



An island  
of swimmers

# Swimming Pool Gap Analysis Report - Executive Summary

December 2025

*The First Survey of its Kind*





# Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the support of Sport Ireland and the Dormant Accounts Fund, Ireland Active and the Local Sports Partnership Network for this project. We are particularly grateful to the staff members from Cork County Council, Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Sligo County Council whose guidance was instrumental in shaping the direction of the data collection.

We would like to thank all those swimming pool operators and their staff who responded to our requests for data and who contributed their time willingly to assist us. Without their input we could have not completed this Report.

Finally, our thanks go to the team at FMG Consulting Limited who have supported and steered us throughout the project.

We look forward to utilising the data presented in this report, to build our understanding of the swimming pool infrastructure across the island of Ireland, to enable better decision-making and target investment more effectively in future years.

Swim Ireland



An island  
of swimmers



Ireland  
Active | Leisure, Health  
and Fitness  
Association



# Overview

Swim Ireland, supported by funding through Sport Ireland, engaged FMG Consulting Ltd. to collate and analyse data on swimming pools throughout the country. This Swimming Pool Gap Analysis Report is the first analysis of its kind and will enable better decision-making and target investment more effectively in future years. This synopsis is a summary of the full report.

The data reveals a complex picture of pool ownership and operating models, particularly in the Republic of Ireland where Local Authority owned pools can be operated directly or through entities on a commercial or a not-for-profit basis. Much of the data is therefore presented as hotel or non-hotel for clarity.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 404

There are 404 operational swimming pool sites open to the public, with 346 in the Republic of Ireland and 58 in Northern Ireland.

### 76%

76% of non-hotel pools reported having pool hoists, compared to just 28% of hotel pools.

### 100km

There is no 50m pool in Connacht and the average distance to travel to one is 100km.

### 57%

57% of pool space in the ROI comes solely from hotels and 31% in NI

### 28%

Only 28% of pools are available for hire by swimming clubs, the vast majority in the public sector.

### 67%

of pools reported having waiting lists for lessons suggesting the need for more pools.

### 93%

93% of facilities offer membership options, but only 58% provide Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) alternatives.

## Age & Condition

25% of pools in the Republic of Ireland were built before 1990 and are nearing the end of their lifecycle but only 2.5% were built in the last 5 years. We need to accelerate the pace of new builds to replace the ageing stock.

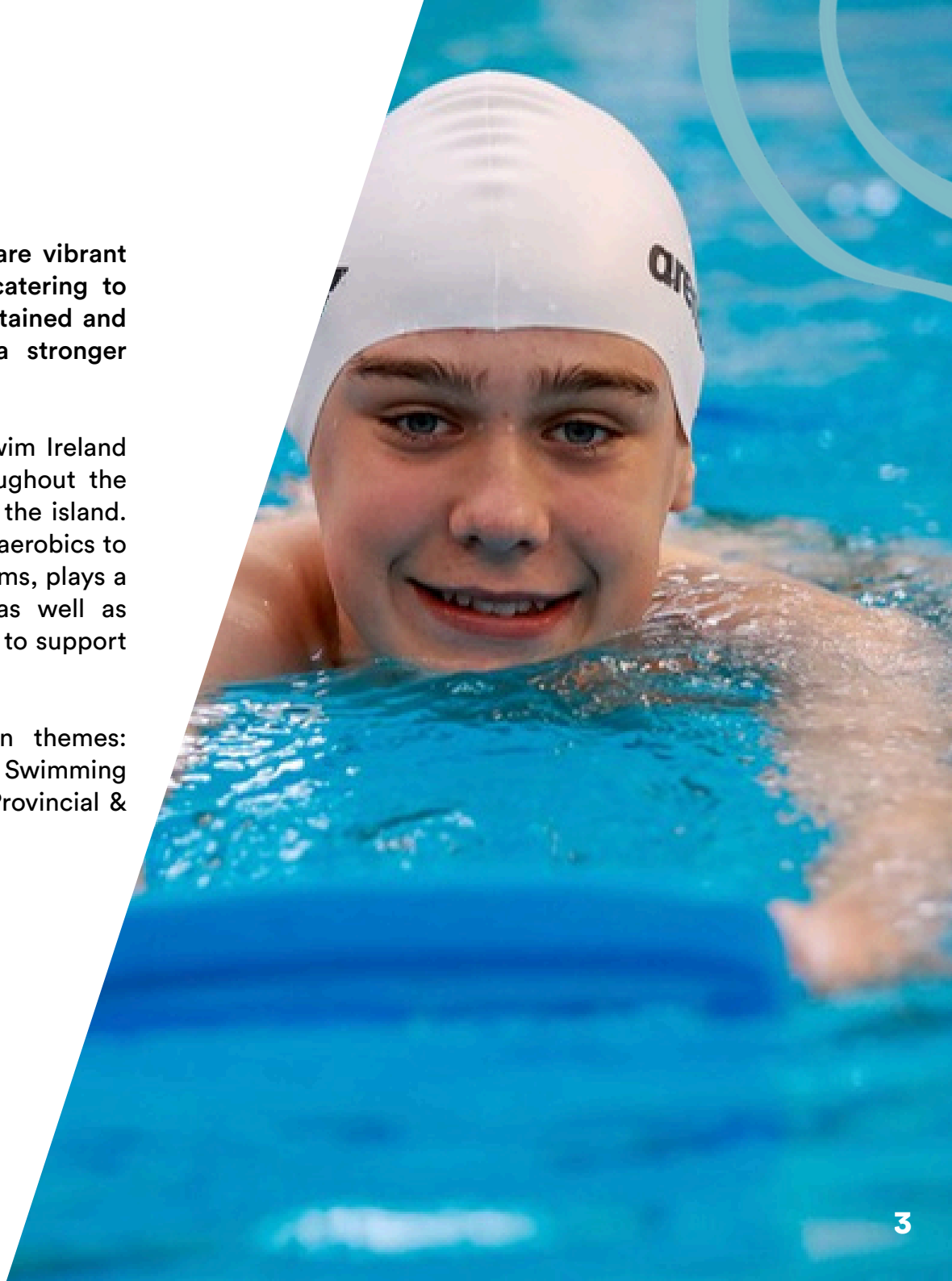
# Background

Swimming pools are more than just places to swim - they are vibrant community centres that offer a wide range of activities catering to different age groups, fitness levels, and interests. Well-maintained and accessible facilities attract more participants, fostering a stronger community and promoting a healthier lifestyle.

It is generally accepted that the sector needs investment. Swim Ireland has been gathering data on pools and leisure centres throughout the island to build our understanding of the infrastructure across the island. The variety of activities available at these facilities, from aqua aerobics to additional wellness amenities like gyms, saunas and steam rooms, plays a crucial role in attracting a broad demographic of users as well as providing opportunities to generate significant other revenues to support the operation.

The Gap Analysis Report is structured around five main themes: Swimming Pool Sites, Community Swimming, Accessibility, Swimming Lessons, Energy & Sustainability, Pool Condition & Age and Provincial & County Analysis.

This summary sets out the key points for consideration.



# Gap Analysis Report - Key Themes

**1** Pool Condition & Age

**2** Provincial & County Analysis

**3** Swimming Lessons

**4** Energy & Sustainability

**5** Community Accessibility

# Key Messages From the Report

## Swim Ireland's Vision: "An Island of Swimmers" – Every Irish Person Deserves "A Pool Within Reach."

Swim Ireland's comprehensive audit reveals critical gaps in our aquatic infrastructure, creating barriers to a healthier, more active, and water-confident nation.

Access is severely lagging: Despite swimming being the #2 sport for adults, and #1 for people with disabilities and women, public provision is critically low. With just 1 public pool per 81,053 people (compared to Scotland's 1 per 14,047), and only 4.8m<sup>2</sup> of local authority operated pool space per 1,000 population, we are falling far short of international best practices.

Hotel pools mask true shortages: A staggering 57% of pools in the Republic of Ireland are in hotels, often limiting public access through membership fees and few pay-as-you-go options (only 13% of hotel pools offer pay as you go). This over-reliance creates systemic barriers, especially for vulnerable groups.

Basic accessibility is missing, excluding many from the water: Despite the sport's popularity among those with disabilities, vital features like pool hoists are missing in over half of all facilities, and a shocking 73% of hotel pools lack them. Basic provisions like Braille signage are also rare.

Learning to swim is becoming a lottery: 67% of pools have waiting lists for swimming lessons, denying lots of children and adults the opportunity to learn a life-saving skill.

Infrastructure is aging and unsustainable: One-quarter of our pools are over 35 years old, nearing end-of-life, yet new construction is almost non-existent (only 2.5% built in the last 5 years). Compounding this, 55% rely on gas for heating, creating both environmental and financial burdens.

There is a lack of access for swimming clubs: Only 28% of pools are available for hire by swimming clubs impacting significantly on the impact of Swim Ireland and it's clubs to provide grassroots swimming across Ireland.

Regional disparities create an unfair playing field: Entire regions are left behind. Connacht has no 50-meter pool, forcing residents to travel an average of 100km. The south Munster region (Cork) also critically lacks competitive facilities, hindering both participation and elite development.

**There is a lot of interest and demand for swimming and we as a nation should be ambitious for providing these opportunities for the people of Ireland.**

## POOL AGE & CONDITION

The data reveals that 25% of pools were built before 1990, and 50% were built after 2000. With 58% of pools reporting refurbishment in the last 5 years, this suggests efforts to bring older pools up to modern standards for safety, accessibility and energy efficiency. However, only 2.5% of pools were built in the last 5 years. Considering that the 25% of pools built before 1990 must be nearing the end of their lifespan (normal life span 30-50 years), there is a need for investment in new construction in addition to continued focus on refurbishment.

This becomes even more important in the context of circa 10 year project timelines to build new pools, population growth and an ageing demographic, bearing in mind that Swimming is one of the few sports that maintains participation across the full life course. We believe that pools can be built within a much shorter time frame and a timeframe of 2-3 years needs to be targeted.

**25%**

of pools were built before **1990**

**2.5%**

of pools were built in the last **5 years**



## Provincial and County Analysis

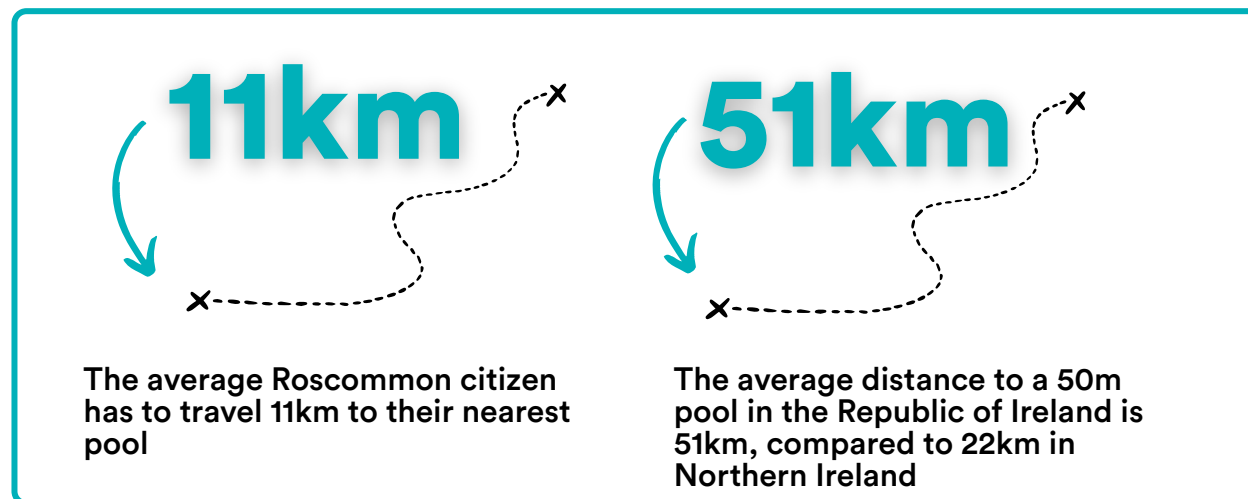
On average, most regions have pools located within 5-8km for most of their populations, however, is it worth noting that their nearest pool may be a private hotel pool and potentially inaccessible. Residents of Galway City for example all live within 5km of a pool but of the 11 pools, only 1 is a local authority pool.

Rural regions such as Leitrim and Roscommon counties see much lower percentages of their populations within close proximity to pools.

Locating swimming pools close to where people live not only promotes greater community access and participation, but also reduces reliance on car travel, helping to lower carbon emissions and support climate action goals.

Long travel distances, especially for school swimming lessons, make it harder for schools to include swimming in their activities due to transport costs and time away from class.

The data shows that access to 50m pools, which are typically used for competitive swimming and higher-capacity training, is an even bigger challenge. The average distance to a 50m pool in the Republic of Ireland is 51km which is more than double that of Northern Ireland (22km) which is relatively well served. The provision of 50m pools is an area of particular concern for competitive swimming in two geographical areas (Connacht and the Cork region) where provision is inadequate due to travel distances. The average travel distance to a 50m pool in Connacht is 105km with Mayo and Sligo being particularly isolated at 119km and 142km respectively. No county in Connacht is within 50km of a 50m pool.



## SWIMMING LESSONS

Despite the strong presence of swimming lessons in Ireland, where an estimated 500,000 children are enrolled in lessons each year, there is a need to further expand the availability of these vital programmes to ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to learn to swim.

Current demand often exceeds the capacity of existing facilities, as evidenced by waiting lists at 67% of pools across the country that offer lessons, and limited access in certain regions, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas.

The gap highlights the need for a more strategic approach to the provision of swimming lessons, ensuring that they are accessible, affordable, and available to a wider demographic.

# 67%

of pools that offer swimming lessons  
have a waiting list





**55%**

**Gas: 55% (Republic: 57%,  
NI: 40%)**



**21%**

**Heat Pump: 21% (Republic: 18%,  
NI: 38%)**



**13%**

**Electrical: 13% (Republic: 12%,  
NI: 16%)**



**5%**

**Other Heating Methods: 5%  
(Republic: 6%, NI: 2%)**

## ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Gas is the most used heating method across all regions and sectors, particularly in public pools. This dominance reflects its affordability, reliability, and widespread infrastructure. However, this heavy dependence raises sustainability concerns.

Public pools rely heavily on gas, especially in regions like Leinster yet private non-hotel pools rely on gas in Northern Ireland.

Private hotels and private non-hotels adopt a more diverse range of heating methods overall, including electricity and heat pumps, indicating a growing preference for modern or energy-efficient systems. This trend is most evident in regions like Munster and Connacht, where heat pump usage is significant.

Oil heating, though declining in usage, remains prominent in rural areas like Connacht and Ulster, where gas infrastructure may be less accessible.

Solar energy plays an insignificant role across all regions and sectors, with only marginal use in Munster and the Republic of Ireland.

The use of hybrid systems ("more than one method") is most notable in public facilities, particularly in Munster and island wide. This reflects the sector's effort to improve efficiency and reduce operational risks by combining multiple heating sources.

Heat pumps are gaining traction, particularly in private facilities in Munster and Connacht, where they serve as a cleaner alternative to gas and oil.



## Community Accessibility

Accessibility to swimming pools is a fundamental aspect of creating inclusive and equitable communities. Ensuring that swimming pools are accessible to everyone, regardless of physical ability, age, socio-economic status is essential in promoting widespread participation and enjoyment. 85% of pools reported being accessible to people with disabilities. However, only 48% reported having pool hoists to assist patrons with limited mobility to enter the water. Public pools generally have better accessibility features compared to private pools. In the hotel sector only 22.7% of pools have hoists.

A strong club culture is vital for sustained participation in sport, providing organised support, community engagement, and consistent opportunities for social and competitive participation. One of the most startling statistics to emerge from the report is that only 28% of pools are available for hire by swimming clubs, the majority of these in the public sector.

To ensure our facilities are truly accessible, it is crucial that they are free of any barriers. Currently, with only 58% of facilities offering a pay-as-you-go option, individuals from lower socio economic backgrounds and those who may want to try swimming without a commitment are often excluded.

**Only 28%** of pools are available for hire by swimming clubs, the majority of these in the public sector.

**Only 28%** of hotel pools report having a hoist.

**Only 58%** of facilities offer a pay-as-you-go option

# Conclusions

A clear theme emerging from the data is the disparity in pool access between urban and rural areas. These disparities highlight the need for targeted infrastructure development in rural regions in particular. Connacht and Munster especially face greater challenges in accessing pools, indicating a need for strategic investment to ensure a more equitable distribution of swimming infrastructure across the country. Northern Ireland's picture is more positive with public pools providing a larger share of the available water space and only 27% of pools having waiting lists for lessons however it still demonstrates a strong need for further provision.

A significant insight from this research is the need to develop more sustainable and cost-effective community swimming pools that are fully accessible. This is especially important as many facilities built during the 1980s are nearing the end of their lifespans and only 2.31% of pools were newly constructed in the last five years. As 50% of pools were built since 2000, the focus must remain both on refurbishment and new construction which is vital to meet growing demand and replace ageing infrastructure.

The report raises concerns about whether local authority pools are fully living up to their responsibilities. Despite being intended to provide accessible, inclusive facilities for all members of the community, local authority pools do not meet the demand for swimming services. This gap has been filled by hotel pools, which are privately owned and are, for example, less likely to offer Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) options. Similarly, many people likely prefer to swim on a day-by-day basis rather than commit to a membership, and this is a group of people not being catered for by the current provision of pools across Ireland.

Moving forward, there is a clear necessity to adopt a more cost-effective and operationally efficient model that can sustain and expand swimming participation across Ireland. This shift must prioritise sustainable community pools that offer appropriate programming and access for those who need it most and a strategy for transitioning to more sustainable heating methods. Local authorities should be supported to step up to ensure that public pools are meeting the needs of all demographic groups, especially those who may not be able to afford private facilities. Similarly, access to various types of swimming pools—both community and competitive-level—must be ensured across the country, including in more rural areas.

By adopting a cost-effective and inclusive model, we can ensure that all demographic groups, especially those in rural areas and those unable to afford private facilities, have access to essential swimming services.



# The Solution: Swim Ireland's Call for Action

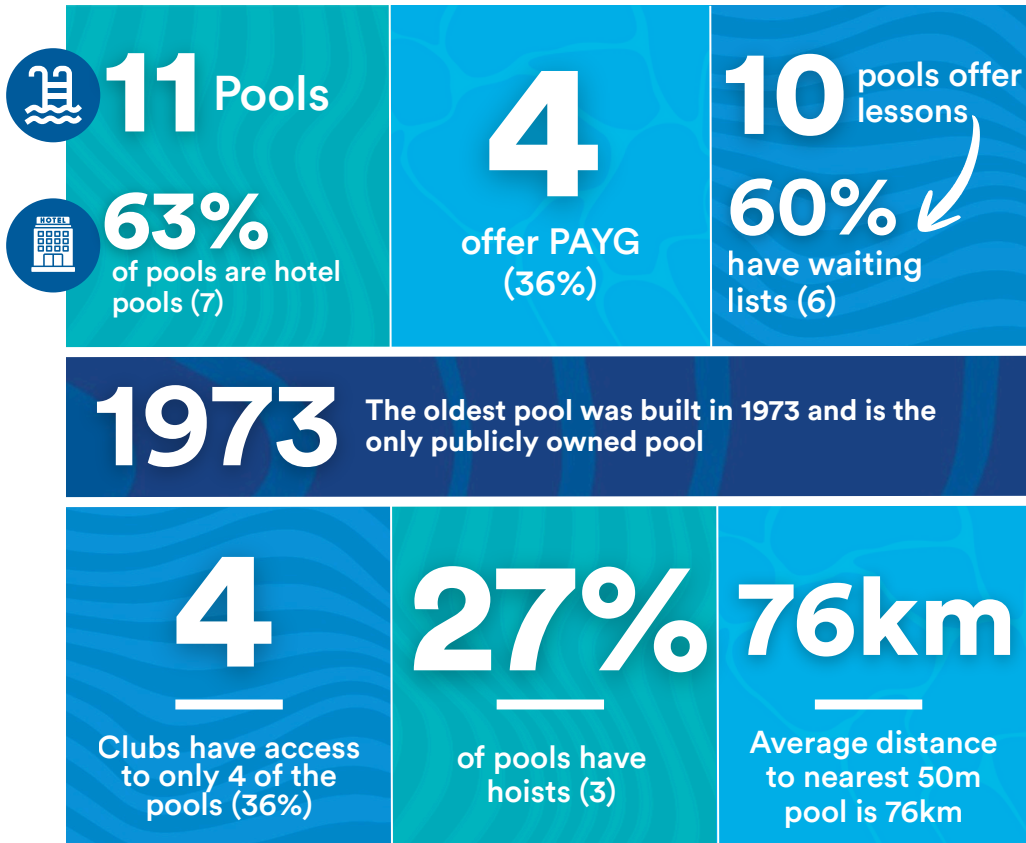
- 1** Invest in robust public pool provision: Implement a dedicated, long-term capital programme for new public swimming pool construction and refurbishment, specifically targeting a minimum of 11m<sup>2</sup> of public pool space per thousand population across the island, aligning with international best practice.
- 2** Mandate and fund universal accessibility: Consider the establishment of a dedicated grant scheme (through programmes like the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme) to equip all public and private pools offering public access with essential accessibility features, including pool hoists and appropriate signage, ensuring no one is excluded.
- 3** Considering our over reliance on gas for energy, there is a need to consider a more comprehensive strategy to support pools in transitioning to energy efficient heating solutions (e.g Heat pumps, solar panels) and implementing retrofitting schemes.
- 4** Address regional imbalance with targeted development: Prioritise strategic investment for two new 50-meter pools in underserved regions – specifically in Connacht and the South Munster region (Cork) – to serve both competitive and community needs, fostering equitable access nationwide.
- 5** Whilst not dealt with in the report, what is becoming increasingly clear is that even where local authorities have built swimming pools, they are in many instances handing them over to private operators due to the complexity of operations involved, and paying a subsidy to do so. And in some cases, existing swimming pools are being closed or are open but operating at limited capacity due to this issue. Swim Ireland has started work on the development of an alternative model of pool operations, and believes this needs to be progressed with government and local authority in order to more comprehensively support the operations of new and existing swimming pools by local authorities.
- 6** It is becoming clearer that there is no uniformity around the design of swimming pools in Ireland, and we recommend the development of more uniform design guidelines around the different types of pools (community, 25m, 50m etc) with the industry in order to better manage build design costs and efficiencies and provide more support to local authorities building pools.

# Galway City

## Example of County Breakdown



**85,910**  
Population



## The National Picture Republic of Ireland



Note: All statistics are based on self-reported information from facilities

Example taken from Swimming Pool  
Gap Analysis Report

**SWIM  
IRELAND**

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