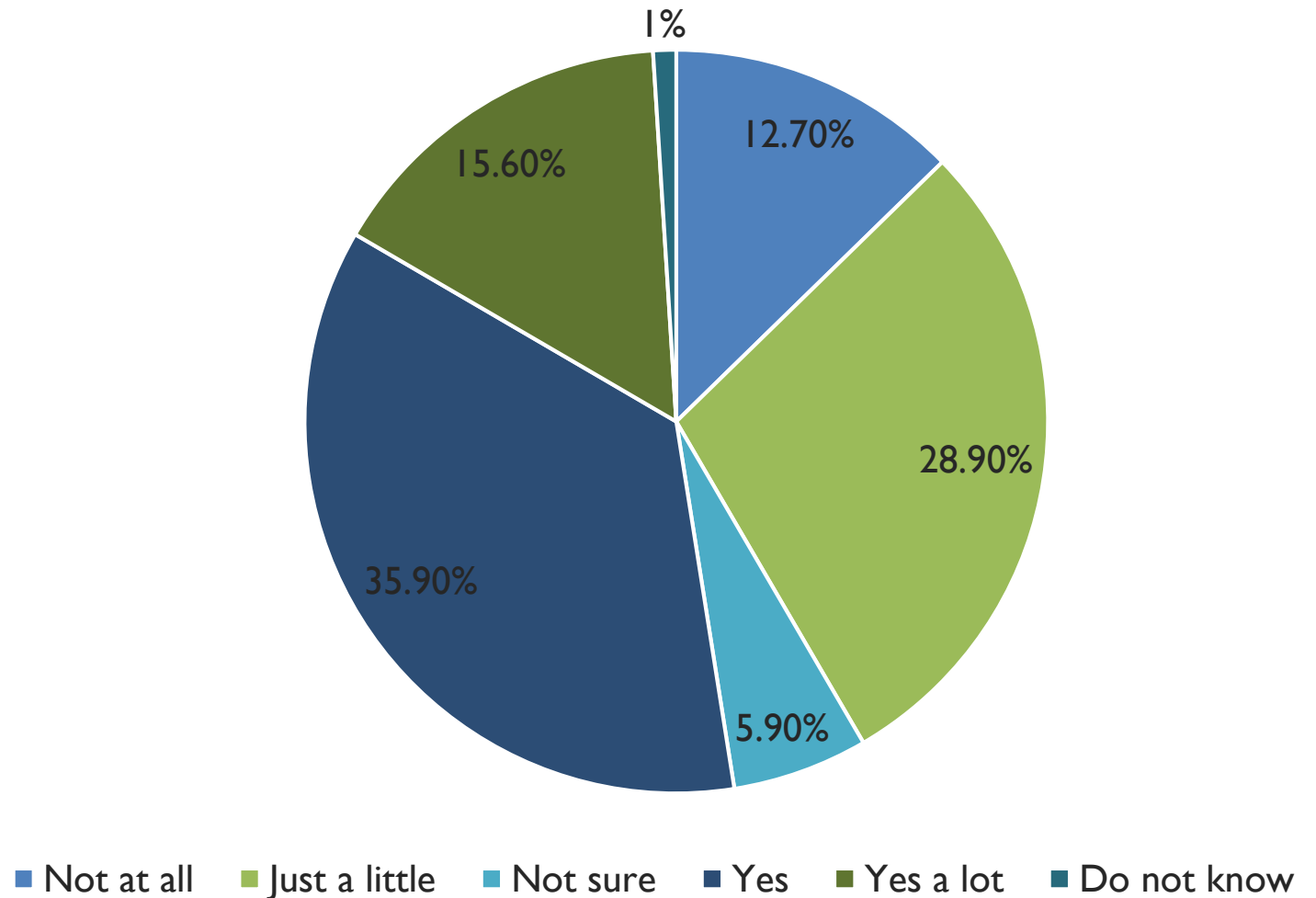
- Participants from the South Eastern region indicated most that they like to walk and cycle in the area and that there are enough routes where they live, whilst those from the Northern region and Southern Harbour scored lowest.

# Places to meet and spend time with friends

Just over one half (52%) believe there are adequate spaces to meet, but 42% do not or just a little

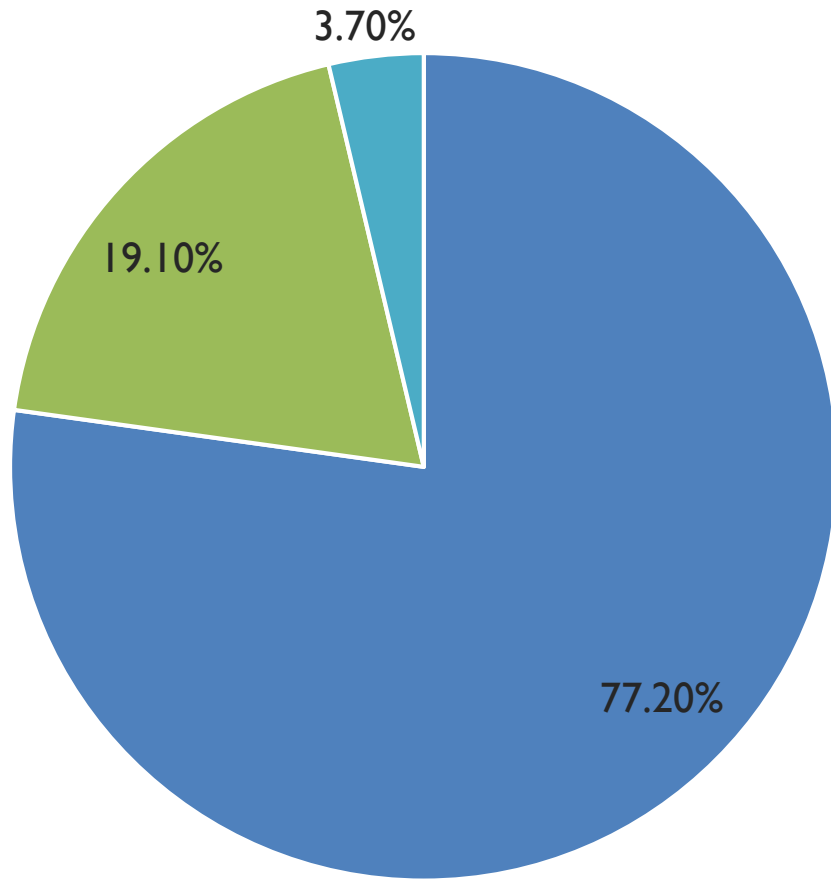
Participants from Gozo most likely to indicate that there are adequate places where they can meet and spend time with their friends the most (those in Southern Harbour least)

Are there adequate places where you can meet and spend time with your friends?



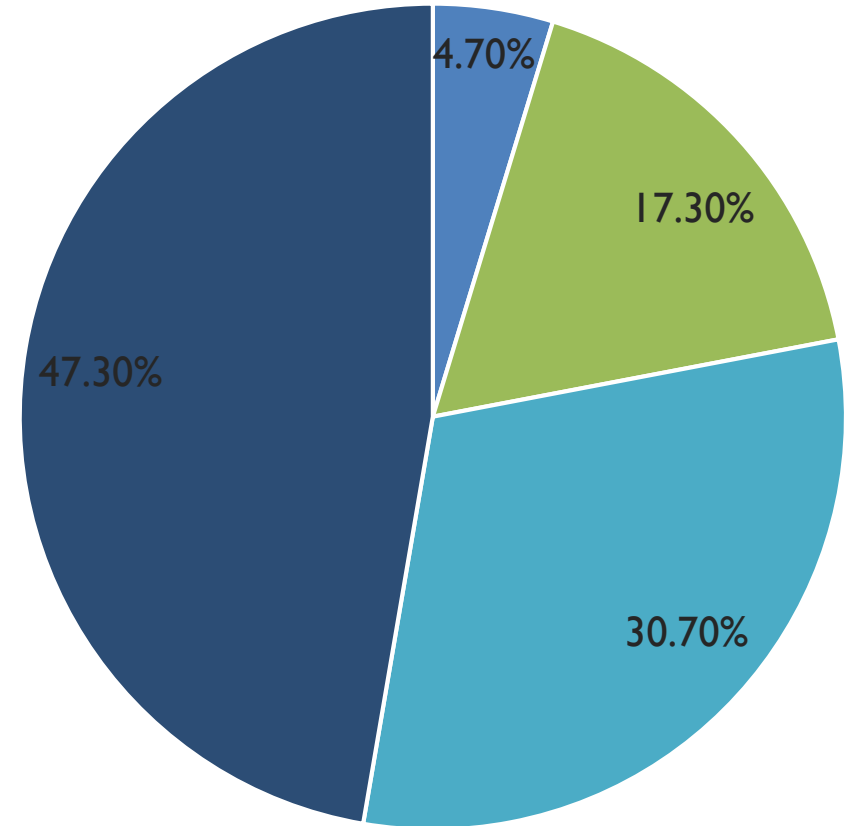
# Visiting nature areas

Is there a garden, park or natural open area close to your house?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

How often do you go there?

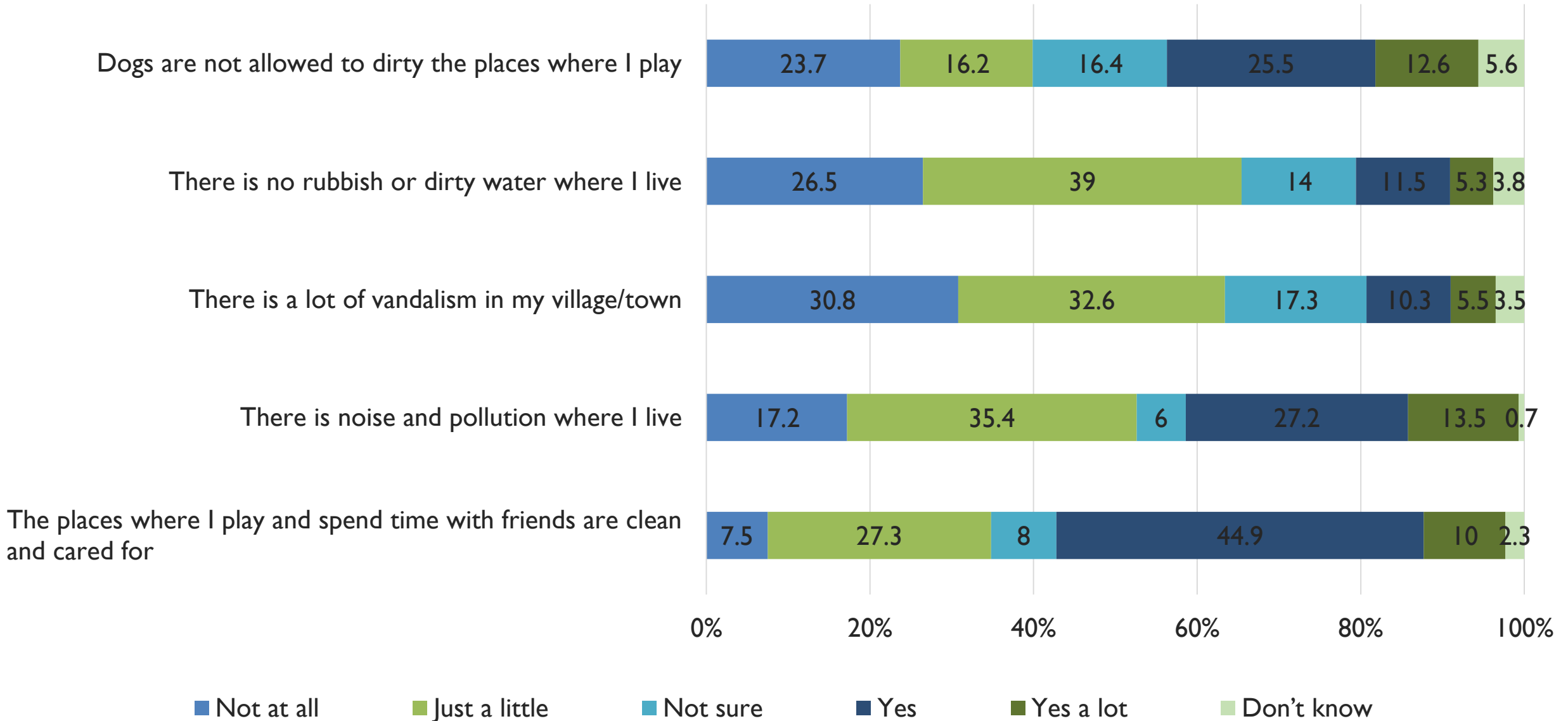


■ Everyday ■ Once per week ■ 3 or more times a week ■ Less than once per week

# Visiting nature areas

- The great majority of participants in the Western region (90.9%) indicate that there is a garden, park or natural open area close to their house.
- Participants in Gozo visit green areas most often, with 71.6% going there at least once a week or more often.

# Cleanliness of open areas where I play and spend my time





# Cleanliness of open areas

- Participants from South Eastern region scored highest on whether the places where they play and spend time with friends are clean and cared for, whilst those from the Southern Harbour scored the lowest.
- Participants from the Southern Harbour scored highest on whether there is noise and pollution where they live whilst those from the South Eastern region scored the lowest.

# Safety in the area where I live

My village/town is safe for all children including boys and girls, children with a disability, and children from other countries

Where I live there is a lot of crime, drugs and violence

I am bullied when I go out to play or meet friends

I feel protected from abuse from people in my village/town (physical, sexual, psychological)

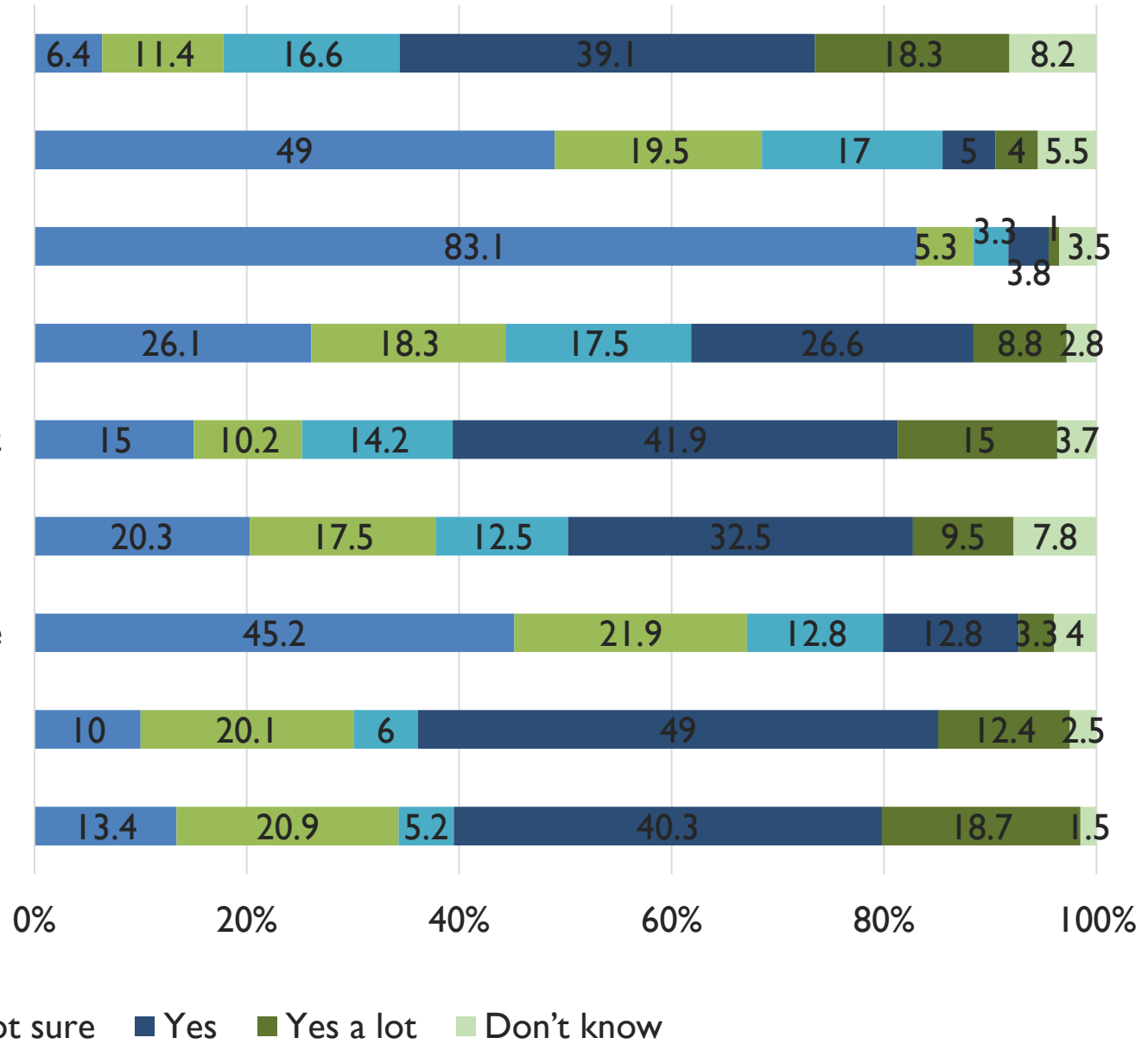
If I feel I am in danger, I know where to get help and report

I feel safe using buses or public transport in my village/town

There are dangerous, broken buildings where I live

There are safe crossings to the playing fields, parks and school

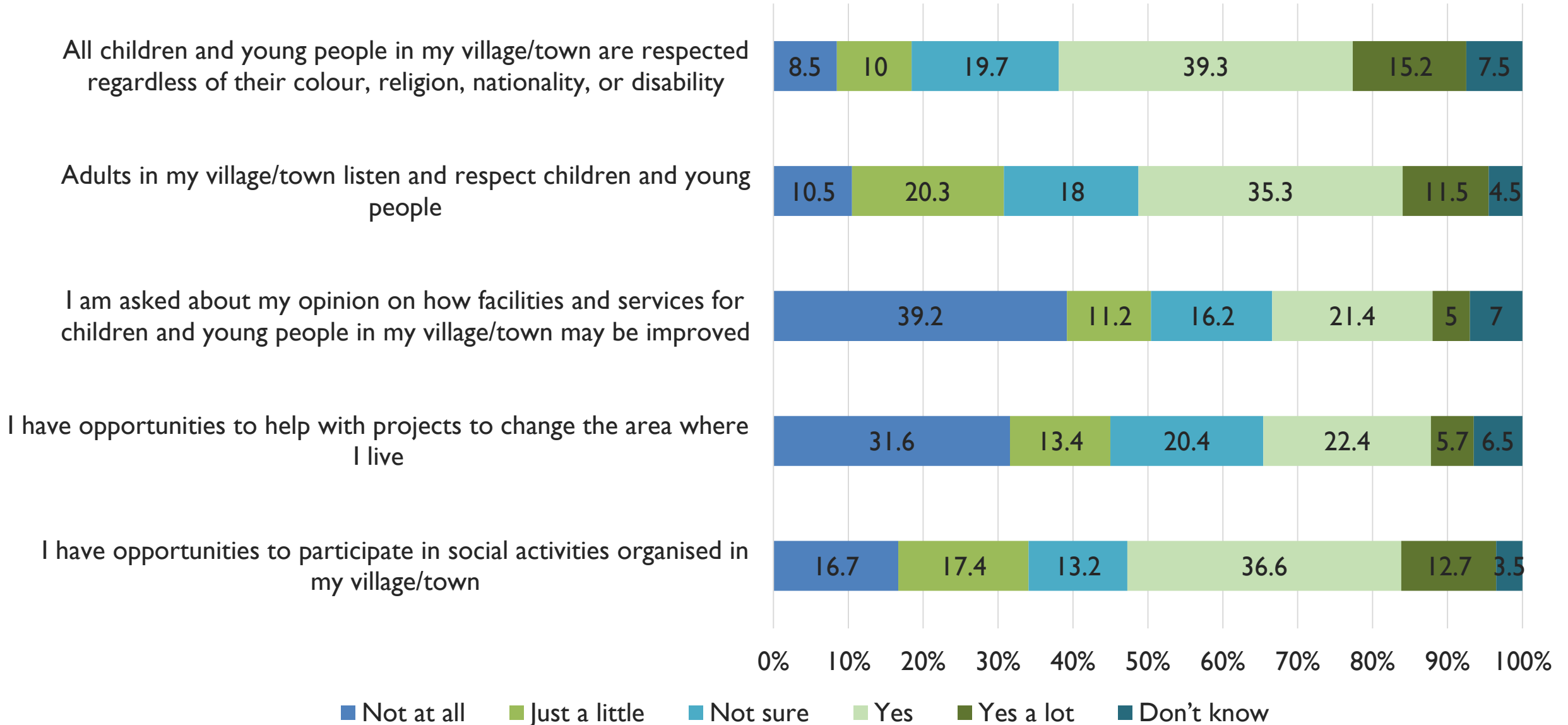
I feel safe to go out to play, walk on my own



# Safety in the area where I live

- Participants from the Northern Harbour scored highest on whether where they live there is a lot of crime, drugs and violence whilst those from Gozo scored the lowest.
- Maltese participants scored higher on whether where they live there is a lot of crime, drugs and violence but also on knowing where to get help when in danger, compared to non-Maltese participants.
- Males generally feel safer, scoring higher than females on feeling safe to go out to play or walk on their own, use buses or public transport, know where to get help and report, feel protected from abuse from people in my village/town, and that their village/town is safe for all children (boys/girls, children with disability or from other countries)

# Participation in the life of my town or village



# Participation in the life of my town or village

- Maltese participants feel more consulted in improving their locality and listened to, than non Maltese children.
- More male than female participants believe that adults in their village/town listen to and respect children and young people.
- Participants from Western region scored highest on having opportunities to participate in social activities organised in their town/village (those from Southern Harbour scored lowest), while those from Gozo scored highest on whether adults listen to and respect children/young people (those from Northern region scored lowest).

# Five most and least satisfied aspects of my hometown/village

Most satisfied (Completely satisfied & satisfied)			Least satisfied (Not at all satisfied & dissatisfied)		
	%	R		%	R
Safety from bullying by peers	63.9%	1	I have opportunities to give my opinion on what I would like in my town/village	41.0%	1
Buses and public transport in my village/town	61.9%	2	My opinions are taken seriously when I say something	36.6%	2
Safety from dangerous and abandoned buildings	61.3%	3	The environment is clean and healthy (no rubbish, noise, dust, pollution)	33.5%	3
All children and young people are included (boys/girls, children with a disability, children from different countries)	59.1%	4	I have opportunities to participate in local council, parish council, other youth organisations in my town/village	27.4%	4
Adequate places where I can go out to walk, play, do sports or cycle	55.6%	5	Safety from cars and traffic	26.9%	5

# How satisfied I am in the area where I live

- Maltese participants are more satisfied than non Maltese in various aspects of their locality, such as safety from cars and traffic and from dangerous buildings, having suitable places where they can meet with their friends, clean and healthy environment, opportunities to give their opinion on what they would like in their town/village, to participate in local council, parish council and other youth organisations, and to have their opinions taken seriously.
- Males reported being more satisfied with safety from abuse by strangers and other adults people in their town/village.
- Participants in **the Western region are the most satisfied** with safety from cars and traffic and from crime, drugs and violence (least Northern Harbour), safety from abuse by strangers and other adults (least Northern region), adequate places where they can walk, play, do sports or cycle and buses and public transport (least Southern Harbour), play and social areas that can be used by young people with a disability (least Northern Harbour), suitable places where they can meet up and hang out with friends, and parks and other open areas where they can enjoy nature (least Southern Harbour), and a clean and healthy environment (least Northern Harbour).
- Participants from **Gozo are the most satisfied** with the opportunities to participate in local council, parish council and other youth organisations, to have their opinions taken seriously (least Southern Harbour), and to be included in the life of their home town/village (least Southern Harbour).

# Areas for improvement in my town/village

	N	%
Suitable places where I can meet and hang out with friends	212	51.5%
The environment is clean and healthy (no rubbish, noise, dust, pollution)	196	47.6%
Safety from cars and traffic	194	47.1%
Adequate places where I can go out to walk, play, do sports or cycle	187	45.4%
Parks, gardens and other open areas where I can enjoy nature (trees, plants, water, animals)	169	41.0%
Safety from crime, drugs and violence	155	37.6%
Safety from abuse by strangers and other adult people	151	36.7%
Play and social areas can be used by young people with a disability	131	31.8%
My opinions are taken seriously when I say something	118	28.6%
I have opportunities to give my opinion on what I would like in my town/village	104	25.2%
Safety from dangerous and abandoned buildings	94	22.8%
All children are included (boys/girls, children with disability, from different countries)	90	21.8%
Buses and public transport in my village/town	82	19.9%
Safety from bullying by peers	71	17.2%
I have opportunities to participate in local council, parish council, other youth organisations	59	14.3%



# Areas for improvement in my town/village

- More non-Maltese indicated that they would like the environment to be clean and healthy with no rubbish, noise, dust and pollution.
- More females indicated that they would like more safety from abuse by strangers and other adults, suitable places where they can meet with friends, and a clean and healthy environment
- More participants from Southern Harbour indicated that they would like more adequate places where they can go out to walk, play, do sports or cycle compared to those from other regions;
- More participants from Northern Harbour would like an environment that is clean and healthy, compared to those from other regions.

# Things I would like to change



- Healthier environment (cars, construction, pollution, noise) and increase cleanliness (litter, rubbish) (100)
- Increase green spaces and nature (73)
- Increase safety in the locality (35) and safe places for teenagers to meet friends (49)
- Increase spaces for sports and cycling (26), reduce cars and add safe pedestrian zones/cycle lanes (35)
- Enhance diversity and respect for everyone, including young people (29)
- Improve public transport (10)

# 5 Conclusions



- The findings for both primary and secondary are quite consistent: children and young people are particularly not happy about cars, traffic, pollution and cleanliness: cars and building construction seen as encroaching the play and social spaces and polluting them with noise, dust, fumes
- Many would like more play spaces for young children and social spaces for adolescents – discrepancy between where they spend their time (street, pavement, ) and where they would like to spend their time (parks..)
- Many would appreciate more nature areas where they can also exercise and do sports - physical exercise, sports, nature not yet part of the mainstream culture of Maltese children
- Children would like a more active say in what happens in their towns and villages and consulted more in decisions about projects for children and young people
- The best places for children and young people to live and grow up appear to be Gozo and Western and South Eastern, and the worst the Harbour Area (North and Southern Harbour) and the Northern region

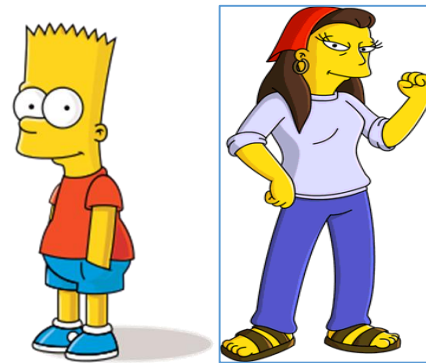
# 5 Preliminary Recommendations



- An inter agency working group (CfC, ERA, Ministry Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity, Agenzija Zghazagh, Children's Council, UM, Local Councils Association, MCCA business community) on how to implement the recommendations in this report
- National indicators of child-friendly towns and villages leading to award quality labels, to be developed by above inter-agency WG
- Designated members in local councils responsible for policy actions on how to make the town/village more child and family friendly and to establish formal procedures on how to include the voices of children and young people in projects for children
- Strengthen green and eco initiatives such as pedestrianised zones and hubs, opening of recreational areas and parks in the community for children and families, streetscaping, soundscaping, cleanliness, and regulation of building construction
- Prioritise environmental education from the early years (taking care of the environment, enjoying nature, climate change, animal care), with schools together with the local councils empowering local community (including children and young people) to take a more active role in the improvement and upkeep of its surroundings

# Further information

- More detailed information on the study's findings, conclusions and recommendations at **National Conference in 2022**
- Further details:
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# Primary

- Less than 1/3 walk or cycle frequently where they live., 41% do so sometimes
- Just over one half feel they have enough open areas to play or enough walking and cycling routes where they live
- More than one half visit the playing field less than once per week, close to one half visit sports centres less than once a week, and 42%-44% visit nature areas or open areas less than once a week
- Only 1/4 go to nature parks frequently, whilst 29.3% go there less than once a week
- Just 1/2 believe the places where they play are clean and cared for, while 1/3 believe there is rubbish or dirty water
- Just 1/2 feel safe to go out to play or walk on their own, about 1/3 feel safe cycling
- Most children are not actively engaged in projects in the community, with only 1/4 participating in projects, and less than 1/4 asked about what they would like when they do things for children, or how play areas and parks can be improved
- Between ¼ and 1/3 are not satisfied with opportunities to be asked about what they would like to change, **safety from strangers or other people**, opportunities to help with projects to change my village/town, **safety from cars and traffic** and safety from bullying by other children
- More than 1/2 would like to improve safety from cars and traffic, and **clean and healthy places (no rubbish, noise, dust, smells)**

# Secondary

- Only 40% said they have enough spaces to play, while 30% said no
- Only 2% go public parks/garden every day (yet this is their preferred area of play), 3.8% to the sports centre and 7.5% the football ground
- Almost 1/2 visit nature areas less than once a week
- Over 60% stated that they like to walk and cycle in the area where they live- but close to 1/2 felt that they did not have enough of these routes
- Only about 1/2 felt that there are adequate places where they can meet and spend time with friends
- Only 1/2 believe they have opportunities to participate in social activities organised in their home town and that adults in their village listen to and respect children and young people
- Less than 1/3 believe they have opportunities to help with projects to change the area where they live, or are asked about their opinion on how facilities and services for children and young people can be improved
- Between 1/2 and 1/3 would like the following areas in their locality to be improved: Suitable places where they can meet with friends, clean and healthy environment, safety from cars and traffic, adequate places where they can go out to walk, play, do sports or cycle , parks, gardens and other nature areas, safety from crime, drugs and violence, and safety from abuse by strangers and other adult people



# Playing different games, learning new things

- More Maltese participants believe it is possible to play different and new games and sports and to discover and learn new things in these play areas than non-Maltese
- More male participants believe they can discover and learn new things when playing in these areas than female participants