



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Q&A Document

International Sports Diplomacy Strategy

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1. What will the new International Sports Diplomacy Strategy achieve?

Sport has the power to bring different nations and cultures closer together, and to build connections between communities.

For Ireland, sport is a powerful point of connection with Irish communities overseas, an opportunity to raise awareness of and showcase modern Ireland, and increasingly an important platform to promote Ireland to international audiences as a location for investment, trade and to visit. Sport can also play an important role in Ireland's international partnerships, and as a means to advance and promote our values and interests.

This International Sports Diplomacy Strategy seeks to enhance the many related activities already underway to maximise the value of significant government investment in both Ireland's international footprint and in sports at every level, to support stronger coordination among key stakeholders and to identify and support new international sports diplomacy initiatives in line with the goals of this Strategy.

The four goals of the strategy are:

- 1. Promote Ireland as a sporting nation**
- 2. Use sport, including Gaelic Games, to deepen our diaspora's connection to Ireland**
- 3. To support international sporting partnerships and cooperation in line with Ireland's values and interests**
- 4. Maximise the economic value of international sports diplomacy and engagement in major sporting events.**

The International Sports Diplomacy Strategy contains a number of new innovative actions that will be implemented over the lifetime of the strategy. The flagship initiatives of the strategy include:

- Funding: Launch of a **new International Sports Diplomacy Fund of at least €1 million over 5 years** to support the delivery of the actions set out in this Strategy.

- Team Ireland: **Whole of Government approach to coordinating activities around large-scale events** to facilitate economic, trade and innovation priorities, as well as tourism and political objectives.
- Promotion: Establishment of a **new Global Ireland Sports Leaders initiative** recognising the important role played by current and former sportspeople to promote Ireland internationally.
- Leadership: **Ireland will host a major international sports diplomacy conference** as a means to convene key international and domestic stakeholders on sports diplomacy in the modern world.
- Connections: **Develop an International Irish Sports Administrators Network**, bringing together these key players in international sporting organisations to better identify opportunities for Ireland.
- Values: **Support Sport for Development initiatives** in line with Ireland's Policy for International Development, A Better World.
- Heritage: Launch a **series of initiatives over the lifetime of the Strategy that recognise and celebrate the contribution of our diaspora to sport globally**, including a new exhibition on Irish leaders in global sport.
- Innovation: **Ensure Ireland remains at the cutting edge of sports technology** and continue our leadership in this space.

2. How was the new strategy developed and how will it be implemented?

Development of Strategy

This Strategy was developed by a Steering Group with membership drawn from relevant Government Departments and State Agencies. Other stakeholders were consulted extensively to inform the Strategy.

Key domestic stakeholders, including sporting organisations, athletes, sports technology businesses, the research sector and universities participated in an International Sport Diplomacy Conference and consultation in November 2025.

Recognising the important role played by sport in connecting with our diaspora, consultation roundtables with members of Ireland's international sporting diaspora were also organised by a number of Embassies and Consulates across 6 continents.

Those consulted included elite and amateur athletes, coaches, club officials and administrators, sports researchers, academics and innovators, individuals in the NGO and development sector, those working in sports tourism and sports journalism, and healthcare providers and researchers including experts on sport injuries rehabilitation. A dedicated consultation also took place with Irish people working in international sporting bodies.

Implementation of the Strategy

A Team Ireland approach will be taken to deliver on the ambition of this Strategy.

To drive implementation and strong coordination among key stakeholders, a new International Sports Diplomacy Implementation Group has been established. The Group is jointly chaired by Assistant Secretaries from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Communications, Culture and Sport and includes relevant Government Departments and State Agencies.

The Group will engage with the private sector, sporting bodies and other key stakeholders, including diaspora representatives, to inform the implementation of this strategy. A representative stakeholder group will be established to facilitate this engagement.

3. What is the Global Ireland Sports Leaders Initiative?

A flagship action of the Strategy is the establishment of a **Global Ireland Sports Leaders' initiative**. The story and success of our sportspeople inspires our nation and serves to connect all Irish people, at home and abroad, in a tangible and meaningful way. **This new initiative also recognises the important role our sportspeople can play to promote Ireland's values and priorities internationally.**

The initiative will be limited to a maximum of six participants at any one time. Participation will be for an initial two-year term with the potential to extend participation by one further year with the agreement of both parties.

The role of the participating Sports Leaders will be to raise the profile of Ireland as a sporting nation, deepen our diaspora's connection to Ireland, support international sporting partnerships and cooperation in line with Ireland's values and interests and maximise the economic value of international sports diplomacy and engagement in major sporting events.

The role will involve international travel, seeking opportunities to build networks and foster connections on behalf of Ireland and Ireland's representatives overseas, and using opportunities to promote Ireland as a sporting nation and as a great place for living, learning, and enterprise.

This will be an honorific role, recognising sporting excellence. Sports Leaders will not receive payment. Travel and subsistence costs incurred in the performance of their duties will be reimbursed.

4. What will be the priorities for the new International Sports Diplomacy Fund?

The Strategy includes a **commitment to spend at least €1 million over 5 years** to support the delivery of the actions, to be deployed through a **new International Sports Diplomacy Fund** managed jointly by the Department of Culture, Communication and Sport and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Fund will be underpinned by four key principles:

1. A targeted approach in line with the goals and partnerships identified in the Strategy, focusing on key countries, regions, and events
2. Promoting Ireland's values through sport, including increasing the participation of women, people with disabilities and other underserved groups in sport.
3. Ensuring value for money and sustainable outcomes for projects and initiatives supported by the fund.
4. Aligning support for projects and initiatives under this fund with Ireland's tourism, trade, business development and development aid objectives.

The new Fund will be launched later this year.

5. How will the strategy help maximise the value of Ireland hosting and participating in major sporting events?

Major sporting events are excellent opportunities for Ireland to put ourselves forward on a world stage. Not just in sporting context, but they give Ireland the opportunity to make business connections, promote our native enterprises, showcase our research expertise, and make diplomatic connections.

This strategy will align with the Major International Sports Events Policy and Strategy framework developed by the Department of Culture, Communications, and Sport, which will convene a group of stakeholders from across government to coordinate activities around major sporting events.

The Secretariat will develop a calendar of high-impact sporting events, which will be the focus of public diplomacy campaigns to enhance Ireland's reputation as a tourism and sporting destination.

6. Why is Ireland looking to develop a more strategic approach to engaging international governing sporting bodies?

International governing bodies are central to the good governance of sport, ensuring that there is a level playing field and organising international competitions where Irish athletes can showcase their skills.

Ensuring that Irish voices and values are represented on the international sporting stage is important to ensuring that are able to influence the decision making processes of these bodies. Ireland already has excellent representatives and officials working at international governing bodies around the world.

We are taking **a more strategic approach to our engagement with international sporting bodies** through two actions. We will **develop an international sport administrators network**, bringing together key players to share knowledge and better identify opportunities where Ireland can contribute to international sports governance.

We will also **explore opportunities for our missions overseas to engage with international sporting bodies** when appropriate to do so.

In support of this objective, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will deploy additional diplomatic resources in Switzerland with a mandate to focus on sports diplomacy.

7. What does the new Strategy mean for sports that organise on an all-island basis?

In the context of a shared island, **sport heightens global awareness of Ireland as an island with a shared sporting heritage, outlook and offering**, and can foster a stronger feeling of connection to the island amongst people from all traditions and all parts of the island.

The UK-Ireland 2030 Joint Statement recognises the unique ability of sport, alongside arts and culture to forge and foster ties between people across the two islands, and commits to exploring future co-hosting opportunities in the area of sport.

An all-island approach to hosting major international sporting events has the potential to make a significant contribution to advancing North-South relations. This can mean sustained supports for expertise and athletes or funding for infrastructure such as stadia. Under this strategy, we will promote an all-island approach to hosting major international sporting events, including supporting the all-island dimensions of hosting of such international events as the T20 Cricket World Cup 2030.

We will also seek to expand cross-border sports opportunities, providing an opportunity for increased strategic coherence in sports policy across both jurisdictions. We will explore the development of future co-hosting opportunities with the UK beyond 2028, and will ensure that our co-hosting of UEFA EURO 2028 creates opportunities for new connections and a positive legacy for relations across these islands.

8. How will the strategy support the promotion of Gaelic Games internationally?

The Global Games Development Fund (GGDF) is a jointly funded initiative by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the GAA, active since 2012. **Funding of €200,000 per year is provided to the GGDF from the DFAT Emigrant Support Programme**, with the GAA contributing matched funding. In 2025, core funding support was provided to 159 clubs across six continents.

This support is in line with DFAT commitments under the current Global Ireland Diaspora Strategy and will again be reflected in Ireland's new diaspora strategy which is due to launch in March 2026.

There is a vibrant global Gaelic Games community. Local Gaelic clubs around the world are typically formed by our diaspora, frequently taking root in their local communities and becoming a hub for Irish people, those of Irish descent and the affinity diaspora who embrace the sporting and competitive aspects of our sports and also the unique values and ethos of Gaelic Games.

These clubs represent our values of community, volunteerism and inclusivity, and promote Ireland's heritage and culture in local communities across the world. The Government will continue to work closely with the GAA to support clubs and communities overseas and have identified specific actions in this Strategy to deepen their connection to Ireland.

In particular, **we will build upon the successful awarding of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status to Hurling in 2018 to seek similar recognition for Gaelic Football**. As well as achieving international recognition of these living heritage practices, inscription acknowledges and celebrates the work of the generations who have kept these traditions alive. It provides a wonderful opportunity to share these cherished aspects of Irish culture internationally, while also highlighting the importance of and reinforcing Ireland's engagement with UNESCO.

9. How will the new strategy advance Ireland's sporting values?

Ireland has a strong sporting heritage with a unique set of values that we show through our athletes, clubs, and supporters around the world. The Strategy will support our core sporting values of community, volunteerism and inclusivity through our continued support for GAA clubs and Irish sporting clubs around the world, and growing the thriving Gaelic Games clubs around the world.

This Strategy encourages a more focused integration of sport in the promotion and advancement of Ireland's interests and values, through partnerships, bilaterally and in multilateral fora in line with the Government's Policy for International Development *A Better World*.

Sport can, for example, lead to improved health and education outcomes and can contribute to enhanced economic development, fostering inclusion, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

10. How will the strategy support Sport for Development initiatives?

Under this Strategy, **we will work with humanitarian and development partners and other stakeholders to support sporting initiatives that have the potential to improve development outcomes** such as inclusion, education, health, economic development and gender equality.

We will support **Sport for Development initiatives implemented by our diplomatic missions, particularly in Africa, with a particular focus on the empowerment of youth and girls.**

Sports can play a critical role in amplifying life-saving humanitarian assistance provided by Irish Aid partners, and in creating meaningful and durable change in vulnerable communities affected by crisis and conflict. In the area of humanitarian assistance, **we will continue to support the valuable work of partners that include sport programmes and spaces as part of mental health supports for adults and children.**

We recognise sport, including for persons with disabilities, as a powerful enabler and accelerator of sustainable development and peace. **We will also support sport initiatives for the displaced with a view to improving outcomes including in health and inclusion.**

11. How will the strategy support Ireland's sports technology sector?

The sports technology sector is on a powerful growth trajectory, with a market size of approximately **€29.6 billion in 2025** that is projected to nearly double to **€59.3 billion by 2030**. Ireland is home to a dynamic, successful and growing sports technology sector, including 93 venture capital-backed sports technology companies. Since 2014, Irish sports tech start-ups have collectively raised over **€224 million in VC funding** across 181 transactions. **Enterprise Ireland is recognised as the leading European investor in sports tech with 19 sports tech investments since 2024** — more than triple the number recorded by the next most active firms.

The growth of Irish sports tech innovation is supported not just by this global trend but by a confluence of enabling factors in our country including a robust STEM talent pool with at least 20 sports science and related degree programmes available, a supportive funding ecosystem, strong academic-industry partnerships, and national expertise in data analytics and regulatory compliance. In addition to building a strong domestic sector, the fundamentals of Ireland's sports technology eco-systems position us to attract sports technology foreign direct investment in line with IDA Ireland's *Adapt Intelligently: A Strategy for Sustainable Growth and Innovation 2025–2029*.

Within the lifetime of this Strategy, we will seek to position Ireland at the intersection of sport, technology, and global business, creating opportunities to strengthen Ireland's reputation as a leader in research and innovation, to support Irish companies and to attract foreign direct investment. Promoting the sector will be aligned with the Action Plan on Market Diversification, in particular the key role of Ministerial-led trade missions to promote the sector and utilising high impact Team Ireland platforms such as South by Southwest in Austin, Texas to promote the sector.

12. What has the Government done to advance sport in Ireland?

Government is committed to supporting our sporting ecosystem so that people can participate, reap the benefits of sport and fulfil their potential, from grassroots right up to high performance level. The National Sports Policy, which was adopted in 2018 and runs until the end of 2027, has provided a clear and robust framework for this support. **Since 2018 we have invested well over €1 billion in sports infrastructure and development.**

The return of investment is substantial with increased participation rates, inclusion, integration and improved access for those with physical considerations and increased supports to enhance well-being.

Recent indicative figures from Sport Ireland now puts active sports participation rate above 50%, exceeding the target of 50% in the National Sports Policy.

We have not only broken our targets for participation but also for funding for sports. The National Sports Policy committed to doubling funding for sport compared to 2018 levels to €220 million. This has been achieved years ahead of schedule and funding allocated for sport in **2026 now stands at over €300 million, a €270% increase on 2018 and a 28% increase over 2025.**

In terms of high performance, we allocated **€27 million across Sport Ireland's high-performance programmes in 2025**, including **€4.5 million in direct support for athletes** through the carding scheme. This is **in line with the Government's target of delivering €30 million per annum for high performance sport by 2027** as we track towards the 2028 L.A. Olympics.

This increased funding for high performance sport reflects the Programme for Government commitment to our High-Performance Strategy 2021-2032, which provides the overarching policy framework for the development of our high-performance system for the next two Olympiads.

13. How will the strategy support sport in Ireland?

This new Sports Diplomacy Strategy complements existing sports strategies, including our National Sports Policy and Major Events Policy and Strategy. While the strategy seeks to harness the power of sport to advance Ireland's diplomatic and trade goals and values, it also seeks to leverage these efforts to further drive participation in sport and to promote Ireland as a destination for major sporting events.

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