



## ParkWatch



**“Most parks have more facilities for dog waste than for teenage girls”**



**Parkwatch Report**  
September 2023



## In May 2023, **Make Space for Girls** asked people to take part in a citizen science project, counting how many teenagers were using the facilities in their local park, and how many of these were girls. This report sets out the results.

Parks are essential for everyone as places to be active, play socialise and relax — and they are particularly important for teenagers, who quite often have nowhere else to go.

They're good for their mental and physical health, allow them to be in touch with nature and have social benefits too, whether that's meeting friends, developing autonomy or creating a sense of belonging to the local community.

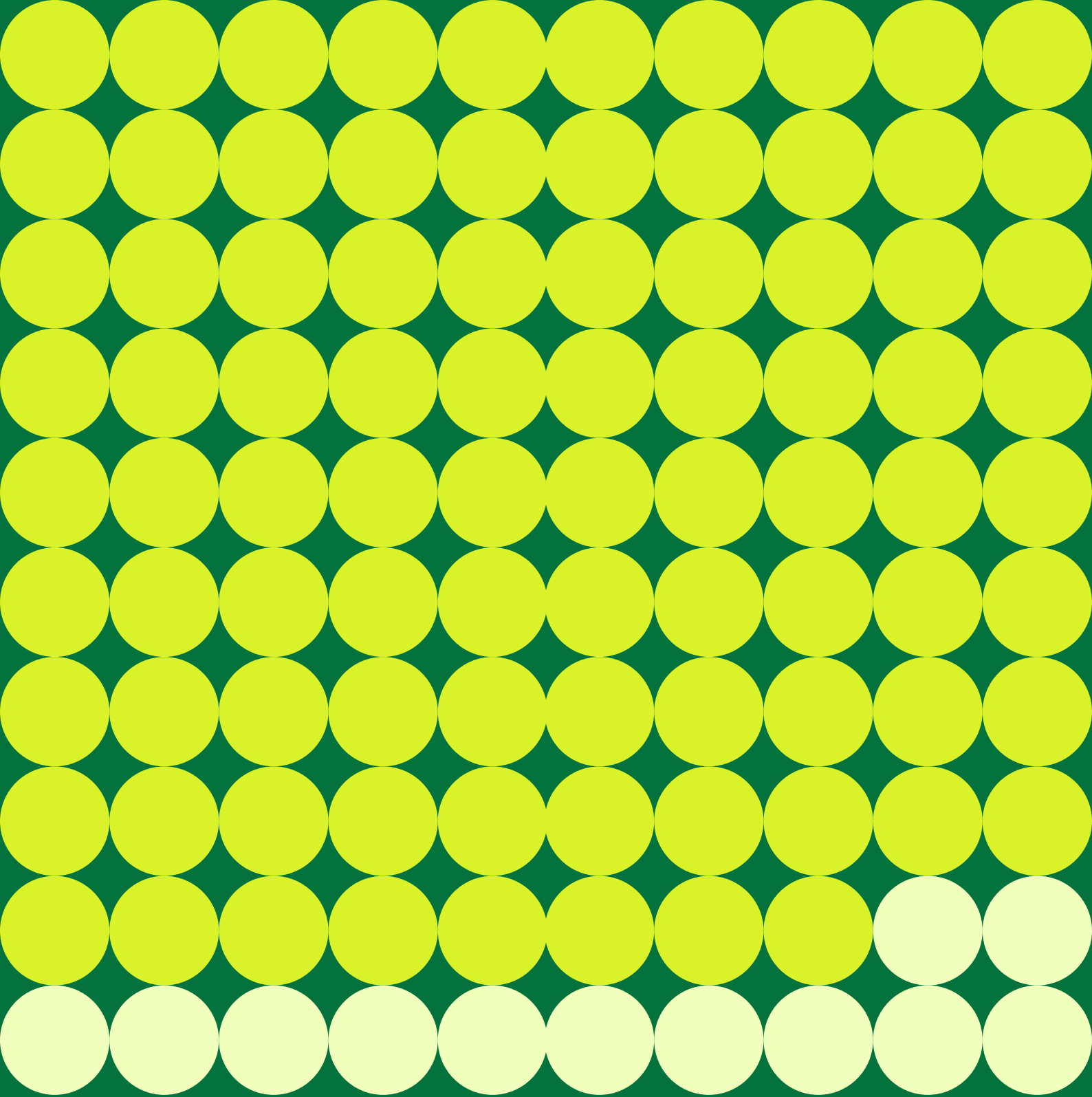
But there's one big problem. Girls are almost entirely designed out of these spaces.

The vast majority of what is provided 'for teenagers' in parks consists of skateparks, BMX tracks or MUGAs (Multi-Use Games Areas, i.e. fenced pitches for football or basketball). It's relatively well known that

these are predominantly used by boys, but until now there has been no data. This is what the Parkwatch project was designed to address.

**Our research reveals that overall 88% of the teenagers using these facilities were boys, and for MUGAs, the most common facilities, this was 92%.**

Knowing just how big this gender gap is means that the need for change can't be ignored any longer. Councils and developers have to create more inclusive spaces and bring the voices of teenage girls into the design process across the UK.



**88%**

**of the teenagers using  
the facilities were boys**

“It’s is mostly boys  
that are there.  
If you go up, they’ll  
just start shouting  
at you.”

But girls don’t have anywhere  
else to go.



92%

of teenagers using MUGAs  
were **boys or young men.**



84%

of those active on  
skate parks or BMX  
tracks **were male.**



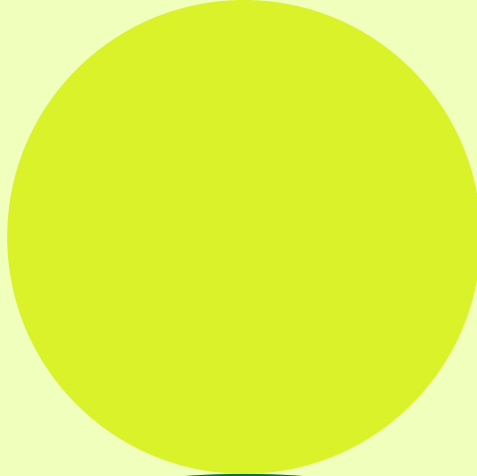
15%

Overall only 15% of  
teenagers using park  
facilities were girls.



94%

94% of the facilities counted  
were either **skate parks,  
MUGAs or BMX tracks.**



**3x**

**Where different facilities\*  
were provided girls were  
three times more likely  
to be using them than  
MUGAs or skateparks.**

\*These included shelters, swings, tennis courts  
and play areas designed for older children

**Teenage girls know that the current situation isn't working — and that it isn't fair or right either**

“[The skatepark] is more of a facility that is not built for us”

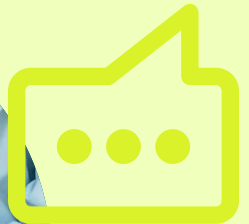


“I think boys mainly go to the park”



“We need to get kids to go outside... otherwise we'll just be zombies on our phones”

“Being a teenager, I like to just hang out on the swings.”



“I don't know any group of girls that would go there and kick a ball around”

“It's very telling when you walk into a park and there is sports activity, sports activity, more sports activity and no seating”



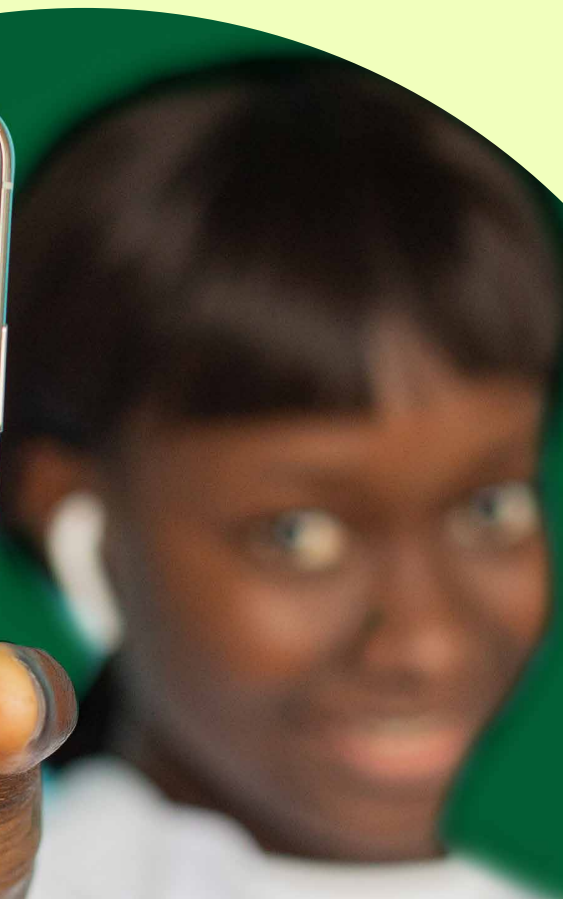
**In addition to the count, we surveyed the provision for teenagers and young people in over 91 councils across the country. What we found is that the facilities dominated by boys also dominate the park landscape.**

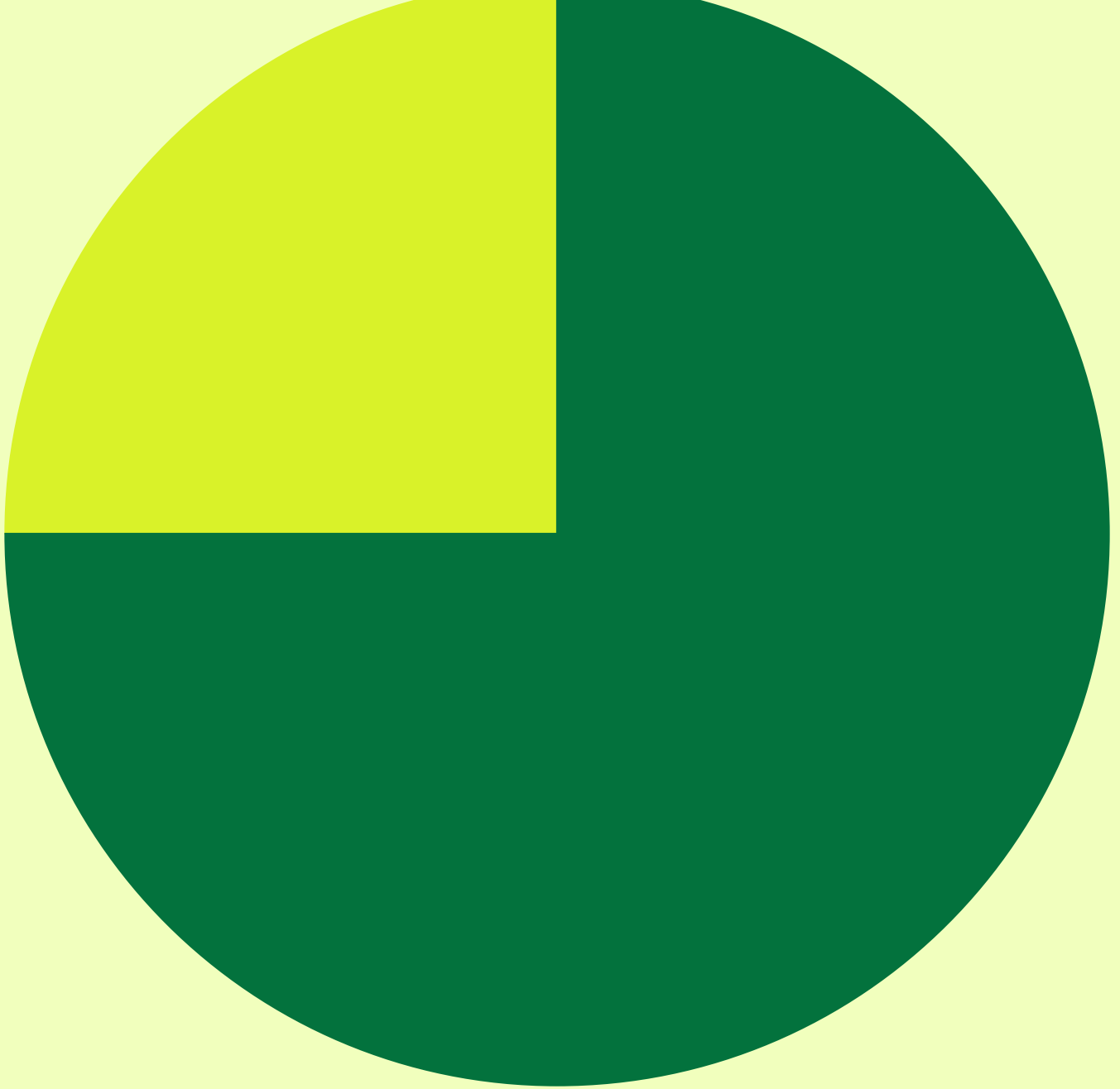
**Putting the statistics together...  
90% of facilities provided for teenagers were MUGAs, skate parks or BMX tracks**



**One council's list demonstrates just how much MUGAs and skate parks dominate facilities for young people.**

Play Area Name	Type
[Redacted]	Skate Park
[Redacted]	MUGA
Community Centre	MUGA
[Redacted]	MUGA
School	MUGA
[Redacted]	Skate Park and Shelter
Youth Centre	MUGA
[Redacted]	MUGA and Shelter
[Redacted]	MUGA
School	MUGA
[Redacted]	MUGA
[Redacted]	Ball Wall, Hoop and Shelter
School	MUGA
Recreation Ground	Ball Wall
Recreation Ground	Ball Wall and Hoop, Skate Ramp, Shelter
Recreation Ground	Shelter and Teen Play Area
Recreation Ground	MUGA and Shelter
[Redacted]	Shelter and Ball Hoop and Goal
[Redacted]	Shelter





**75%**

**of other facilities are shelters — quite often placed next to the MUGA or skate park, because as one strategy document describes it “as girls often want somewhere to sit when boys are playing a ball game”.**



# This isn't what girls actually want...

“frankly, if I'm here in the park with my mates I'm here to chat. I'm not here to ogle”



“if there is seating it's designed so you can watch the boys play which is actually the thing that irritates me most, that we're going to put the girls into a subservient place where they're expected to spectate”

“I think the sports areas are mainly male dominated which can be intimidating”

“Lots of space for sport, none for hanging out”



# This limited range of options is quite often written into planning or other council policies



“Provision for young people can also include equipped sites that provide more robust equipment catering to older age ranges. It can include facilities such as skate parks, BMX, basketball courts, youth shelters and Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs).”

**Play strategy,  
Midlands**

“skate park facilities and MUGAs are often highly valued forms of play; helping to cater for older age ranges”

**Open Space Assessment,  
South East**

“Town and Parish Councils have made inroads into the teenage provision with:

- 37 MUGAs (multi-use games areas)
- 15 skate parks
- 4 BMX tracks

**Planning assessment,  
North East**

As a result, parks end up offering nothing for teenage girls and the problem is perpetuated in every new development.



**This lack of facilities has a huge impact on teenage girls.**

**They don't feel that parks are for them, and so miss out on the benefits for both their mental and physical health.**

Girls are less active than boys at every stage of adolescence — but we don't give them anything to be active on.

Access to nature has been demonstrated to improve mental health in young people — and girls are three times more likely to have a mood disorder than boys.

Under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, every child up to the age of 18 has a right to play — but we're not providing this anywhere for teenage girls.

**Girls don't want to stay in their bedrooms and on their phones, but there is nowhere else for them to go.**

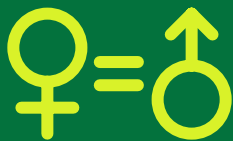
# Recommendations



When new facilities for teenagers are being provided, councils and developers should **consider a far wider range of facilities** than just MUGAs, skate parks and BMX tracks.



**Councils should evaluate** what they currently provide for teenagers and whether it meets the needs of girls.



Every piece of current and future provision should be subject to an **Equality Impact Assessment**, using the data in this report or their own observations.



**Councils and other bodies should also examine all their policies** — whether that's open spaces, play or planning — to ensure that these do not result in the same limited provision.



Most importantly of all, we need better engagement. **Teenage girls need to be at the centre of the decision making process**, in order to create parks and other spaces which really meet their needs.

# Methodology

**The Parkwatch project took place 27th-29th May 2023.** Participants were asked to fill in a simple online form asking them to look at the teenage facilities in their local park and count how many teenagers were using them, and how many of those were girls, and also to report if this looked like an organised event.

Parkwatch was a citizen science project rather than a census and so the results are indicative. However, they are the first research we have on how teenage facilities in parks are used, and in particular the first sex-disaggregated data.

The survey resulted in **265 counts** reporting on **1858 teenagers** across the United Kingdom. These included **117 counts** on **87 different MUGAs** and **100 counts** on **81 different skate parks**. This latter figure represents approximately **5% of the skate parks** in the UK. In addition, there were **15 counts on BMX tracks** and **27 on other facilities**.

**Here are  
the results**





# 8% Girls

**On MUGAs there were 756 teenagers, of which 60 were girls — just 8%.** However one result was a substantial outlier.

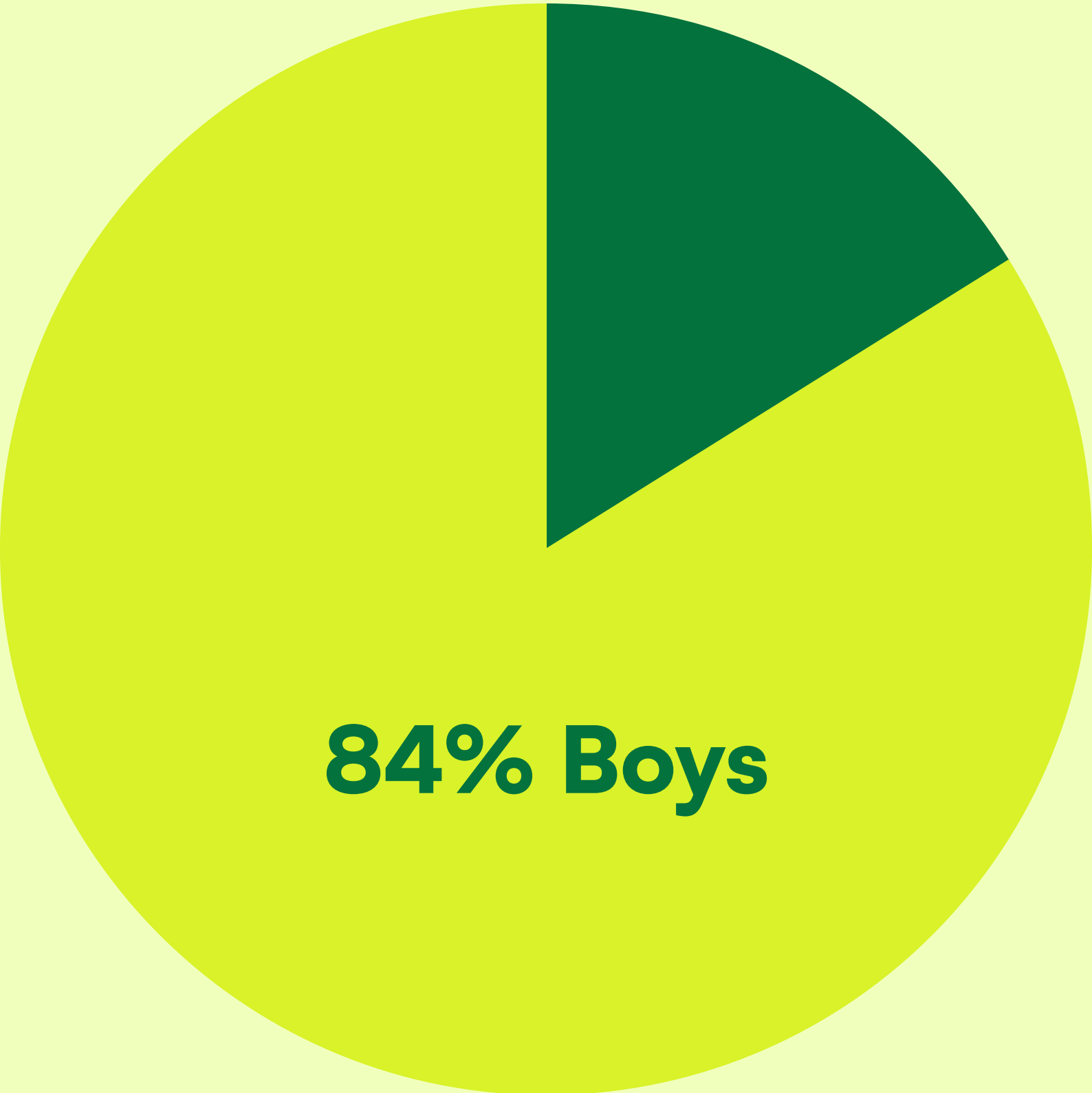
With this taken out, the proportion of girls drops further to 6%, and outside London to a very low 4%.



# 92% Boys

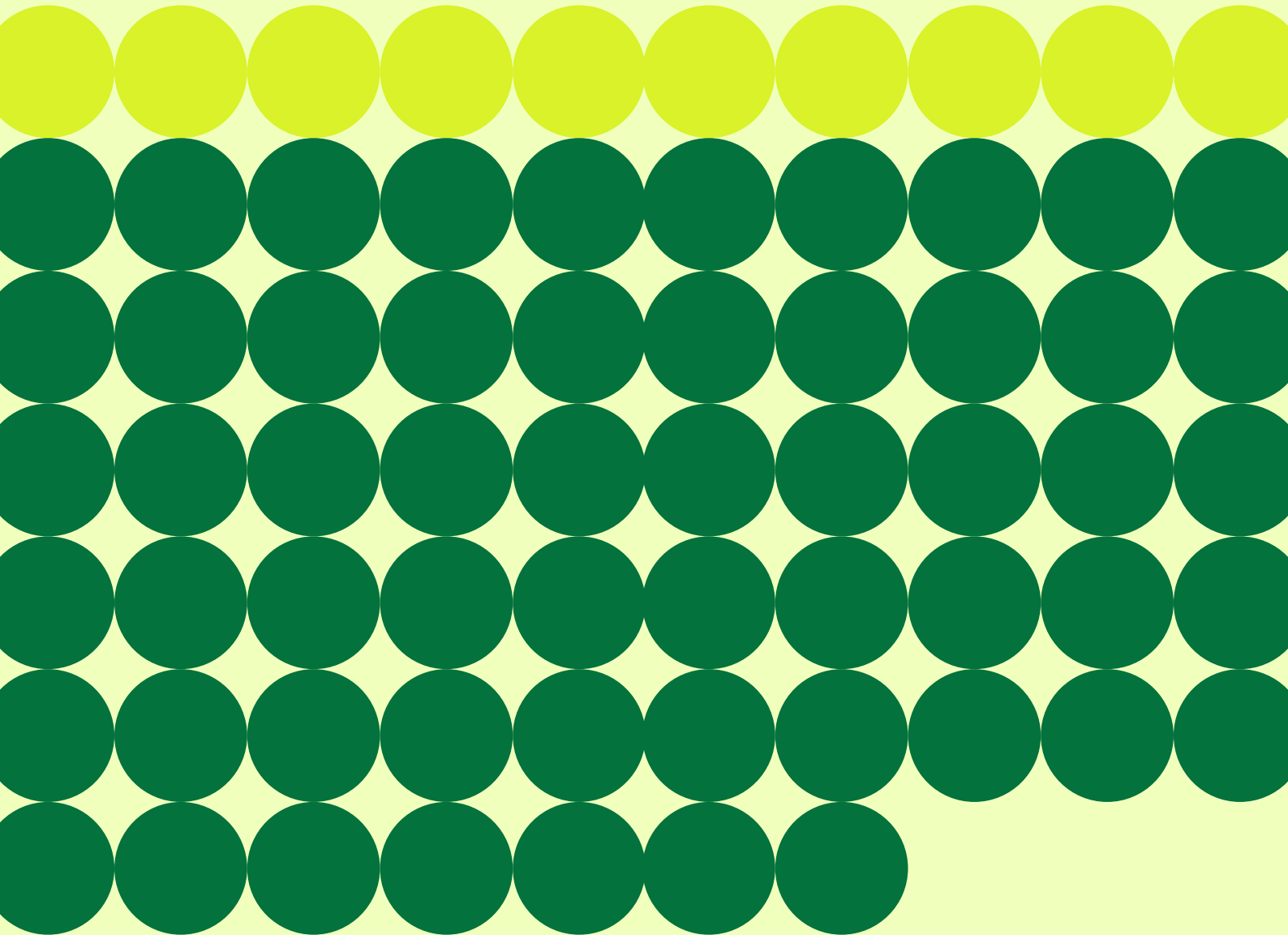
# 16% Girls

On skateparks there were 707 teenagers, of which 112 were girls — so 16%. This correlates with SkateboardGB's own estimates that 85% of skateboarders are male.



# 15% Girls

We also got counts from 15 BMX tracks, where 10 of 67 teenagers were girls. Although this is a small number of counts, the results do suggest that the sport has a similar profile to skateboarding with 15% of participants being female.

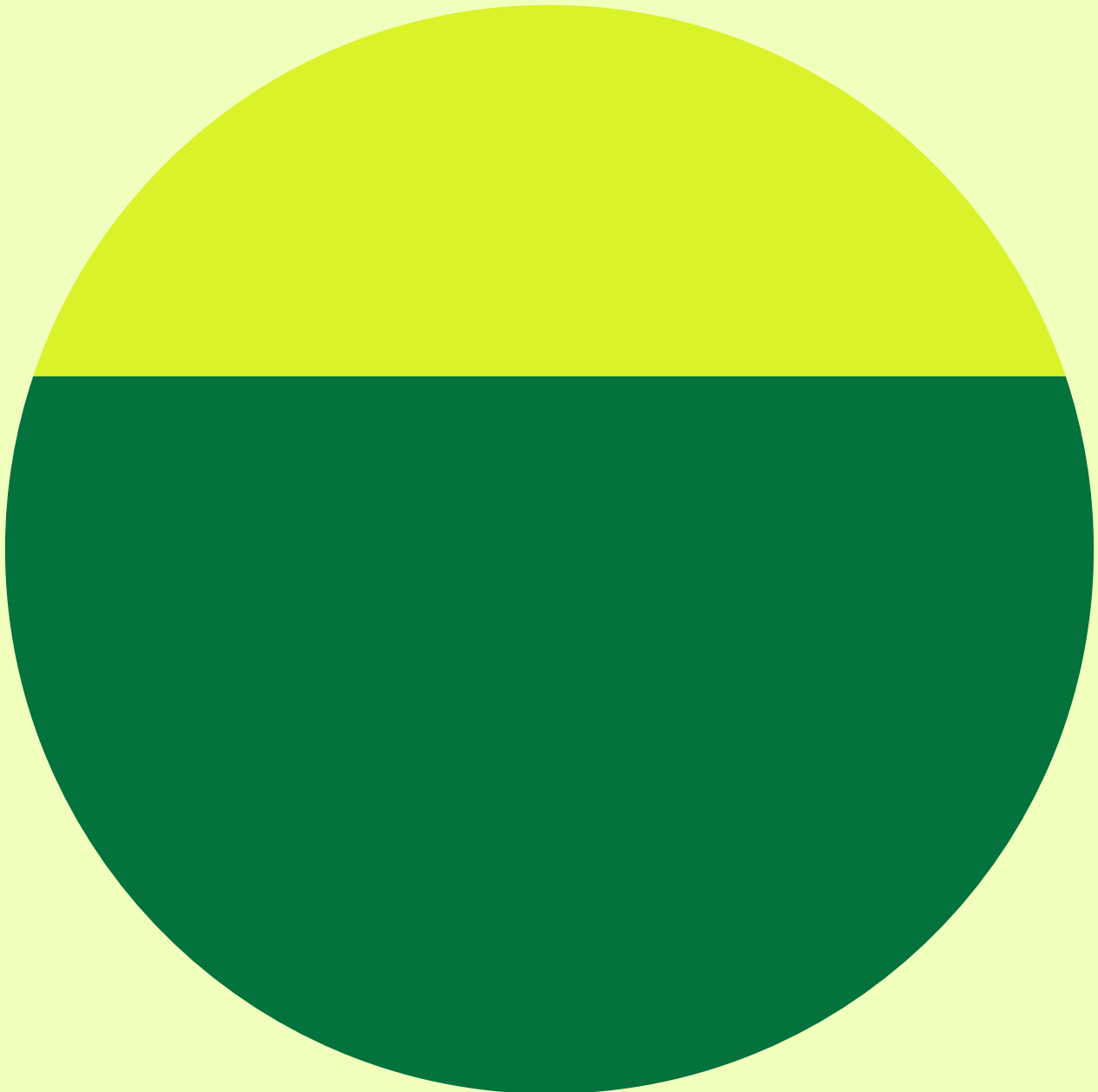


# 85% Boys



# 34% Girls

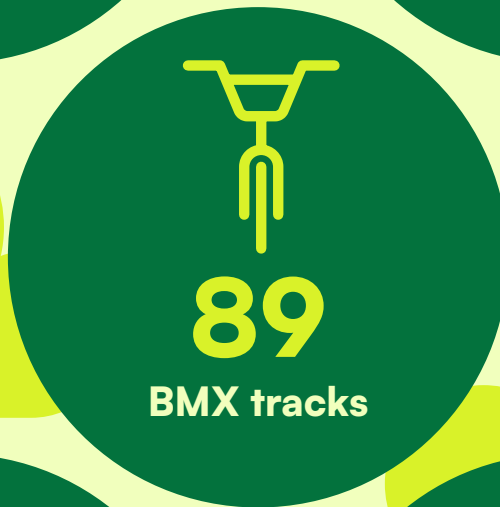
The other facilities which were counted included tennis courts, play spaces and outdoor gyms. These were being used by 255 teenagers, of whom 86 were girls — 34%.



# 66% Boys

**Separately, we evaluated the teenage facilities provided by 91 different councils who had listed their provision on their website.**

**The totals were...**



In addition Make Space for Girls spoke to two focus groups of teenage girls in July 2023 about how they felt about parks and the existing provision for teenagers.

# ParkWatch

**We are very grateful to the  
Sweaty Betty Foundation for  
their support for Parkwatch**

Make Space for Girls (Reg. Charity 1193772)

