

# MAKING STRIDES FOR SOLIDARITY

Strategic Plan 2026-30



**SANCTUARY RUNNERS**

Solidarity, Friendship, Respect

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This strategic plan was developed with support from Rethink Ireland.



# Executive Summary

**Sanctuary Runners is a solidarity-through-sport movement, promoting community integration by bringing migrants (especially asylum seekers and refugees) and those living in the local community together to run, jog or walk in friendship and respect.**

Since its formation in 2018, Sanctuary Runners has grown into one of Ireland's most visible and respected community integration initiatives, connecting people around the country, fostering wellbeing and achieving national and international recognition.

This Strategic Plan 2026–2030 sets the foundations for our next phase. It is built on extensive engagement with group organisers, participants, Board members, staff, and external partners. It clarifies our identity, our purpose, and sets our long-term direction.

Over the next five years, Sanctuary Runners will focus on

- Growing the Sanctuary Runners movement in Ireland: Strengthening and sustaining our Irish groups is at the core of what we do.
- Expanding the impact of the Sanctuary Runners model, particularly by working with other sporting organisations to promote integration in their sports.
- Expanding internationally: Bringing Sanctuary Runners to other countries.
- Speaking out: Advocating confidently and responsibly for community integration.
- Strengthening systems: Enhancing organisational systems, leadership, and financial resilience to support our activities.

This strategy marks a transition from start-up energy to structured, sustainable growth while preserving the warmth, simplicity and humanity that define Sanctuary Runners.

# About Sanctuary Runners

Sanctuary Runners was founded in Cork in 2018. Built on a simple but powerful idea – that running and walking together can help build friendships and community – the movement has grown into one of Ireland’s most prominent community integration initiatives.

## Highlights of our First Seven Years!

- 40+ groups in Ireland
- Global Solidarity Run has reached 100 countries
- President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, became Patron of Sanctuary Runners
- Became a recognised advocate for Community Integration in Ireland
- Multiple national and international awards for community integration
- Largest ever team of asylum seekers at Dublin Marathon
- Launched Sanctuary Runners in England and Wales

As of the end of 2025, we had more than 40 groups around Ireland and a group in Brighton, England. The Global Solidarity Run in 2024 and 2025 brought the Sanctuary Runners message of solidarity to almost 100 countries worldwide. We have welcomed thousands of participants to our regular meetups and special events.

Our iconic blue t-shirt is worn proudly and has become a powerful symbol of our movement. We do not charge a membership fee or ask people to pay for the t-shirts, because we want everyone to feel welcome and included. Where people (particularly those seeking international protection and living in direct provision) have challenges keeping them from participating, we help break down those barriers – providing transport, running gear and a warm welcome. Hundreds of our participants volunteer to organise our meetups and events. Since we started we have built a community of people, across Ireland and beyond, who despite the hardships many are facing, meet up in a spirit of joy and togetherness.

Our members are highly visible participants in major events such as Dublin and Cork marathons, whether as runners, volunteers or supporters.

Sanctuary Runners has been registered as a charity in Ireland since 2024. In 2025, Sanctuary Runners GB registered as a charity in England and Wales. We have a small staff team focused on supporting and growing our groups, developing partnerships, operations and finance.

We have established partnerships with significant sporting bodies in Ireland, including Sport Ireland, Athletics Ireland, Canoeing Ireland, and Swim Ireland. Their support has been hugely important to us as has philanthropic support from Rethink Ireland, Community Foundation, private philanthropy and government grants under various integration funds.



# Background - Migration in Ireland

**When we started out in 2018, Ireland's system of direct provision for housing people seeking international protection had been in place for almost 20 years. At that time, there were approximately 6,000 people living in direct provision, often isolated from their surrounding communities.**

There were indications after the 2020 general election that there was political will to reform or improve the system. Since then, however, the number of people seeking international protection has increased significantly. In 2024, international protection applications exceeded 18,000<sup>1</sup>. We also saw a major increase in migration after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 with Ukrainian refugees offered temporary protection here. By the end of 2025 there were more than 33,000 people living in international protection accommodation.

In recent times, the political will has shifted towards discouraging applicants from arriving and making it more difficult for them to stay, with arrivals falling 16% from 2024-2025. This is in line with what the European Migration Network observes as “a notable trend... in 17 EMN Member and Observer Countries towards more restrictive or stricter migration and asylum policies.”

In parallel, we are seeing much louder and more prominent anti-migrant discourse in Ireland, echoing trends in the UK, the US and

many EU countries. For our groups, risks have increased and people need to be more cautious at times as anti-migrant aggression has risen, particularly towards non-white migrants. While discussions often ostensibly relate to ‘migrants’ as a whole, there is a disproportionate focus in some quarters on there being ‘too many’ asylum seekers.

Despite these trends, there are many supportive people in our communities, in sports organisations and in other community groups. We believe that the majority of Irish people are welcoming and supportive of initiatives like Sanctuary Runners.

Ireland's population is growing and becoming more diverse with 16.3% of Irish residents now non-Irish citizens. A December 2025 report from the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) made a strong case that “the benefits of migration – innovation, entrepreneurship and cultural renewal – depend on effective integration policies”<sup>2</sup>. NESC identified migration as “a key lever as it can help replenish the workforce, enrich communities and offset population ageing”<sup>3</sup>.

The goal of Sanctuary Runners is to help build those bridges to a more inclusive integrated society, while also advocating for Government leadership to put the necessary infrastructure and integration policies in place to maintain social cohesion.

<sup>1</sup> <https://emn.ie/publications/asylum-and-migration-overview-2024-ireland/>

<sup>2</sup> Building a Virtuous Demographic Cycle | The National Economic and Social Council - Ireland

<sup>3</sup> Building a Virtuous Demographic Cycle | The National Economic and Social Council - Ireland

**“ Whatever their circumstances, we continue to be impressed with the resilience and spirit of our members as they work, study, volunteer and enrich Irish society.**

Many of the people we have met living in direct provision since 2018 have gone on to become Irish citizens. Some others have been waiting years to hear the outcomes of appeals or have been issued with deportation orders.

Whatever their circumstances, we continue to be impressed with the resilience and spirit of our members as they work, study, volunteer and enrich Irish society. We believe that while people are living here, connecting them to their communities has huge benefits both for the people who are new to the country and for longer-term local residents.



# Context and rationale for a new strategy

Our first strategy took us from 2021-2025, establishing the Sanctuary Runners movement. We grew our reach across Ireland, established partnerships with other sports and organisations and began to become known internationally. This updated strategy positions us to continue to have an impact for the next five years and make strides for solidarity. This strategy responds to the following:

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## Feedback from our participants

Our participants – the people who run, walk and volunteer with us – tell us they truly value the belonging, visibility and connection that Sanctuary Runners has given them. But as the number of groups has grown, there is also a need for better communication and ongoing support, including active outreach to International Protection centres and migrant communities.

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## Potential for future growth in our movement in Ireland – and internationally

In Ireland, the movement is continuing to grow and we now need to put stronger foundations under that growth while consolidating and strengthening our existing groups. Continuing to sustain and grow our Sanctuary Runners groups will require clear and robust governance, organisational structure and systems. In Great Britain, Sanctuary Runners is in the start-up phase and there is significant interest from multiple locations in England and Wales. We also have requests from other countries to set up groups.

This strategy positions us to consolidate and grow Sanctuary Runners in Ireland while putting foundations in place internationally.

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## Opportunities to expand our impact through partnerships

Partners (e.g. Sport Ireland) have expressed interest in working with us to help other sports become more inclusive. Leveraging our experience with integration this way has the potential to significantly broaden our impact on communities.

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## The public and political climate on migration

Although Ireland's attitudes towards immigration remain more positive than the EU average, vocal anti-migrant messaging is increasing, with asylum seekers and people of colour often scape-goated and attacked. Our focus on community integration is more important than ever in this context.

# Our Vision, Mission and Values



## Vision

A more inclusive society where people from all backgrounds and nationalities are valued, and where community integration is properly understood and championed.



## Mission

Our mission is to build bridges and bring people and communities together. We use running, jogging, walking and volunteering to welcome people of all backgrounds, especially migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.



## Values

- **Solidarity**
- **Friendship**
- **Respect**





# Our Strategic Framework

**We have identified strategic priorities for the next phase of our development, to continue to make strides for solidarity from 2026-2030.**

First, we will continue to grow Sanctuary Runners in Ireland. Our core focus will be on strengthening and supporting our existing groups around the country. We will also establish new groups where there is capacity, a need and local demand.

We will expand the impact of the Sanctuary Runners model, particularly by working with other sporting organisations to promote integration in their sports. And we will expand internationally, to meet the growing demand to establish Sanctuary Runners groups in other countries.

Throughout, we will be a strong voice advocating for community integration and the benefits of an inclusive, tolerant society where people from all cultures and backgrounds feel they belong.

We recognise that to achieve these priorities we need to have strong foundations in place. We have a small organisation and need to enhance our systems and processes to be more effective. Continued strong governance and leadership from our Board will help guide us through implementing our strategy. Without essential funding none of this can happen, so we will seek to develop a sustainable mix of funding streams.

# Strategic Priorities 2026-2030



## Priority 1

**Grow Sanctuary Runners  
in Ireland: Strength and  
Support Irish Groups  
(Core focus)**

**Our Sanctuary Runners groups are the heart of what we do.  
Our priority will be to:**

- Work with group leads and organiser teams of existing groups to improve support and training and ensure that organisers have continuous opportunities to provide feedback and innovative ideas.
- Scale up our Group Support and Community Development framework to support and sustain all Irish groups
  - Revitalise the organiser hub to share best practices, tools and standards
  - Continue strong communication to recruit members to existing groups
  - Support establishment of new groups when conditions are right (e.g. core team in place)
  - Address transport barriers and rural engagement
  - Build systems and data to improve group health and impact
- Strengthen pathways to leadership for migrants within SR, building on the success of the pilot Leadership Programme with Athletics Ireland in 2025.
- Bring people together for events that energise the community and promote Sanctuary Runners (calendar of events to be agreed annually and resources to be put in place to deliver).



## Priority 2

**Expand Internationally:  
Introduce Sanctuary  
Runners in other  
countries (Emerging  
Growth Area)**

**There is growing interest internationally in launching Sanctuary Runners groups in other countries. Our priority is to respond to this demand while simultaneously ensuring our core groups in Ireland are fully supported and helped to grow. To do this we will:**

- Establish an appropriate governance model for international development, ensuring integrity of the model, and appropriate linkages between Sanctuary Runners groups in different countries. This may be in the form of a Sanctuary Runners International Network with country affiliates.
- Establish Sanctuary Runners GB as a self-sustaining organisation – currently in the startup phase, we expect SR GB to grow during this strategic period, with charitable status and organisation resources to support groups in Scotland, England and Wales.
- Adapt group-start processes and the organiser hub for international application (e.g., prepare Sanctuary Runners ‘in a box’ as a resource).



**There is growing interest internationally in launching Sanctuary Runners groups in other countries.**



## Priority 3

**Explore the expansion of the model: Work with other organisations to promote integration and broaden our impact.**

**We have established partnerships with a range of organisations and developed pilots with other sports. We will continue to expand our impact and promote broader integration.**

- Build on and learn from partnerships with Canoeing Ireland, Swim Ireland and other sports to develop transferrable tools and approaches.
- Explore partnerships with organisations based on criteria to be developed, e.g. alignment with Sanctuary Runners Mission and Vision, enabling expansion of our reach.
- In partnership with Sport Ireland, roll out initiatives like the Leadership Programme to other sporting bodies to promote inclusion in their sports.
- Develop a toolkit for other sports.
- Use any such expansion to broaden inclusion to other groups – for example, broader migrant community, older adults, travelling community.



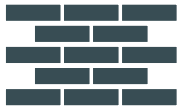
## Priority 4

Use our Voice to Advocate for Community Integration

**Our voice is important in promoting community integration and representing our participants. Sanctuary Runners will:**

- Develop an Advocacy & Communications Framework which is non-party political, values-led, safe for participants and focused primarily on community integration.
- Shape national conversations on community integration and other key issues which may arise and affect our members.
- Provide a visible, positive alternative to anti-migrant sentiment by sharing stories, data and media on an ongoing basis.





## Priority 5

**Build Strong Foundations  
to Deliver**

**Achieving our Strategic Priorities requires strong structures and systems. We will focus on putting foundations in place to enable delivery of the strategy, while remaining lean and cost-effective.**

### **Foundation 1: Organisational Development, Systems & Data**

We will build a robust operational backbone:

- We will strengthen our operational infrastructure: streamline HR, IT and financial systems to support our mission.
- Introduce simple and sensitive tracking of data on participation while implementing a relationship management system for partners, organisers and groups.
- We will improve communication across, and within, our groups.



## **Foundation 2: Governance & Leadership**

Our Board of Trustees plays a critical role, providing guidance to the organisation and ensuring we are upholding high standards of governance. We will:

- Ensure governance structures and procedures are fit for purpose as we scale up.
- Review the effectiveness of the Board at regular intervals and continue to expand the Board to include new skills and experiences and increase migrant representation.
- Maintain and regularly update our risk register and governance calendar as useful tools.
- Update and clarify executive and non-executive Roles, Goals and Responsibilities underpinned by 'best practice' principles.

## **Foundation 3: Fundraising**

Without essential funding in place, this strategic plan cannot be delivered.

- We will focus on implementing a fundraising plan that identifies resources and infrastructure required and secures a sustainable mix of State funding, corporate/philanthropic and public donations
- State funding: build on our experience applying for and managing grants and identify additional sources of multi-year funding
- Philanthropic: secure multi-year donors and cultivate long-term relationships with key philanthropic organisations
- Corporate: seek to expand current corporate relationships
- Individual: put infrastructure in place to attract donations from the public without compromising our commitment that fundraising is not required of our members

# Implementation Roadmap



**In the first year of this plan, the main focus will be on Stabilising & Strengthening the core ‘backbone’ of Sanctuary Runners. Supporting Irish group organisers will be the top priority.**

We will also put the foundations in place for delivery – the operational excellence and governance required for longer term success. Developing an appropriate participant data approach, cognisant of key stakeholder needs, data protection and Health and Safety requirements while finalising an international structure blueprint will also be completed in this period.

We also expect to establish a small number of groups in GB and in selected other countries.

In the period 2027-2028 the main focus will be on building and expanding the organisation by strengthening the Irish groups, piloting new partnerships that meet our criteria, deepening corporate relationships, establishing new international chapters while developing training materials and toolkits.

The period 2028-2030 will be characterised by scaling activities while sustaining existing groups with expansion of international partnerships, further growth in numbers of strong Irish groups, scaling new initiatives where viable and aligned with Sanctuary Runners’ Vision and Mission, while achieving sustainable multi-year funding. In finalising this plan, we will agree specific metrics and goals for each year of the plan.

**2026**

**2027**

**2028**

**2029**

**2030**

**STABILISING AND STRENGTHENING**

Support Irish groups.

Put foundations in place for long-term success.

Establish groups in Britain and Australia.

**BUILDING AND EXPANDING**

Strengthen Irish and new groups.

Pilot new partnerships.

Deepen corporate and other relationships.

**SCALING FOR GROWTH**

Sustain existing groups and expand in Ireland and internationally.

# Risks and Mitigators

**As for any plan, it is important to consider the risks to successful implementation. Sanctuary Runners maintains a risk register which is continually updated.**

For the next strategic period, we have also considered the key risks and assessed their likelihood, potential impact, and the mitigation measures proposed.

Some of the risks are internal and can be mitigated against through improving our infrastructure and systems. For example, one of the potential risks of growth is overextension. To mitigate against this, we will implement structured filters for the formation of new groups, the expansion into new areas, and the organisation of events. These filters will help ensure that expansion is sustainable and aligned with the organisation's core values and capacity. We will also ensure our groups have the support they need and maintain robust communication protocols.

As we have grown, we have implemented high standards of governance and compliance and we will continue to maintain those standards.

Other risks are more associated with the external environment. For example, the changing political climate could impact our access to funding. With this in mind we will continue to be diligent in our financial planning and we will also seek to develop efficient, streamlined processes and tools—including organiser training and recruitment—that are not dependent on funding.

Anti-immigrant activism can have a chilling effect on our groups and has been an ongoing risk for some time. The safety of our participants is always our priority. Developing protocols and supports for individuals and groups helps offset this risk.

By proactively identifying risks and implementing targeted mitigation strategies, Sanctuary Runners aims to safeguard our mission and ensure responsible growth throughout the next five years.

Sanctuary Runners has been innovative and entrepreneurial since it was founded. Maintaining that creative energy will give us the capacity to respond to opportunities and will also help us manage risks that emerge.

# Success in 2030

**In 2030, as we are coming to the conclusion of this plan, we will know we have been successful if:**

- We have a thriving Sanctuary Runners community in Ireland, with groups across the island where migrants and locals come together in friendship and respect.
- Community integration principles have resonated and are reflected in public discourse and ultimately in policy.
- The Sanctuary Runners model has been adopted by other sports to promote and improve inclusion more broadly.
- Sanctuary Runners GB is well established, with groups thriving across England, Scotland and Wales.
- We have a vigorous Sanctuary Runners Global network in place where groups in different countries share best practices and learn from each other.
- Our migrant participants provide visible leadership within Sanctuary Runners and in broader society.



# Conclusion

## Sanctuary Runners stands at an important moment.

The organisation has proven its impact, earned a positive reputation, and built a deeply meaningful community model. The next five years will require intentional, disciplined growth – strengthening the core in Ireland, systematically responding to international opportunities, and expanding the movement to new communities and sports in a structured way.

This strategy provides the clarity and framework necessary to meet these ambitions. It preserves the humanity and simplicity of Sanctuary Runners while giving the organisation the governance, systems, partnerships and direction required for sustainable, scalable impact.

Sanctuary Runners is, and will continue to be, a catalyst for a more inclusive society, making strides towards solidarity.

**SOLIDARITY.**


**FRIENDSHIP.**


**RESPECT.**


**Sanctuary Runners CLG is a charity  
registered with the Charities Regulator.  
Charity Registration Number: 20206637**


[info@sanctuaryrunners.ie](mailto:info@sanctuaryrunners.ie)

[www.sanctuaryrunners.ie](http://www.sanctuaryrunners.ie)

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