**Addressing inequality in outdoor use: unpacking the barriers**

Spending time in the outdoors is of considerable importance for our health and wellbeing. In Scotland, the proportion of people regularly getting outdoors for recreation has increased in the last 15 years. ‘[Outdoors](https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/measuring-progress/national-indicator-performance)’ refers to open spaces in towns and cities, as well as the countryside and so includes all visits to places like parks, woodlands, farmland, beaches and riversides. The [COVID-19 pandemic](https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-access-and-recreation/increasing-participation/measuring-participation) further heightened awareness of the value of time spent outdoors.

However, use of the outdoors is unequal across society. Recent [research](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016920462200069X) highlights that some population groups in Scotland use the outdoors less often than the rest of the population.

Why?

At the James Hutton Institute, we undertook a review of barriers to the use of the outdoors experienced by people of different equalities groups. We examined academic and non-academic literature from Scotland and the UK for the following groups: minority ethnic, women and men, disabled people, children and young people, those aged over 65, religious groups, and socioeconomic groups. These groups were selected as relevant to The Scottish Government in assessing the equalities impacts of outdoor access policies.

Barriers to use of the outdoors, for each group, are outlined separately in a ‘slide pack’. This makes it possible to access the sections of most interest to you. A bibliography is provided for each group.

The research shows that there are significant evidence gaps around the barriers to use of the outdoors experienced by minority ethnic and religious groups. Often these are discussed as single groups in the research, but this overlooks the differences in the experiences of people in different minority ethnic communities and of different faiths.

There are different data gaps for different equalities groups in Scotland. For example, there is a lack of *quantitative* data focusing on specific groups (e.g. older people), lack of data on intersectional sub-groups (for example, minority ethnic young people, women living in deprived areas), and evidence available for religious groups is largely anecdotal.

Findings from our research highlight that many barriers cut across groups, although they may be experienced differently by people in different groups. This includes poor health and immobility, lack of social networks, safety concerns, knowledge and familiarity.

Our research review provides insights to why some groups might be using the outdoors less often. Given the benefits to health and wellbeing that can be gained from spending time in the outdoors, it is important to understand what kind of interventions might help to overcome disparities in accessing and enjoying the outdoors for different groups.

To get a comprehensive understanding of the experience of barriers, studies looking both within certain groups and comparing between different groups are needed. These different approaches may offer different insights. It is also essential that future large-scale survey data is broken down by equalities groups so that we can gain a better understanding of the relative influence of different barriers for the groups.

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Future work in the new Strategic Research Programme (2022-2027) will continue to unpack inequalities in use by different groups. We will look into the use of ‘nature’ prescriptions to address public health issues, and how to foster care-full use of the outdoors so that nature can continue to be there to support our health and wellbeing.

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