



# Participation Strategy

2022-2026



**SWIM  
IRELAND**



# Executive Summary

This Strategy focuses on the areas that Swim Ireland can impact to achieve our overall Vision of **“An Island of Swimmers”**.

## Our Mission

**“ To shape a culture that encourages, supports, and empowers people in Ireland to actively enjoy swimming and the aquatics indoors and outdoors. ”**

The Irish Sports Monitor 2019 identifies swimming as the second most popular sport for men and women next to personal exercise. Swimming has increased in popularity from 2017-2019.

Participation is a broad subject, so to ensure we remain focused we have defined participation as: “Participation is when people swim for social connections, exercise, health and physical activity, challenge, mental wellbeing, skill development and to gain a new experience. This may be as an individual, part of a casual or formal group, club, or a team”.

You will see further in the document that we have redefined ‘Swimming’ with a view to making it more inclusive and in order that we include people who would not necessarily see themselves as ‘Swimmers’ in the narrower sense. For Swim Ireland swimming is why people choose to swim, where they swim, who they swim with and the mental and physical benefits. Swimming is an inclusive sport for people of all ages and abilities.

We believe that the greatest measure of success is the increase in opportunities for people to swim regardless of their age, background, or location. Swimming is a life skill and a gateway to many other sports and this strategy aims to ensure people can learn to swim, and/or participate in ‘Swimming’ as redefined later in the document. For this to be a reality, over the next number of years we are seeking to increase the number of places to swim within a short distance of where people live, the supports and opportunities available to enable people to swim and to continue their lifelong enjoyment, including a wider offering of programmes to meet the needs of a wide variety of ages and abilities. This Strategy aims to address these needs.

To achieve our aim of An Island of Swimmers we have set four Strategic Objectives:

An important element of this Strategy will be the innovation and creativity of the delivery of swimming and how we will create new developments and opportunities. This Strategy will set the direction for new approaches to how people learn to swim and participate in swimming.



We will work with partners to challenge the norms, to assess the current and future impacts and to lead change with the aim of shaping a culture that encourages, supports, and empowers people in Ireland to actively enjoy swimming and the aquatics indoors and outdoors.

# Context

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## Swim Ireland Context

Swim Ireland is the National Governing Body (NGB) for Swimming, Water Polo, Diving and Artistic Swimming across the 32 counties of Ireland, recognised as such by Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland. Swim Ireland is also recognised at World level by FINA, and at European level by LEN. With a membership of over 19,000 we have a network of 163 Clubs across every county on the island of Ireland.

Swim Ireland's remit as a Governing Body is to increase participation, run the competitive aspect of our sport and to provide a framework for regulation. The Swim Ireland Strategic Plan 2022 - 2026 has four Core Strategic Focus Areas which form the basis of the strategy, these are:

### 1. *National Infrastructure for the Aquatics*

Working with Government on the National Policy and Strategy to create the infrastructure, facilities, and programmes to support swimming as a fundamental life skill and create opportunities for the aquatics to flourish.

### 2. *Swim Ireland Events, Programmes, Courses & General Offerings*

Continuing to build a compelling portfolio of products and services that meet the needs of the participant, industry and members whilst generating sustainable, profitable revenue for reinvestment into swimming and the aquatics.

### 3. *Swim Ireland Membership Landscape*

Supporting the core membership base with solutions that address their needs, grow the sport across all disciplines, continually strengthen the sport at national/regional/club level, and deliver high performance targets.

### 4. *Organisation*

Maintaining a stable, strong, well-run organisation based on best practice principles in governance/safe-guarding/financial management/commercial inclusion and an effective culture with engaged staff and volunteers.

Swim Ireland seeks to provide a pathway of opportunities for swimmers of all ages and abilities, an educational pathway for swim teachers and coaches, officials and volunteers, a performance pathway for athletes, swim industry expertise, infrastructure advice and advocacy for swimming.

## National Context

This Strategy is guided by and the programmes delivered contribute towards the targets within the National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027, Get Ireland Active - The National Physical Activity Plan 2015 – 2020, The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland 2022 - 2032 , The Sport Ireland Participation Plan 2021 – 2024, The Children's Sport and Physical Activity Study 2018, The Sport NI Corporate Plan, Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013 – 2025, the Tourism Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland Strategies and the Swim Ireland Strategic Plan 2022-2026.

The Strategy has been developed by a working group which met during 2021. The group comprises of representatives from Swim Ireland, Swim Ulster, Sport Ireland, Local Sports Partnerships, Swimming Pool Operators, and the Tourism Industry. The group met over a seven-month period to carefully co-design the Strategy to ensure that Swim Ireland focuses on the areas that will have the biggest impact on increasing participation in swimming across Ireland.

## Societal Context

Outside of the life skill, safety and health considerations swimming is consistently shown to be the second most popular sport behind personal exercise. The Irish Sports Monitor 2019 shows:

- 46% of the Irish population regularly participate in sport.
- 9% of adults participate in swimming. Over 340,000 people swam once a week in 2019
- Swimming is the second most popular participation sport behind personal exercise.
- Swimming is the number one sport for women
- Swimming is the number one sport for people with a disability
- Swimming forms a critical part of the €230m sports and fitness industry in Ireland which employs 9,500 people across the country.

The importance of swimming to the physical and social environment and its impact on the physical and mental health and well-being of people cannot be underestimated. Swimming pool provision needs specific attention. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the way people take part in swimming. The closure of pools during the first period of the pandemic decimated participation in swimming. Young people have suffered the most as over 500,000 young people missed out on the opportunity to learn to swim as part of the learn to swim programmes. We continue to see an impact on the Irish population returning to swimming as some pools have not yet returned to normal operations.

A positive impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the attraction of swimming in the open water. We have experienced an unprecedented growth in open water swimming among all ages but specifically with swimmers over the age of 50. The open water provided people with the ability to go swimming when the pools were closed but even after the pools have opened, we are seeing a sustained level of participation.

Covid-19 has brought to light the need for an increase in swimming pools and the improvements and enhancements in outdoor places to swim.

- Many pools need repair which will require significant investment.
- There is a large percentage of the population that live further than walking distance to a pool which results in many of those people not having the opportunity to swim on a regular basis.
- For those that do live close to a pool there are many of those that cannot afford to pay to access a pool; this is also a barrier for schools of which many do not have the budget for transportation to a local pool or the admission fee or the cost of a swim teacher.
- For those that are close to a pool and can afford the admission fee there is a high demand on pool time, and it is increasingly hard to secure pool time.
- Modern construction techniques means that semi-permanent swimming pools can be built much quicker than a traditional pool complex, at a lower cost and with lower maintenance costs. We see these pools as key to addressing the shortage of pools in Ireland and to increasing opportunities for people to be able to swim.
- In addition to the semi-permanent pools, we welcome the development of pop-up pools which provide the opportunity to place a pool for a short time at a very low cost in an area where there is no pool provision.
- The culture of outdoor swimming in lakes and the sea is paving the way for the development of outdoor pools and lidos which will create opportunities for people to swim in a safe environment.





# Our Values

The Swim Ireland Values and Behaviours will guide the delivery of this Strategy and will be evidenced by Swim Ireland staff and volunteers in their actions.

# S

## Skills, Professionalism & Knowledge

We harness our skills, knowledge, and experience in an always professional manner, to allow us to continually grow and develop Swim Ireland.



# W

## Wellbeing & Inclusivity

We aim to be inclusive and welcoming in our sport, seeking to empower everyone to participate in a safe and enjoyable environment, where everyone is treated with the same level of respect, equality and importance.



# I

## Integrity & Excellence in Governance

We see governance as the central pillar to a successful, high performing organisation whereby honesty and transparency is key.



# M

## My Passion, Our Vision!

We are purposeful, driven and passionate in the pursuit of our vision and the delivery of our objectives and services across the organisation.



## Teamwork & Collaboration

We work together and empower each other with a clarity of purpose and vision in all of our working relationships to achieve optimal success in all we do.



# The Starting Point

Swim Ireland have delivered programmes for schools, community groups, swim clinics, female programmes, and challenge events over the last number of years and great results have been achieved. In 2021 a new participation department was formed with a greater focus on providing an increase in participation opportunities. We launched new programmes and initiatives in 2021 and due to Covid-19 we focused primarily on open water swimming and open-air pool programmes. In the later part of 2021, we were able to deliver programmes in swimming pools for schools, community groups, females and for those looking to develop their skills. This Strategy aims to bring all the participation programmes together to provide innovative opportunities and solutions across Ireland for people to swim regardless of their age, ability, background, or interest.

**The societal context section on the previous page outlines the trends of participation in swimming in Ireland in addition to the findings from the Irish Sports Monitor 2019 we know that**

- Swimming is the most participated sport across the life cycle of all sports
- The current age profile of Swimming shows the 35-44 years to be the largest participant group in Swimming, followed by 15-24, then 45-54, then 25-34, then 55-64 then 65.
- We do not have detailed data in relation to the number of U/15s Swimming in the Republic of Ireland
- We do not have detailed information in relation to Swimming Participation in Northern Ireland, however, we suspect it is not dissimilar to the Republic of Ireland.
- We have a rising older age population and Swimming is a sport and physical activity that is particularly suited to older people
- Swimming is not just a sport but indeed a life skill.
- Ireland is an Island Nation.
- Swimming is a gate way sport for other sporting activities

**In 2021 Sport Ireland's research and Innovation team conducted data modeling on swimming participation in Ireland**

The data modeling utilised the C.S.O (central statistics office) population projection statistics and pooled secondary analysis data of the Irish Sports Monitor between 2013 and 2019. It must be noted the Irish Sports Monitor only contains data on people 16 years of age or older.

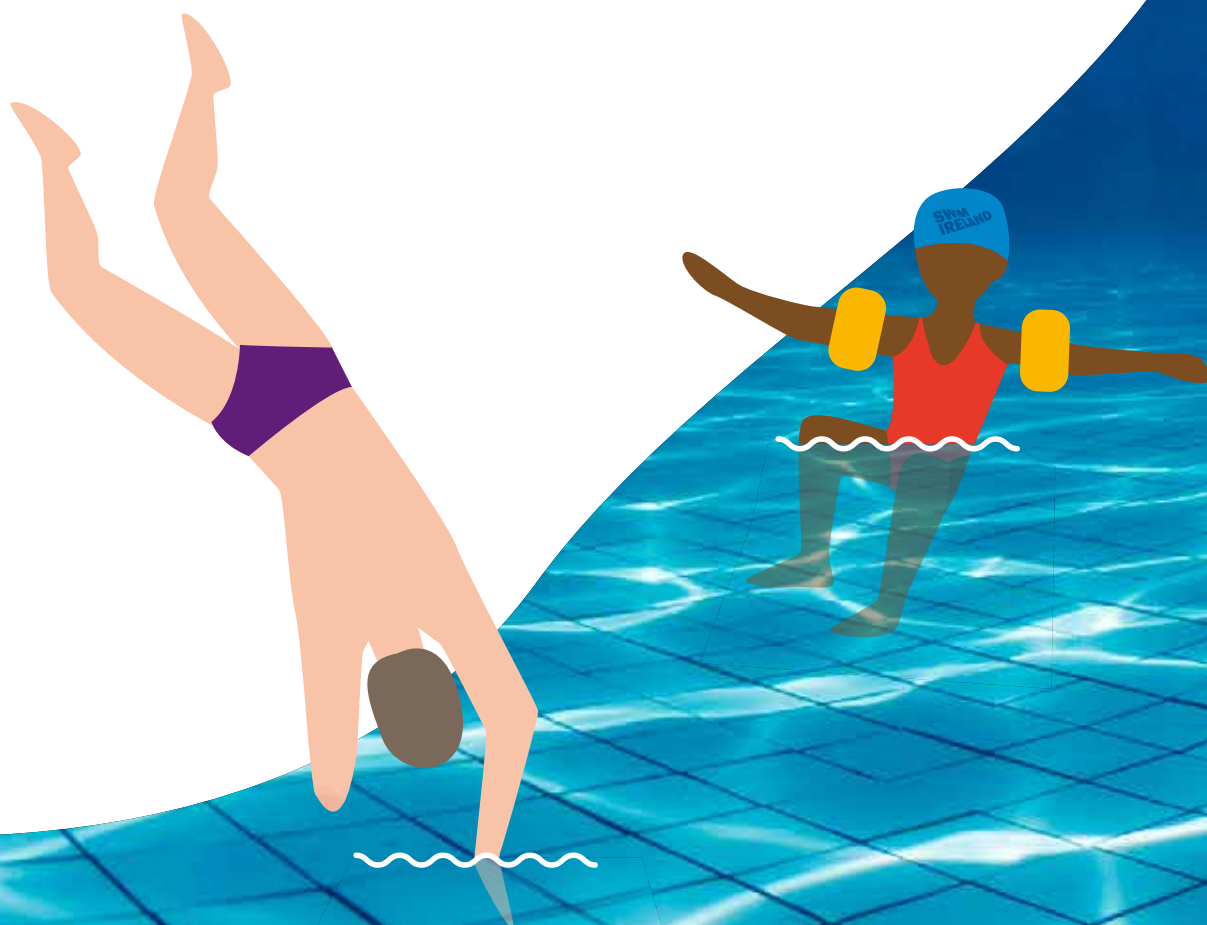
The data modeling highlighted the following:

- In 2021 the population of people 16 years of age or older in Ireland was 4 million. Of this approximately 335,000 people swam at least once in the last week which represents 8.4% of the Irish population 16 years of age or older.



- The profile of swimmers in Ireland is dominated by the older age groups as people 34 years of age or older represent 67.6% of the people who swim. The 35 – 44 age cohort represents one in every four swimmers and accounts for approximately 80,000 people. This is followed by 45-54 (56,000), 25-34 (56,000), 16 -24 (50,000), 55-64 (46,000) and finally 65+ (36,000).
- C.S.O population projections demonstrate that the population of Ireland is consistently increasing and ageing for the next thirty years (2021 – 2051). In the scenario the participation rates from the pooled Irish Sports Monitor data are maintained across all age groups for the next decade the number of swimmers would increase from 335,000 in 2021 to circa 370,000 in 2031. However, the percentage of people 16 years of age or older swimming on a weekly basis would reduce from 8.4% to 8.2%. The primary reason for this is the population is growing at a faster rate than the rate of growth in swimming.

The data modeling shows that we cannot just let it happen itself. We need to innovate, challenge the current norms and increase the number of participant opportunities in swimming.





# Definition of Swimming

This Strategy aims to shape a culture within all aspects of our sport that encourages, supports, and empowers people in Ireland to actively enjoy swimming and the aquatics indoors and outdoors.

We define swimming as “a form of physical activity in the water that people engage in whether for social connections, exercise, health and physical activity, challenge, mental wellbeing, skill development, competition, fun, or many of these reasons combined.

This Strategy includes the aquatic disciplines of swimming, diving, water polo, and artistic swimming. Swimming means different things to different people, and we have set out below all of what comes to mind for people when we reference swimming/the aquatics:

Gateway to other sports, Nature, Fun, Exercise, Movement, Challenge, Competition, Diving, School, Confidence, Club, Happiness, Skins, Smile, Social, Health, Adventure, Individual, Group, A Lifesaving Skill, Pool, Friendship, Safe environment, Non-formal, Diving, Travel, Swimming, Water polo, Synchronised Swimming, Mental Wellbeing, Confidence, Open water, Community, Freedom, Life skill, Education, Inclusive, Aerobic, Coordination, Calm, Social, Rehabilitation



# Lifecycle of

From Cradle to Grave.

Teenager

Child

Toddler

Baby



# a Swimmer

An Island of Swimmers.





# Our Strategic Objectives



To achieve our vision of ‘An Island of Swimmers’ we have set four strategic objectives which will guide us to support our mission “To shape and support a culture that encourages, supports, and empowers everyone in Ireland to actively enjoy swimming and the aquatics indoors and outdoors”.

## 1. Swimming Places

- 1.1 Pilot the Pop-Up Pool (12m x 3.6m transportable pool) and promote its effectiveness and impact to Local Authorities. Work with operators to provide connections and longer-term participation opportunities at local level
- 1.2 Promote the use of portable, semi-permanent and outdoor pools/lidos and provide support to partners on their installation and use. Work with operators to provide connections and longer-term participation opportunities.
- 1.3 Support the development of the National Swimming Strategy, a major part of which will focus on swimming infrastructure indoors and outdoors.
- 1.4 Promote and advocate for places to swim, indoors and outdoors, which are safe, accessible, inclusive, and welcoming
- 1.5 Support pool operators on sustainability and on the utilisation and maximisation of pool programming (resource dependant).



## 2. Swimming People

- 2.1 Continue to value, train, and retain swim teachers, coaches and volunteers without which we would not be able to promote and provide swimming participation opportunities on the island of Ireland.
- 2.2 Deliver innovative programmes for women and girls in the areas of teenage, midlife, older people, the retention of female volunteers, development of female teachers, coaches and officials, the transfer of female athletes to roles in sport through the support of female leadership programmes.
- 2.3 Act as an enabler and support those with an interest in swimming to connect to a club, group or a community through participation and membership opportunities, education, and information.
- 2.4 Provide membership packages which add relevant value and support to the member.

## 3. Swimming Programmes

- 3.1 Continue to develop, deliver, and grow innovative programmes and events in swimming and the aquatics for all ages, abilities, gender, or background that meet the needs of the general population to achieve the objectives contained in the National Sports Policy and the Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport.
- 3.2 Deliver Schools Programmes using our pop-up pools and introduce the concept of Intensive Swimming Lessons more widely to seek to support the development of key swimming skills in a shorter timeframe.
- 3.3 Continue to develop, deliver, and grow open water programmes with a minimum of 5,000 participants per annum.
- 3.4 Deliver a minimum of four large scale open water events in the form of festivals of swimming with a minimum of 5,000 participants per annum.
- 3.5 Develop and deliver specific lifecycle programmes in swimming to support females to participate at all stages of the lifecycle.

## 4. Swimming Partners

- 4.1 Create awareness and clarify Swim Ireland's role and relevance in swimming and water safety with partners and the wider public.
- 4.2 Develop and strengthen relationships with relevant strategic partners and advocate for swimming to be integral in their planning and strategies.
- 4.3 Develop and strengthen partnerships and relationships with the Local Sports Partnerships, Local Authorities, Pool Operators and other key delivery partners and to support them in delivering swimming programmes in communities across Ireland.
- 4.4 Work in partnership with statutory and non-statutory organisations who can add value to the delivery of swimming in Ireland.
- 4.5 Sustain existing and seek new commercial partnerships to promote swimming.

# Measures of Success

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1. Have agreed with the Department of Sport and Sport Ireland how participation in swimming can support the aims and objectives of the National Sports Policy and how to achieve this increased participation.
2. To deliver with the Department of Sport, a National Swimming Strategy for ROI.
3. To have programmes available for all age groups to participate in swimming (a clear swimming pathway for lifelong enjoyment regardless of what age you get involved).
4. An increase in the numbers of swim teachers and coaches by 5,000 to enable greater participation opportunities.
5. To provide 60,000 participants on Swim Ireland participation programmes and events delivered across Ireland in partnership with the Local Sports Partnerships, to enable greater opportunities for people from all backgrounds, race, and gender to participate and to enjoy the long-term benefits that Swimming can provide.
6. To have an informed, developed expertise in the area of pool infrastructure, outdoors and indoors, which is demonstrably supporting an increase of swimming opportunities across the island of Ireland.
7. To provide 100,000 opportunities for people to learn to swim by delivering programmes for schools, groups, and individuals in the pop-up pools.
8. To have piloted new and innovative ways to increase the opportunities for children to learn to swim and to develop ways to enable hard to reach community groups to enjoy swimming, concentrating primarily on the pop-up pool concept and indoor and outdoor programmes.
9. For the wider definition of swimming and swimming participation i.e. Swim Ireland's role in relation to it, to be understood and recognised.
10. To have a defined position and role in the areas of Water Quality and Water Safety, and actively working to increase the number of safe and accessible outdoor places to swim and the number of recognised bathing areas.
11. Strong relationships and working partnerships have been established with a minimum of 10 of the 31 Local Authorities in ROI, four of the Councils in NI, and all 29 Local Sports Partnerships, and other Stakeholders.





