

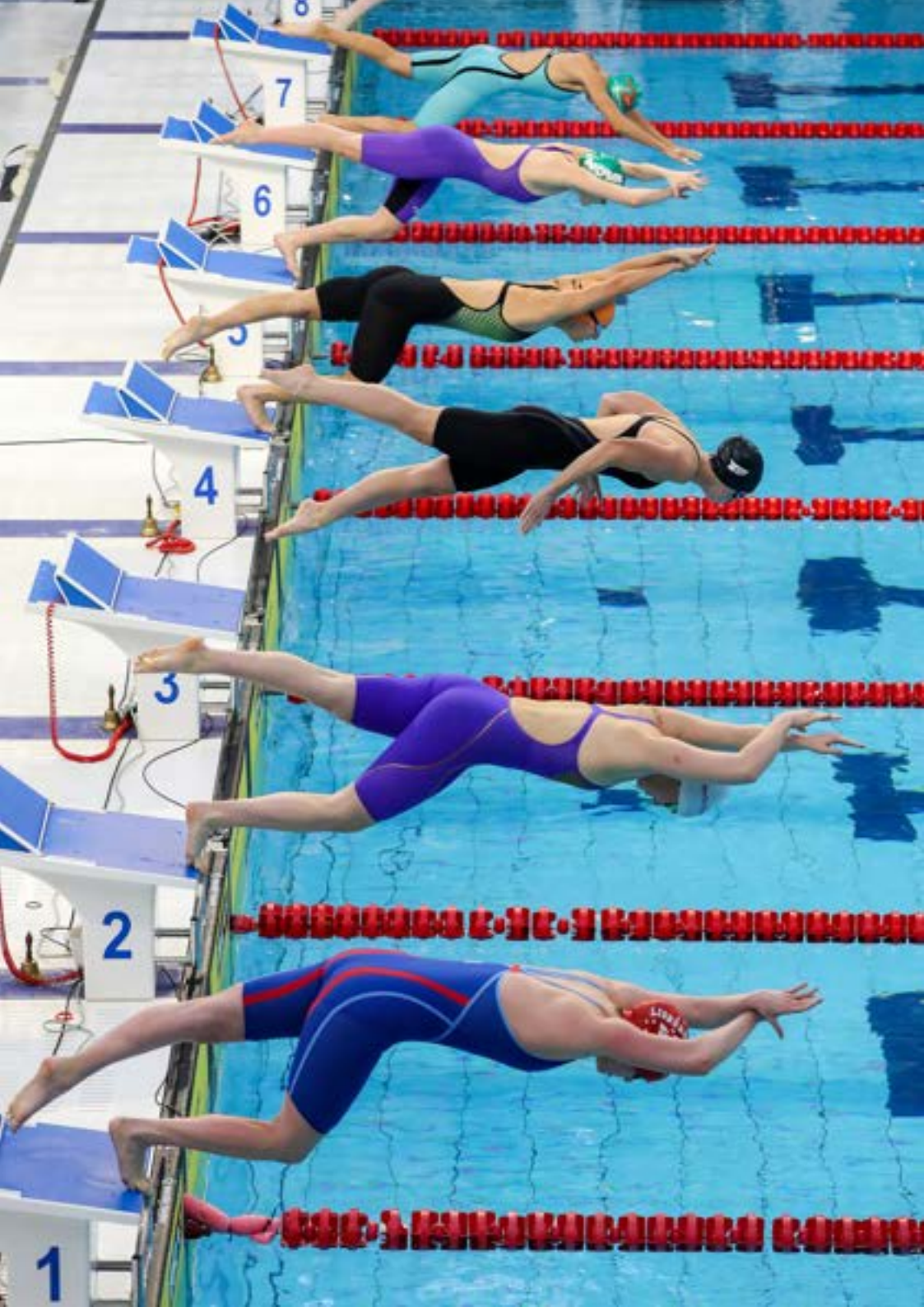
2024 - 2026

WOMEN IN SPORT ACTION PLAN

Women and The Water

**SWIM
IRELAND**

An island
of swimmers



Contents

Introduction	1
Women in Numbers	2
Target Areas & Programmes	5
Pillar 1: Active Participation	6
Pillar 2: Coaching & Officiating	7
Pillar 3: Leadership & Governance	11
Pillar 4: Visibility	12
Measures of Success	14

Introduction

Swim Ireland has been passionate about driving female participation in aquatics for many years. We have delivered numerous successful programmes, collaborating with various stakeholders to ensure that our programmes and initiatives remain at the forefront of WIS across Ireland. This Swim Ireland Women in Sport Action Plan builds on our successes to date, revisiting and reimagining our most popular programmes and adding innovation into the mix.

This plan encapsulates our vision to create an island of swimmers. An island that welcomes all genders, all ages, all diversities, and all abilities. It recognises sport, and specifically aquatics, as an important enabler for development and women's empowerment. Working together with other National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Pool Operators, Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) and community organisations, and of course our male allies, to deliver the objectives is core.

In line with the European Union publication 'Towards more gender equality in sport', we are focused on continuous action to advance gender equality in all areas of our sport and organisation to ensure females reach their full potential from grass roots to performance.

Our plan is aligned to the four key pillars of the Sport Ireland Women in Sport Strategy: Active Participation, Leadership & Governance, Coaching & Officiating and Visibility.

We target two key groups under each pillar; teenage girls and women using initiatives and programmes to increase engagement, participation and to ensure we tell the story of the women involved in our sport. This plan pledges our commitment to Women in Sport, and we will continue to advocate and contribute to greater female representation at all levels of our sport supported by Sport Ireland and the Department of Sport.



Women in Numbers

Women in Sport Statistics
2019 vs 2024

Members (2019 - 2024)

2019

Competitive
54% Female

Non-Competitive
56% Female

2024

Competitive
54% Female

Non-Competitive
56% Female



Coaching (2019 - 2024)

2019



Swimming



Diving



Water Polo

2024



Swimming



Diving



Water Polo

*Diving has achieved a more even gender balance between male/female coaches since 2019

Women in Numbers

Women in Sport Statistics
2019 vs 2024

Leadership (2019 - 2024)

2019



59%

Staff

27%

Board

2024



49%

Staff

45%

Board

Committees (2019 - 2024)

2019

Leinster 57% Female

Ulster 36% Female

Munster 43% Female

Connacht 71% Female

2024

Leinster 43% Female

Ulster 50% Female

Munster 50% Female

Connacht 78% Female



Women in Numbers

WIS Programme Numbers To Date

AQUA MOVES

This is a programme that introduces teenage girls to artistic aerobics, previously known as synchronised swimming.

SWIMMIN' WOMEN

The Swimmin' Women midlife programme encourages and empowers mid-life females to participate in aquatic sports.

LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

This programme is specifically designed for female leaders and other volunteers to help them to develop in their role.

EUROPEAN U23 CHAMPIONSHIP LEGACY PROGRAMMES

These programmes are 'Learn to Swim' for those that missed the opportunity at school, swimming teacher and lifeguard training leading to employment and to experience the wider aquatic disciplines.



137

AQUA MOVES



705

SWIMMIN'
WOMEN



206

LEADERSHIP
PROGRAMME



125

ARTISTIC
SWIMMING



25

EUROPEAN U23
CHAMPIONSHIP LEGACY
PROGRAMME



Target Areas and Programmes

Women and The Water

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Pillar 1

Active Participation

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In line with the Swim Ireland Strategic Plan 2022-2026, we are working to re-define what “swimming” means, looking outside of traditional lap swimming and into any form of physical activity in the water that females can engage in. We aim to attract females of all ages and demographics into the water, whether for social connections, exercise, health and physical activity, challenge, mental wellbeing, skill development, competition, fun, or many of these reasons combined. Recognising the challenges of engaging some cohorts in sport, we will have a specific focus on teenage girls, girls from a minority background and girls with disabilities.

We recognise that teenage girls are a key target audience and a new area of development for us will be in the sport of Artistic Swimming which will build on the hugely popular Aqua Moves programme which was piloted under the last WIS programme.

We will continue to encourage women and girls, young and old, of all ages, abilities, backgrounds, and ethnicities to participate in swimming programmes from ‘Swimmin’ Girls, with a specific focus on teenage girls, to ‘Swimmin’ Women’ (aged 30+) and on to Swim for a Mile, both in the pool and sea.

Included in this is the Swimmin’ Women Midlife Programme targeting women entering their perimenopausal and menopausal years, providing physical activity, paired with women’s health information to create a powerful coping strategy to minimise menopausal symptoms and thrive during this transitional phase of a woman’s life.

Active Participation Focus Areas

Teenage Girls

- Swimmin’ Girls
- AquaMoves
- Artistic Swimming
- Swim For a Mile Challenge
- Legacy Programme

Women

- Swimmin’ Women
- Midlife Programme
- Pregnancy Programme,
- Swim For a Mile Challenge
- Artistic Swimming
- Perimenopause & menopause Programme



Pillar 2

Coaching & Officiating

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Coaching

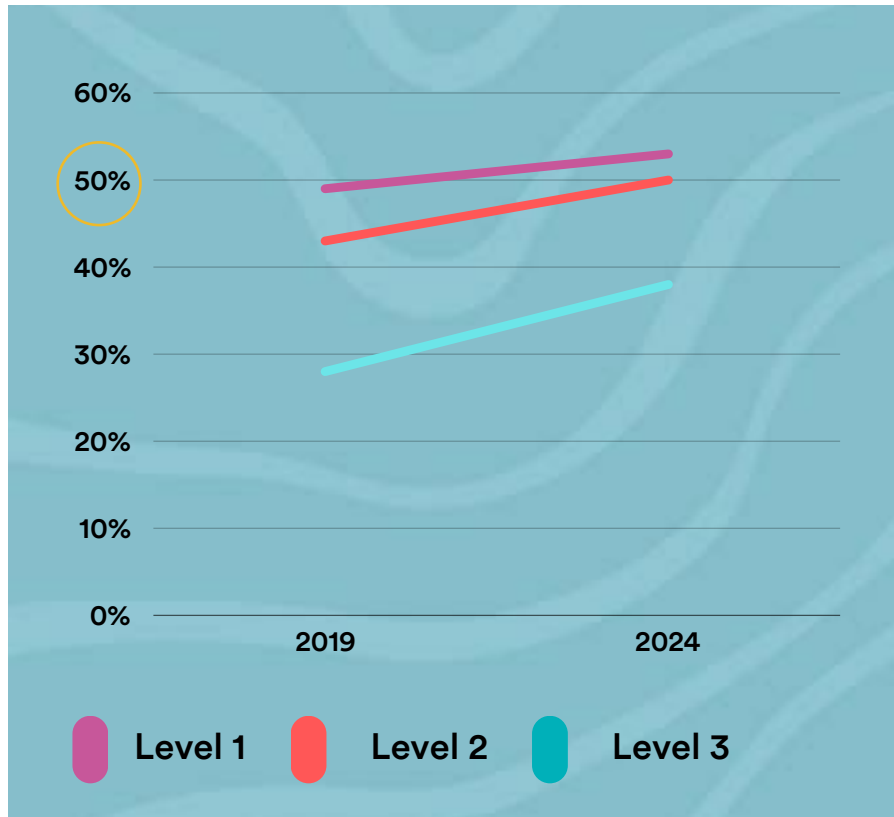
The gender balance across the Swim Ireland Coaching force has steadily improved since the introduction of the previous WIS Strategy in 2019 and the WIS Coaching & Mentoring programme.

We have met or exceeded the magical 50% mark for L1 & L2 Swimming Coaches and have improved our numbers of L3 Coaches by 10%. Diving was predominantly female and is now more evenly balanced but we will continue to support the progression of female coaches in diving. The coaching route is being seen more and more as an option for young girls and this is something that we will continue to build on and support.

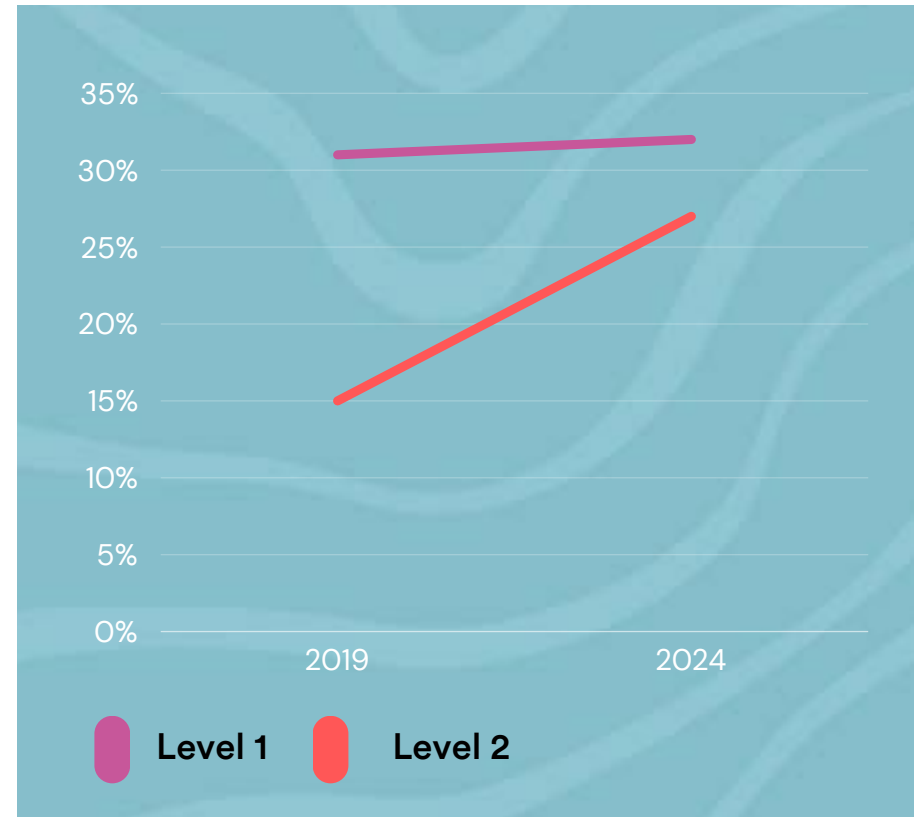
This strategy will continue to provide supports, not only to encourage new female coaches, but to retain those who are already in the sport by keeping them engaged through continuous development and targeting an evenly balanced L3 coaching cohort.



Female Coaching | Swimming



Female Coaching | Water Polo



Performance

The Swim Ireland Performance Department have made strides since the previous Women in Sport strategy in terms of gender parity. Since 2019 the department have targeted and appointed two female apprentice coaches in the National Centres in Dublin and Limerick. These appointments were designed to develop these two coaches within the performance arena and to highlight them as an inspirational tool to bolster the coaching fraternity in Ireland with more female coaches. We do not currently have a female coach within the National Centre in Ulster, but this is a clear target for the department within the new strategy.

The Performance Department now ensure other than where accreditations are limited that we have a female coach on all our National Teams regardless of if they have placed an athlete on the team and we regularly appoint female Team Managers and at least one member of our sports science team is female on every national team trip.

In every other aspect of the Performance Department, we are equitable across the board with both females and males attending the same competitions, entering the same number and category of events, both genders swim in relays and our national competition entries are balanced male and female with qualification times based on gender balance at that time and neither gender are precluded from entries at a given time.



The Performance Department executive is currently imbalanced and a crucial piece of ongoing work around this is seen through every advert we issue; we appoint on merit, but we very much want and look forward to receiving applicants from females and ethnic minorities. We have made inroads in recent years with the appointment of a female Regional Pathway Development Coach, two female apprentice coaches and a Performance Manager on our Senior Leadership Team and all based on merit. The Performance Department is actively addressing the imbalances with females in the performance realm being a global problem and what we must do is part of the strategy is find a way to educate, inspire, and instil confidence in female coaches and ensure we retain them in Ireland as the world wants them.



Officiating

From a Swimming technical official's perspective, our volunteer workforce is evenly balanced across all levels. Four of our six internationally recognised swimming referees are female, and we aim to continue to encourage and support more females into these senior roles.

Water Polo, which was impacted more acutely during Covid-19 has a large gender gap in the number of female referees relative to males.

We will place a particular focus on Water Polo in this plan.

We plan to reinvigorate our Water Polo Referee Programme, offering a clear pathway and mentorship to address the challenges by dealing with the underlying issues preventing women and girls from taking up the role.

Coaching & Officiating Focus Areas

Teenage Girls

- Coaching and Mentoring Programme (16 yrs +)
- WIS Continual Professional Development Courses
- Introduction to strength and conditioning education for club athletes across the disciplines

Women

- Coaching and Mentoring Programme (16 yrs +)
- WIS Continual Professional Development Courses
- Introduction to strength and conditioning education for club athletes across the disciplines
- Develop a female international water polo referee



Pillar 3

Leadership & Governance

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The evidence of the success of the previous strategy under this pillar is evident across the organisation. Two of our current board members and one of our International Referees are graduates of our Women in Sport Leadership Programme which has had a total of 206 candidates to date. The programme provides participants an opportunity to develop the skills necessary to take on leadership roles and become influencers at regional, national, and international level.



We will continue our leadership programme but with a more internal focus on new volunteers entering our sport. Following the global Covid-19 pandemic, Swim Ireland like many other NGBs suffered a loss of volunteers from our sports. Our Leadership programme will be reinvigorated to focus on the upskilling of new and returning volunteers, offering role preparation and a support programme, providing more females with the skills required for such leadership roles.

This will ensure we have a sustainable pipeline of role ready candidates within our regional and national structures and to ensure we continue to achieve gender balance across the organisation to mirror our board which has a 60:40 gender balance in line with the Swim Ireland Gender Policy.

Leadership & Governance Focus Areas

Teenage Girls

- Club Captains in Youth Sport
- Retention through volunteering
- Water Polo Athletes Commission

Women

- WIS Leadership Programme
- Role preparation and support programme
- Gender Balance Policy
- Management Advisory Group
- Athletes Commission



Pillar 4 Visibility

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Swim Ireland will create an open and safe space to have conversations around female health and wellbeing and its relationship with the aquatics. We want to reduce the taboo around the sometimes-challenging conversations that females face when participating and performing in aquatics. We will do this through increased education and awareness on the specific challenges that teenage girls and women face throughout the female life cycle, such as menstruation, pregnancy, menopause, female athlete nutrition and body confidence.

We will launch an online Athlete Hub in 2024 an information portal that will provide athletes with the knowledge and skills to develop inside and outside of the pool. The Athlete Hub will include content specifically for females of all ages providing health information and learning resources to support females in and out of the pool, empowering them to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing and providing aquatics as a powerful coping strategy.



Visibility

Teenage Girls & Women



ATHLETE HUB



PROMOTION



MEDIA TRAINING



SANCTUARY SWIMMERS



HER OUTDOORS YOGA & DIP



PRIDE SPORT



ACCESSIBLE LEARN TO SWIM



CREATING SPACE FOR CONVERSATIONS



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



EUROPEAN WEEK OF SPORT

Targeted Campaigns 2024-2026

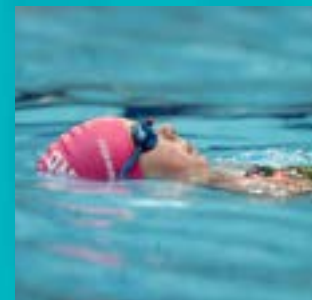


Artistic Swimming for Teenage Girls



Swimmin' Women Mid-Life Programme

Bespoke information and support on women's health



Strength & Conditioning training for target groups





Partnerships

For this plan to be a success, we will continue to work in collaboration with a number of partners across the different projects, these will include - Sport Ireland, Sport Ireland Institute of Sport, National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships, the Federation of Irish Sport, Ireland Active, Swimming Pool Operators, Local Authorities, Age and Opportunity Ireland, Active Disability Ireland, Health Promotion Agencies and Charities and others. We will also collaborate with our sponsors and partners to support this plan.

Measures of Success

We have been collecting baseline data on female participation since our first WIS Strategy. Our ambition is to achieve an evenly split gender balance across all areas of our sport across the life of this Strategy. We will set annual targets each year across all areas, focusing specifically on areas where we see the widest participation gaps.

At a high level this means:

- Continue to achieve a 50/50 gender balance on Regional and National Committees
- Increase Level 2 Water Polo Coaches to 30%
- Develop a female international water polo referee
- Increase Level 3 Swimming Coaches by 10%
- Increase the number of Leadership Programme graduates on our committees and boards
- Introduce a female performance apprentice coach in Ulster
- Increase programme numbers by 20%
- Introduction of Artistic Swimming for teenage girls
- Introducing strength and conditioning and female specific education to our members



Monitoring and Evaluation

This implementation of this plan will be led by the Operations and Women in Sport Manager and the Executive will set annual operational targets which will be reviewed quarterly. We will conduct regular surveys to identify barriers and enablers to encourage wider participation. Where appropriate we will be using the M1 question to track sustained behavioural change.

The Plan will also be reviewed annually by the Board of Swim Ireland.

A group of four female swimmers are in a pool, celebrating with their arms raised. They are wearing swim caps and goggles. The water is splashing around them. In the background, there are blue stadium seats and a large indoor pool facility.

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