



**FINE GAEL**

# Taking Ireland Forward Together

The second iteration of Fine Gael's rolling political programme



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## Introduction from An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD

Fine Gael members are the party's greatest resource. When I was elected Leader, I committed to ensuring that everyone's voice would be heard and respected, and that I would make a genuine effort to include our members and elected public representatives in the work of policy formulation and campaigns.

In spring 2019 the party will hold a special conference to give effect to that commitment. That conference will consider change to the Fine Gael Constitution, it will debate the second iteration of our rolling political programme, and it will renew Fine Gael's values.

Fine Gael's values are:

- Equality of Opportunity;
- Enterprise and Reward;
- Integrity;
- Hope; and
- Security.

I stand by these values but I believe that they now need to be added to as we face the challenges of the 21st century. Democracy, the European Union, internationalism and personal liberty cannot be taken for granted.

So I propose to add four new values:

- **Personal Liberty:** Fine Gael believes that individuals and families know how best to organise their own lives and make decisions for themselves.
- **Europe and Openness:** Fine Gael is a party of Europe. We believe that Ireland's future lies at the heart of Europe, a common home we are helping to build. We believe in global free trade, greater freedoms, fewer borders and barriers.
- **Protecting the Environment:** Our environment is under threat from global challenges like climate change and local issues like bad planning. Protection of our environment and building sustainable communities for our families should influence all policies.
- **Compassion:** We are a compassionate party that affirms the role of the state in offering a helping hand to those that need it.

At our spring conference, I want to hear from members about what our values should be. What values need to be added and what should change, and at that conference I want us to ratify and approve those new values.

I also want to hear from members about their ideas for our policy platform.

When I was elected leader, I set out my intention that Fine Gael would have a rolling political programme that details Fine Gael's position on the key issues of the day. At last year's National Conference we published the first iteration of that rolling political programme. Now we publish the second iteration. Between now and the special conference I want you, our members and public representatives, to take this document away and to consider it, to debate it internally and externally, and then at our conference to propose how it can be strengthened.

I want to unleash the enormous talent and ability available to us in Fine Gael, so that we can take Ireland forward together and provide the leadership this country needs for the next generation.

I look forward to seeing you again this spring and to a robust and engaging discussion.

**Leo Varadkar TD**

Fine Gael Party Leader and Taoiseach



## Foreword from the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, Richard Bruton TD

Ireland is at a crossroads.

After many difficult years we have now set out a plan which builds a future based on opportunity, fairness and sustainability, and which meets our people's hopes and ambitions in an authentic way.

Too often in the past such an opportunity has been destroyed by bad politics and bad choices. In setting out Project Ireland 2040 and our vision for a Republic of Opportunity, we seek to ensure that the sacrifices made by so many people during the difficult years of recession will not have been in vain.

The solid foundation of our plan is built on genuine enterprise and innovation, not on speculation or debt. However, we are also aware of the gathering pace of global challenges which will not relent and which must be met with responsibility and resilience. Brexit is one of the most significant challenges we have ever faced. Technology is transforming the world in which we live at an unprecedented rate. Responding to climate disruption is a profound challenge where we must aspire to be a leader, not a follower. The decisions we make now in meeting these challenges will be crucial for the choices available for the next generation

We are putting plans in place to be ahead of those changes. That means:

- implementing Project Ireland 2040 to create growth that is compact, connected, sustainable and regionally balanced;
- setting out a plan to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change;
- supporting talent and being a leader in anticipating and responding to the needs of learners and enterprise, and providing new pathways for learners to develop;
- responding to the new expectations of Irish citizens. The new stresses and threats in their lives demand new approaches, including by supporting mental health, in positive ageing and right across the public service; and
- making communities safe in a world with new types of threat, by changing the whole culture of policing and regulatory reform.

Developing a strong economy enables the creation of equality of opportunity which is our central driving ambition. Fairness and justice are not to be found in making everyone the same. Every person must have the chance to take different paths to fulfil their potential. The role of government is to provide opportunity, and to give people a second chance when they do not succeed. It is to empower people and to respond to diversity of need with choice and opportunity.

Fine Gael has led at critical turning points in our history. Fine Gael members will get the opportunity early next year to input into our plan for the future.

### **Richard Bruton TD**

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment



## Chapter 1

# Strong communities and balanced regional development

We believe in a Republic of Opportunity that is built around people, communities, and commercial and social enterprises. We shall empower communities to knit together their diverse elements and to sustain communities that enable a vibrant and supportive environment for those of all ages and in all parts of the country. We know that communities do not exist in isolation from broader economic developments, so we will continue to prioritise balanced regional development to ensure all parts of our country share in our prosperity.

Over the past decade, population has increased in every county, and employment is growing in each and every region across the state. We want to continue this progress.

Our ambition is that:

- the pattern of future population growth is balanced between all parts of Ireland, and with growth in rural as well as urban areas;
- a person's location is not a barrier to fulfilling their potential and new businesses are being opened in all parts of the country;
- coherent planning for skills, enterprise, and innovation will create the basis for sustainable competitive advantage in adaptable sectors for every region;
- new approaches are developed to buttress towns and villages as vibrant centres for thriving rural hinterlands;
- new ways of meeting the needs of citizens at local level will be developed by harnessing technology;
- we accelerate the delivery of high-speed broadband across the country;
- the rich tapestry of sport, culture and heritage is woven together as assets that can sustain tourism, as well as active and engaged local life; and
- our local government system is further enabled to support community and regional development.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

## **Implement 'Project Ireland 2040' - our plan for all parts of Ireland to grow and prosper**

Ireland's population is expected to increase by 1 million by 2040. Without policy intervention this population growth will result in an ongoing shift in population and jobs towards Dublin and the neighbouring counties. This is not in the interest of Dublin, or any other part of the country.

Fine Gael in government brought forward 'Project Ireland 2040', and is fully committed to its implementation. 'Project Ireland 2040' will ensure sustainable growth over the next twenty years for all parts of Ireland. We will not repeat the mistakes of Fianna Fáil's National Spatial Strategy that promised something to everyone. 'Project Ireland 2040' encompasses the National Planning Framework, which sets out how we are planning for this population growth, and is backed up by a €116 billion 10 year capital plan. This will mean that for the first time in Ireland's history we will ensure that our planning and capital investment plans are meaningfully aligned; the money follows the plan.

## **Balanced and sustainable growth for all parts of Ireland**

'Project Ireland 2040' will also ensure that over the next twenty years there is a more effective balance of growth across our country, with the intention that all the regions grow at broadly comparable rates. Furthermore, we want to build up the cities of Cork, Waterford, Limerick, and Galway, as viable alternatives to Dublin, with each being targeted for population growth of more than 50%, twice the growth range projected for Dublin. Under 'Project Ireland 2040' there is scope for the growth of all towns in Ireland, in particular those with key regional functions such as Athlone in the midlands, Sligo in the north-west, as well as the cross border city-regions of the future like Letterkenny-Derry and Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry.

To ensure the vitality of our rural areas, a significant proportion of national population and economic growth will be targeted at building up the fabric of smaller towns, villages and rural areas, with much of that happening by redeveloping derelict and under-utilised lands inside small towns and villages.

While there is significant targeted investment in 'Project Ireland 2040' to achieve these goals, Fine Gael understands that central government does not have the answer to every question. That is why we introduced a new approach in 'Project Ireland 2040' and established four funds, with a total of €4 billion of funding, which will be allocated on a competitive basis to the best projects that achieve the objectives of 'Project Ireland 2040'.

## **Improving transport links for all parts of Ireland**

Fine Gael has always placed importance on accessibility for all parts of the country. This is recognised in 'Project Ireland 2040', which provides funding for an extensive road building programme ensuring that all parts of Ireland are linked not just to Dublin, but also to each other. It also places a particular focus on improving the access to the North-West, which was neglected when it came to roads investment during the Celtic Tiger.

During the course of the last decade, it was necessary to prioritise investment in maintenance over bringing new projects through route design and planning. This meant that many worthwhile projects have been delayed over the past decade. We are now committed under 'Project Ireland 2040' to developing a strong pipeline of future road development projects so that there can be steady and sustainable improvements in our road network in the decades ahead.

Fine Gael appreciates the importance of local and regional roads. We are conscious that despite the strong recovery in the public finances, we have not yet reached the level of roads funding that is necessary to properly maintain our regional and local roads. However, the €4.5 billion in regional and local roads funding under 'Project Ireland 2040', in addition to the €7.3 billion regional road accessibility in national roads, will remedy this.

## **Make real the Atlantic Economic Corridor**

A strategic objective of 'Project Ireland 2040' is to promote economic development across Ireland and to enable all parts of the country to achieve their potential. The development of the Atlantic Economic Corridor from Kerry to Donegal can strongly contribute to that objective of balanced development. The development of a high-quality road network from Cork to Limerick, Galway and onto Sligo under 'Project Ireland 2040' is the spine of the Corridor. Our Atlantic region provides a vast array of opportunities for businesses of all scales across a wide range of sectors. The skills on offer along the Corridor make it the ideal place for any company to set up and expand. Across the Corridor there is a strong presence in every sector including medical devices, biopharma, ICT, agri-food, aviation and finance. Fine Gael in government is working to capitalise on these strengths.



Designated Atlantic Economic Corridor Officers in Local Authorities along the Corridor are working together to ensure a cohesive approach to developing and promoting the Atlantic Economic Corridor. We will ensure that this important network continues to receive resourcing.

## **Commitment to the Local Improvement Scheme**

Fine Gael re-established the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) which had to be suspended during the lost decade. €37 million has been allocated to LIS since it was reintroduced last year with over 1,100 rural roads improved as a result in the last year. We will continue to fund this important scheme in the years ahead.

## **Investing in the rail network and improving connectivity**

We are committed to investing in the rail network. To that end we will examine how line speeds on all the interurban routes can be improved, enhancing the role of the rail network in facilitating inter-urban connectivity. As outlined in 'Project Ireland 2040', Fine Gael is committed to fully examining the opportunities for improving the journey times and/or developing high speed rail links between Belfast, Dublin and Cork, and delivering upon that, if a robust economic case is identified. The introduction of high speed rail could transform connectivity between the high population centres on the island of Ireland. That could mean getting from Belfast to Dublin in just one hour, or Dublin to Cork in 90 minutes, with a connection to Limerick. We will ensure that this feasibility study is commenced in 2019.

An external review of the viability of the extension of the Western Rail Corridor to Tuam and Claremorris is being carried out at present. If this review demonstrates a positive cost benefit analysis for this project, then this project will be prioritised in line with 'Project Ireland 2040'.

## **Broadband to every home, farm and business across Ireland**

Fine Gael is committed to the delivery of the National Broadband Plan which is provided for under 'Project Ireland 2040'. The National Broadband Plan will ensure high speed broadband access of at least 30 megabits per second to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. Already the National Broadband Plan has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. The contract negotiations for the National Broadband Plan are approaching their conclusion. Once delivered, it will mean that every home, farm, and business in the state will have access to a future-proofed broadband service.

## **Regional Enterprise Strategies to ensure that every part of the country shares in our economic prosperity**

Fine Gael in government was responsible for the first coherent response to the enterprise needs of the regions with the Regional Action Plan for Jobs. Employment is now expanding in all regions. These multi-annual plans involve exploiting the new investments being made in key infrastructural arteries, in heritage assets in town centres, and in educational infrastructure. We will ensure that these plans are regularly updated.

At their heart is a strategy for regional initiative that achieves co-ordination among the national enterprise agencies and the regional stakeholders. They will continue to be driven by:

- regional jobs targets by IDA and Enterprise Ireland;
- competitive funds for the development of regional sectoral initiatives;
- the strengthening of resources for enterprise start-ups;
- the increased uptake by enterprise for quality programmes for management, lean production, innovation and market diversification;
- a programme of investment in advance facilities by IDA in strategic locations; and
- the promotion of local business networks for collaborative initiatives.

## Education and skills as drivers of balanced regional development

A rich pool of talent in a region is a magnet for foreign investment and a seed bed for new enterprise. We will:

- make multi-campus Technological Universities a driver of regional development; and
- strengthen the further education options to build the skill base of sustainable regional sectors.

Fine Gael has an ambitious vision for the role which Education and Training Boards can play in delivering balanced regional development. They will provide key resources to support strong enterprises with innovative products and services, capable of building diversified and sustainable markets.

New apprenticeships, traineeships and new blended certified programmes will help enterprises to strengthen their talent base, both of new recruits and existing management and employees.

Technological Universities will deliver a wider range of higher skill programmes, develop capacity for applied research, strengthen enterprise hubs and become a spine for regional hubs around key sectors, such as ICT, food, software, advanced manufacturing, pharma, and engineering. The enactment of the Technological Universities Act means our focus is now on working with the various consortia to get these new technological universities up and running. 'Project Ireland 2040' commits resources to the development of technological universities, with a particular urgency being attached to the establishment of the Technological University of the South East.

We will facilitate the creation of 'Technology and Innovation Poles' which will be collaborations between Institutes of Technology, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and private enterprise and funds are provided for this under "Project Ireland 2040".

The new Regional Skills Fora are developing a strong bridge between enterprise and the education institutions. Investment in education at all levels will develop essential arteries to support the proposed pattern of population growth set out in 'Project Ireland 2040'.

## Expand and extend the tourism opportunities in the regions

Fine Gael is the party that placed tourism at the centre of our economic development. We recognise its importance in providing employment across the country and to a wide and diverse range of individuals. During the height of the economic crisis when Fine Gael took office, we prioritised measures to boost the tourism sector and in 2015 published the "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025" policy document.

That document set ambitious targets for Irish tourism, including that by 2025, revenue from overseas visitors would increase by €1.5 billion to €5 billion, that employment in the sector would grow by 50,000 to 250,000, and that there would be 10 million visits to Ireland. All these targets are likely to be achieved in the near future.

In addition to the tourism capital investment programme, Project Ireland 2040 also commits €56 million to tourism greenways investment over the next four years. This investment will be in line with the Greenways Strategy, which provides the optimum basis for the development of national greenways. We are committed that this level of expenditure on greenways will continue post 2021, thereby providing over time a significant network of greenways that are attractive to domestic and foreign tourists alike, and encourage longer stays in more rural areas.

Air access is particularly important to our tourism sector, and further air access initiatives will be provided, as will continued support for our airports outside of Dublin through operating subsidies and development grants.

## The agri-food sector at the centre of Irish economic development

A strong agri-food and seafood sector is a major part in driving employment and economic development in the most peripheral areas of the country, as well as in every town and village. Fine Gael has always recognised the importance of the family farm structure and the need to ensure rural and coastal communities receive the investment needed to continue to grow.

This requires a continued focus on delivering the targets contained within the 'Foodwise 2025' and 'Harvesting Our Ocean Wealth' strategies. Diversification of markets is hugely important. Expanding our agri-food exports by opening new and emerging markets, growing live exports and focusing on building up the presence of agricultural attachés and Bord Bia/



Enterprise Ireland representatives is central to the 'Global Ireland' initiative. As we approach 2025, we will begin work, in partnership with the sector, on a successor strategy to meet our national growth and sustainability objectives including climate mitigation targets.

Under the current CAP, Fine Gael has delivered €12 billion for the farming community. A strongly resourced CAP will be vitally important for farm families and a vibrant rural economy in the coming years.

The next CAP is set against the backdrop of Brexit and the global challenge of climate change. There will be an increased emphasis on knowledge transfer, technology adoption, and competitiveness, and new incentives for young farmers. Fine Gael will be very firmly focused on maintaining vital supports for farm income. The budgetary allocation for the 2021-2027 period will be critical in terms of meeting the challenges we face, and we will be strongly and robustly defending the CAP at an EU level.

We are equally committed to a strongly resourced European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) to support the fisheries sector in the context of the next CFP. Fine Gael doubled the amount of funding available to the fisheries sector under the last EMFF, to €241m. A strongly resourced EMFF is vitally important for fishing and coastal communities in the context of Brexit. We will also invest strategically in our harbour infrastructure and continue to deliver Brexit response initiatives for our seafood processing sector, to provide the industry with the best possible competitive advantage in the coming years.

Brexit poses one of the most serious challenges ever faced by the agri-food and seafood sectors. We will continue to prioritise our farmers, food businesses, fishermen and processors in the context of negotiations and continue to rollout supports for the industry in meeting emerging challenges such as fluctuations in currency.

It is clear that the best interests of the agri-food sectors in both Ireland and the UK lie in a trading arrangement post-Brexit that is as close as possible to the current system. However, it is also clear that the trading relationship cannot be the same outside of the Single Market and the Customs Union, and that any final arrangement outside of these structures will involve friction and additional cost along the supply chain.

We will continue contingency planning and make the necessary arrangements for possible future customs, import control and export certification requirements in the agri-food sector.

We will also work on delivering initiatives that help to mitigate the potential impacts of Brexit, building on the provisions we have put in place to date; enhanced resources for Bord Bia, Brexit response loan schemes and capital investment supports, farm gate investment under the RDP, research and innovation investment in the Prepared Consumer Foods Sector and the pursuit and development of new markets.

Making sure that farmers are best placed to derive a fair price from the marketplace is strategically important. We will work with the Commission to introduce greater fairness and transparency across the supply chain at an EU level. We will continue the rollout of the producer organisation framework in the beef sector to give farmers more negotiation power in the marketplace and continue to invest in areas like knowledge transfer to give farmers the backing needed to innovate and increase profitability.

We will drawdown all available EU funds under the current RDP and will develop new schemes under Pillar 2 of the next CAP that will not only meet our environmental and climate objectives, but will also provide farm gate investment that helps the most vulnerable and disadvantaged farmers across all sectors.

In particular, we will work with the farming community to consider new measures under the next RDP that will mitigate the risks associated with challenging weather events that have become more prevalent in recent years, affecting fodder supplies.

Encouraging the next generation of farmers will be vital to securing the future of the agri-food sector. We will strategically use the National Reserve to encourage new entrants and younger farmers. We will continue to prioritise young farmers with enhanced grants in on-farm investment schemes and we will invest in the next generation through the green cert system, through agri-food programmes at third level and through research.

## Helping charities improve accountability and corporate governance

Fine Gael wants to expand and support the role of volunteers, to encourage active citizenship, to facilitate the growth and development of philanthropy and, through oversight of the Charities Regulator, to ensure best practices and governance, management and administration of charities.

We understand that charities are facing increased levels of scrutiny and regulation in recent years. Enhanced accountability is a positive development, but we recognise that some organisations might not be equipped or funded to adequately navigate their way through the process. We will seek to work with all stakeholders to streamline the processes insofar as possible and tailor reporting requirements to the size of the organisation. We will act upon the recommendations of the recently published Consultative Panel on the Governance of Charitable Organisations to improve the quality of corporate governance in the sector, and also to ensure that the burden imposed is proportionate.

Having listened to the concerns of the sector, Fine Gael in government has introduced a VAT compensation refund scheme to enable charities to receive a refund of a proportion of their VAT costs from 2018 onwards. We will work with the sector to ensure that this scheme is as straightforward as possible.

## Community development funding

We will continue to strengthen and fund community development initiatives like SICAP, CLAR, CSP, CEP and Outdoor Recreation Schemes.

LEADER plays a key role in providing grant aid for rural communities. Projects are now being approved much more quickly since reforms introduced last year. Fine Gael in government will continue to monitor the scheme to ensure it is operating efficiently and transparently.

## Develop rural town centre policies and town teams

Rural towns are drivers for their surrounding areas through well-established economic, administrative and social functions. They form clusters of services, have a significant share of homes and jobs, and act as transport hubs for a much wider rural community. We will continue to strengthen rural towns as a focus for local housing and employment growth and regeneration, with initiatives such as derelict site transformation and new technology, such as low carbon and renewable heat and digital connectivity.

The €1 billion Project Ireland Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will play an important role in enabling such initiatives. In tandem with this, a new living village scheme will be developed to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. This scheme will take properties that are currently not in use in town or village centres, renovate them and make them attractive for residential purposes. The success of this scheme will inform future policy development. We will also continue to develop the Town and Village Scheme to allow the rejuvenation of rural towns and villages throughout Ireland.

## Enabling local government to govern

Fine Gael is firmly committed to further increasing the powers and responsibilities of local authorities. We are committed to the principle of subsidiarity, which means that matters should be dealt with at the level of government that is closest to the people and most competent to deal with it.

We will hold plebiscites in Waterford, Cork City, Galway and Limerick asking the public if they wish to have a directly elected mayor who would provide leadership to their local authority and assume the majority of the functions currently carried out by the Chief Executive. If approved, legislation will be brought forward to allow for directly elected mayors to take up office in 2022.

Recognising the unique complexities of a Dublin elected mayor, Fine Gael will establish a Dublin Citizens' Assembly to consider what type of local government structure and directly elected mayor, if any, would be most appropriate to Dublin. Depending on the outcome of the Citizens' Assembly, a plebiscite will be held on the subject in 2021.

## Living off-shore islands - an integral part of our nation

The islands are an integral part of the state, and therefore it is important that islanders feel united with the rest of Ireland. We will strive to improve transport and communication links to and from the Islands, to ensure better connectivity.

In recognition of the important role played by island schools, we will continue to provide additional ring-fenced supports for Island post primary schools. From 2018 the government is increasing teacher allocation for each of the island post-primary schools; an additional ring-fenced budget of €15,000 per annum for each post-primary island school to cover their additional operational costs will also be provided.

We think that the islands provide the perfect location to pilot an ambitious project for communities to make a rapid transition to a carbon neutral society by implementing sustainable energy generation, energy efficiency and rainwater harvesting.

Our islands are a unique and valuable aspects our culture. This should be cherished and sustained by investing in the communities and preserving their heritage for future generations.

We no longer think it necessary that the Islands cast their votes a day earlier than the rest of the country and will work to change this so that voters on our Islands vote on the same day as every other voter.

## A post network fit for modern times

Fine Gael believes in a future for An Post and an Irish postal network that reflects the needs and demands of modern Ireland. Obviously the explosion of online services has contributed to a major decline in the volume of letters being sent while online payments have reduced footfall. However, the move to online retail and increased provision of banking services present major opportunities for An Post which, if grasped by the company, will ensure its long-term survival.

Fine Gael in government has sought to minimise any closures and safeguard the future of viable post offices, recognising the role they play in communities. As part of An Post's renewed strategic plan for the network, communities of over 500 people will have a post office and over 95% of the population will be within 15km of at least one post office. We will ensure that this level of service is maintained into the future.

We will closely monitor the pilot of the recently-launched 'Digital Assist' post offices. As we move more public services online there will remain a portion of the population who either cannot or do not want to use online services. This pilot will examine the demand and suitability of post offices to fill that gap and if successful, we will expand it nationwide. We will also support the utilisation of the An Post retail network for banking and other services.

## Libraries at the centre of communities across Ireland

Libraries across the country are attractive and welcoming spaces where all members of the community can access knowledge, ideas and information. It is where people can reflect, connect and learn. The local library provides a social space for the isolated in urban and rural communities and collaboration with local agencies and community groups can develop and enable initiatives that encourage people to use the library, promote civic participation and reduce rural isolation.

Our ambition is to develop the public library service as a relevant, modern and high-quality community service and to focus on improving access, use and visibility, establishing the public library as the "go-to" place for integrated local services. We will work to achieve this ambition through the recently published public library strategy.



## Chapter 2

### Enabling opportunity

Equality of opportunity and equality before the law are fundamental values in a democratic republic. Fine Gael believes that the state has an important role in ensuring that all people are treated equally, and that no person is held back from achieving their potential through discrimination. Our policies are focused on early interventions that make a positive, timely impact on a person's life, dismantling discriminatory barriers, promoting inclusion and providing opportunities for second chances when people need them.

Our ambition is that Ireland is a country where:

- discrimination is not tolerated;
- no-one is held back from achieving their potential because of discrimination and every child is given the best possible chance in life, irrespective of background;
- people of all ages have access to a wide range of pathways to fulfilling careers, and are supported with difficult transitions which they may encounter; and
- strong public services are in place for early diagnosis of difficulties in a child's development.

Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:

#### Reducing child poverty

Ensuring that every child get the best start in life is essential if we are to deliver upon our commitment to creating a Republic of Opportunity. One of the most damaging impacts of the recessionary years was the substantial increase in child poverty. The best way to tackle child poverty is to strengthen parents' prospects of secure employment, along with access to health, housing, childcare and education. Back to work or education supports continue to increase and state childcare initiatives are more accessible than ever, supporting transition to employment. Direct welfare payments have also been increased,

for example, the Qualified Child Increase, income disregard for one parent families, and an extension of the School Meals Programme. These initiatives make a targeted and real difference to people's daily lives. There is more to do but we are committed to deliver on our goal to significantly reduce the number of children in consistent poverty.

Following publication of the mid-term review 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' (July 2018), we now have a blueprint for tackling child poverty and homelessness which places an emphasis on an effective cross-governmental approach. As the first national children and young people's policy framework, this lays out the roadmap for us to coordinate efforts for greater impact as we set out to improve outcomes for children.

## Reducing educational disadvantage

Reducing educational disadvantage is crucial to breaking down many of the barriers that still exist in Irish society and it is prioritised by Fine Gael in government. As has been shown in UNICEF's 2018 report on childhood educational disadvantage, Ireland ranks second best among rich countries in reducing educational inequality. We will not rest on our laurels though, and aim to close the gap further in learning and progression among disadvantaged groups.

Our programme to tackle educational disadvantage includes:

- developing more tailored assistance for DEIS schools, so schools can get the right help to meet their needs, starting with schools with higher levels of disadvantage;
- initiatives to deliver new targets in reading and maths, including to increase the number of pupils in our most disadvantaged (DEIS Band 1) urban primary schools performing at the highest levels in maths and reading at sixth class by 42% and 27% respectively by 2020 from 2016;
- enabling school leaders to plan better for their schools and their students by giving them access to better data. For example, literacy and numeracy results over a number of years for their school so that they can see which interventions are working;
- a focus on increasing the number of students entering third level from disadvantaged and disability backgrounds. We will ensure that every DEIS school partakes in a higher education institute led access programme. We will deliver a set of initiatives to help people access third level, including:
  - measures to encourage those from disadvantaged backgrounds to become teachers, an initiative designed to create strong role models within their community; and
  - funding bursaries for students coming from non-traditional backgrounds into college;
- implementing a hot school meals programme across 36 DEIS schools to 7,200 students. This new pilot, starting in 2019, will test the potential to expand this service to provide hot and nutritious meals in these schools with a view to incrementally rolling the scheme out to all schools on a permanent basis; and
- improving the pathways in our education system particularly in transition from school to apprenticeship, so that it can be a viable option for 20% of school leavers.

## Ensuring opportunity for citizens with disability

For too long in the past society has placed obstacles in the path of many of our citizens with disabilities - obstacles that prevented them reaching their potential. They were unable to receive an education, or take a full part in their community or the workforce.

Fine Gael wants to give people with a disability greater independence and choice in accessing services which best meet their individual needs. We will continue to work over the next five years to ensure that services and supports are easily accessible and available to those who need it the most.

We have already brought forward actions to fulfil these ambitions. Last year, we extended the right to a medical card to all children with severe disabilities regardless of their parents' income. That is 33,000 children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance, no longer subject to reviews, and 10,000 children are now receiving a medical card, as a right. Fine Gael in government fully restored the carer's support grant, and brought about the first increases in both the carer's allowance and disability allowance for eight years.



After many significant delays and repeated failures by successive governments, Fine Gael has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This has now paved the way for real change and action for people with a disability.

### **Continue to break down barriers and offer greater choice**

This will be achieved by the introduction of personalised budgets in line with the 'Report on Personalised Budgets'. These budgets will provide more control and choice over the range of services an individual needs, thereby offering greater independence and transparency.

### **Early intervention as the norm**

150 schools and preschools are taking part in an in-school speech and language pilot in the current 2018/2019 year. For the first time ever, pupils are offered early intervention and tailored assistance with greater collaboration between therapists, parents, teachers, and other school and pre-school staff. Early intervention for children with a disability is crucial also. Fine Gael in government brought through a revised process for assessing a child's needs to ensure that there is a standardised approach to assessment across all Community Health areas. The purpose of this is to ensure children with disabilities, and their families, access appropriate assessment and intervention as quickly as possible. In addition, this procedure will ensure that the approach to assessment of need is consistent across all areas.

### **Helping children with special educational needs to fulfil their potential**

Helping children with special education needs to fulfil their potential is our policy. We will develop proposals to implement the recommendations of the recent review of the SNA scheme. Some 15,000 SNAs assist 36,000 students across the country. The current model is greatly valued by parents, students and schools, however, a new model is needed to ensure that we are achieving the best outcomes possible. We now need to expand the model to enable SNAs to meet the student's learning, emotional and social needs. The model in its current form acts too much as a blunt instrument. The new model will be front-loaded and will see the majority of support posts allocated ahead of time, removing the need for assessments and allowing for earlier intervention. Students should have access to a continuum of assistance based on need not diagnosis.

We will:

- work with parents in reforming the Special Needs Assistants (SNA) model, to ensure that children get the right assistance at the right time;
- continue to roll out a new resource allocation model, which is a fairer model in which parents do not have to get an expensive diagnosis; and
- develop better progression paths from primary to secondary education.

### **Ensure that people with disabilities have the opportunity to work**

Fine Gael is committed to implementing in full the 'Making Work Pay Report' to ensure employment opportunities are available to all. For example raising the Medical Card earnings disregard for people on Disability Allowance or on Partial Capacity Benefit associated with the Invalidity Pension, so people with disabilities do not lose their Medical Card because they take up extra work.

### **Value the importance and essential nature of respite**

We will continue to improve the delivery of respite. The €10m additional funding provided by government for 2018 has had a positive impact. The funding provides for the twelve new houses, one in each CHO, and three in the Greater Dublin area. Eight respite centres have opened. The remaining houses are expected to come on stream by the end of the year. To date over 450 people have benefited from these new respite houses.

€2m allocated for alternative respite is working well locally, with good examples of summer camps, evening and Saturday clubs having taken place, benefiting hundreds of adults and children. This alternative respite allocation has meant that 1200 people have benefitted.



## Deal with the extra living costs incurred by people with a disability

Many people with disabilities tell us that the current system of payments, designed to cater for a loss of income, are not sufficient to cover the additional living costs incurred. Therefore, we have commissioned a study of those additional living costs. We will act on the findings of this study which is due to be completed in 2019.

## Inclusion for LGBTI+ citizens of all ages

Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity has no place in our republic. In the three years since the marriage equality referendum our determination to combat discrimination against the LGBTI+ community has not wavered. Fine Gael will continue to be a strong voice for LGBTI+ rights and freedoms not only at home but also abroad.

We have launched the National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy, a world first, to create a safe, supportive and more inclusive Ireland and improve the physical, mental and sexual health of our young people.

Recognising that discrimination and isolation do not just affect our young people, we have dedicated funding to develop of a new National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy. It will comprise actions from across government, including health and be informed by stakeholder engagement to improve outcomes for our wider LGBTI+ community.

While looking to the future we must not forget our past, and those who were previously stigmatised by our laws, we will provide for the disregard of offences repealed by the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

We will continue to review and improve the Gender Recognition Act to ensure meaningful inclusion and advance the rights of all trans and non-binary people in Ireland.

## Continuing reforms to improve Direct Provision

Fine Gael in government has brought forward major reforms of the direct provision system. We are particularly focused on reducing the time that asylum seekers must wait for a decision to be made. The new single application procedure, introduced as part of the International Protection Act, continues to accelerate the determination process.

Asylum seekers can now take up employment opportunities where an applicant has not received a first instance decision within nine months, while the independent living model – enabling residents to purchase and cook their own food in kitchen facilities – is being introduced across centres nationwide. 1,500 residents now have access to independent cooking facilities. Residents now have access to the Ombudsman and Ombudsman for Children, and a new free appeals process for issues relating to reception conditions.

New standards for the quality of accommodation services are being developed and following their publication, an independent inspection service will be procured, guided by the new standards. We will continue to implement the recommendations of the McMahon Report, the majority of which have now been implemented by way of legislative change and system improvements.

## Integration and immigration

Fine Gael believes in freedom of movement within the European Union, and also believes that migration from outside of the European Union is good for Ireland. It has helped us to enrich our society, staff our public services, and has bolstered investment in our economy.

Migrants must be supported so that they can play a full role in Irish society, and Ireland must be a welcoming and open place to new arrivals. Reflecting that, Fine Gael in government introduced citizenship ceremonies. These ceremonies acknowledge that adopting Irish citizenship is a joyous and important event in the lives of new citizens and must be celebrated.

We will continue to invest in the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service so that those seeking to migrate to Ireland or who are seeking to naturalise receive professional and efficient public services.

We acknowledge that barriers persist in preventing immigrants and new citizens from fully partaking in, or feeling a sense of belonging to, Irish society. Therefore, in 2017 Fine Gael in government published a Migrant Integration Strategy, a framework

for a range of actions to help migrants to participate fully in Irish life. At its core, is a commitment to identify and remove any remaining barriers to integration. Fine Gael will ensure that this strategy and its actions are implemented.

## Traveller and Roma Inclusion

Fine Gael recognises that members of the Traveller and Roma communities face particular barriers and discrimination in modern Ireland. In 2017 we published a national Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.

We will ensure that all the 149 actions which we have committed to are implemented over the lifetime of the plan (2017-2021) to better the lives of Travellers and Roma.

A health-led response drug and alcohol abuse and implementing the 'National Drugs Strategy'

'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery' delivers a health-led approach to Ireland's drug and alcohol problem and to achieve better health and social outcomes for people affected by substance misuse. In doing so, it balances the desire to maintain a focus on reducing demand, while at the same time promoting strategies to reduce harmful use.

This seven year strategy focuses on giving people a say in their treatment and providing the services to respond to those different needs. Consequently we are expanding drug and alcohol addiction services, including for under 18s and piloting a supervised injection facility. In particular, it recognises the impact of substance abuse on communities and focuses on participation in shaping the policies which can assist in tackling the problems they face.

Fine Gael in government is implementing the National Drugs Strategy and will progress the following key actions:

- **Supervised Injecting Facility:** Recognising the reality of individuals injecting drugs and the desire to reduce the harm caused to individuals, their families and their communities, we are working with Merchant's Quay Ireland to deliver Ireland's first medically supervised injecting centre in Dublin city centre, on a pilot basis, in 2019. This will enable vulnerable people access to a range of medical and social supports aimed at improving their health and reducing drug related deaths.
- **Addiction and Homelessness:** In line with Rebuilding Ireland we are working to address the health needs of people who are homeless. This includes investment in services for people who are homeless and require nursing and related care prior to hospital admission and post discharge from hospital. We have funded a new intermediate care step up-step down facility run in Dublin and will seek to roll out this model in other locations.
- **Alternative approaches to criminal sanctions for personal possession of drugs:** Criminal convictions for the possession of drugs can have a serious implications for a person's future particularly young people, impacting negatively on their ability to work and travel. For these reasons we have established a Working Group to examine alternative responses to the personal possession of drugs, taking account of an extensive public consultation undertaken this summer and to bring forward recommendations ensuring our justice system operates in the best interests of society as a whole.



## Chapter 3

### Making life easier for families

Family is at the core of who we are as a society. Families must be empowered to overcome the challenges thrown up by life, and reach their potential. We must ensure that the needs of families are at the centre of public policy making.

Our ambition is that:

- the Working Family Payment ensures that no working family suffers poverty and child poverty is falling;
- parents have access to affordable, quality childcare;
- children and teenagers have an engaging learning environment, well attuned to their needs with appropriate curricula, teaching and assessment;
- the cost of healthcare for families is falling;
- families are helped to take responsibility for a healthy, active and fulfilled lifestyle, assisted by easy access to early diagnosis, primary care and a strong network of community supports delivered in an easily accessed manner; and
- families have access to public services by strong charters of service for parents and children.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

#### Supporting parenting and quality early childhood programmes

Research shows children benefit significantly from parental care in their first year. Therefore, shared paid parental leave in the first year of a child's life will be introduced in 2019, while we intend that the progressive initiatives that have begun in childcare are expanded further in the years ahead.

We know that the greatest need for childcare assistance are for hard-working families and that childcare costs can be a barrier for couples to continue to work in a manner they wish. Fine Gael in government has introduced childcare subsidies to families of children between 6-36 months in centre based care and to parents of children on low incomes, are in education, or hold a medical card or GP visit card. These families can receive assistance of up to €145 towards the childcare costs of

their children, up to the age of 15. The Affordable Childcare Scheme is one of the most effective ways in which the state can support families, reduce socio-economic disadvantage and allow both parents to work if they so wish. Therefore, we are committed to the speedy roll-out of the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

We will incentivise after-school services in schools or community hubs to offer a range of family focused measures, which can involve the provision of PE, homework clubs, speech and language therapy, etc.

To help ingrain good habits from the earliest ages, we will ensure that the Healthy Ireland guidelines on food and activity will be integrated into early year's settings.

We will increase the Home Carers Tax Credit to €1,650 so that it is equal to the PAYE Tax Credit, and maintain that equalisation in future years, to recognise the work of parents who stay at home.

### **Accelerate diversity in education**

Our school system must reflect and respond to a pluralistic society. In particular, the fact that 95% of primary schools are denominational, means the demands and preferences of many parents are not satisfied. We will:

- achieve the target of 400 multi-denominational and non-denominational schools by 2030;
- continue to uphold the rights of parents to have their children educated in a denominational school;
- ensure clear guidelines regarding how students who opt out of religion should be treated; and
- continue to develop state run multi-denominational education through the Community National School model under the ETBs.

### **A fairer school admissions process**

We want to make it easier for parents to access their local schools and to enrol their children in a school that meets their needs. We have brought forward the Education (Admission to Schools) Act which will:

- ensure that religion cannot be used as a factor in primary school admissions, with a protection for minority faith schools to ensure they can survive;
- provide for a power to compel a school to accept a student with special educational needs, or to open a special class; and
- ban waiting lists, thus ensuring parents who move to a new area are not disadvantaged.

### **Helping with the costs every family face**

Reflecting the higher incidence of poverty among families with children, we have continued to increase the Back to School Clothing and Footwear allowance, bringing the total value of the payment to €150 for each primary school child and €275 for secondary school children. In considering the needs of children Fine Gael is also mindful that poverty traps are most associated with one parent families – the transition off income supports to employment income can be challenging. In order to ease this transition we are increasing the income disregard for one parents in work.

The Working Family Payment is a payment that supports 55,000 low income families in our state, we are extending the disregard in respect of housing costs from maintenance payments made to families in receipt of the Working Family Payment.

### **Parent and Student Charters to give greater influence in school decisions**

We are fortunate in Ireland to have such dedicated and committed teachers and schools. The Parent and Student Charter will underpin those high professional standards. All schools will introduce a parent and student charter following consultation with parents and students. This will require schools to:

- consult students and parents regularly in relation to school costs and work to avoid costs acting as a barrier;

- publish school financial statement which would include information on how any voluntary contributions are used;
- invite feedback from students and parents;
- provide a fair and accessible mechanism for resolving complaints, including through mediation; and
- publish the number of complaints made, the reasons for the outcome in each case, and how the outcome was reached by the school.

## Investing in schools

Fine Gael will invest in state of the art school facilities and continue to deliver new permanent school places to keep pace with demographic demand. We will continue to open new primary and post primary schools in the period 2019-2022. Already 42 new schools have been identified.

We will provide for an additional focus on refurbishment of the existing school stock, including:

- upgrading school labs as part of modernisation of science curricula;
- building and modernising PE facilities in post-primary schools;
- commencement of deep energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008; and
- €420m investment in digital facilities over the next decade.

Project Ireland 2040 provides total funding of €8.8 billion to education over the next decade, representing an increase of well over 70% on the approximately €5.1 billion provided over the previous decade.

## Backing teachers and school leaders

The single greatest influence on a child's schooling is the quality of the teacher and the quality of leadership in their school. We are committed to investing to help teachers and leaders to continually improve, by helping them to develop their own self-evaluation plan and design and implement initiatives to deliver measurable improvement.

## Wellbeing and mental health in our schools

Improving the mental health, wellbeing and resilience of all children is vital and schools are central to this. We will:

- embed a wellbeing strategy as a whole-school effort in every school;
- continue to expand and strengthen NEPS to help schools on this journey;
- use the wellbeing programme in Junior Cycle to build resilience; and
- expand student support teams into all DEIS schools.

## Fulfilling Lifestyles

Significant progress has been made in developing strategies for Wellbeing, Healthy Eating, Active Lifestyles and Avoidance of Substance Abuse. However, more can be done to empower families and communities to participate and take control of their own health and wellbeing.

- Service networks both public and voluntary will be, wherever possible, enabled to offer access through the school or similar community facility. This will involve co provision of PE, homework clubs, speech and language therapy, etc. using some of the capacity of the schools.
- Schools are a powerful source of leadership in our communities as demonstrated by the adoption of flags to mark commitment to active lifestyle, respect for the environment, healthy eating, tolerance and integration. Assistance will be provided to extend these drives into the wider family networks and local community.
- Primary social care model will continue to evolve with an expanding range of diagnosis, management of chronic care in the community, remote connectivity with patients out of hours using technology, and the expansion of community support for independent living.

- Building up the quality of the network of voluntary, private and public services will require a willingness by the state to invest in consistent upskilling, and Recognition Systems for Volunteers as well as developing standards and service models [e.g. Early Childhood Provision].

## **Ensuring that everyone is kept safe through vaccination**

Vaccines are one of the miracles of modern science. Diseases which were once deadly were made rare by vaccination programmes but could become deadly again if we do not maintain uptake rates.

We have expanded the childhood vaccination programme to include meningitis B and rotavirus. We will extend the HPV vaccination programme to boys.

Fine Gael will prioritise achieving 95% coverage among children of all elements of the Childhood Immunisation Programme. This is essential to ensure that not only those who receive the vaccines are protected but also that herd immunity is achieved also.

As part of this effort we will develop new and innovative ways to communicate the benefits of vaccinations and to counter myths and other harmful misinformation and conspiracy theories concerning immunisation.





## Chapter 4

### Ageing with security, opportunity and dignity

Life expectancy is increasing. Yet rather than this being a cause for celebration, it is generally presented as a problem for government and society. Fine Gael believes that this is an opportunity that must be embraced with the emphasis towards the positive rather than the challenges. However for those positives to be realised, people must have confidence that as they age and enter retirement, they will be able to do so with security, opportunity and dignity.

Our ambition is that:

- people enjoy a financially secure retirement;
- as people grow older they are secure in the knowledge that assistance and services are available to help them stay in their home independently and they enjoy real choice in the housing and care options;
- there is easier access to further education or training, more flexible models of education that assist older learners when they wish to continue to work and reskill;
- those who want to work later in life, are enabled to do so;
- increased promotion of healthy and active lifestyles as a person ages to help prevent illness and costly treatments; and
- community supports are available and accessible to those experiencing loneliness and isolation.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

#### **Pension reform to allow everyone security in retirement**

Improvement in life expectancy, and an increasing time spent in retirement means we must ensure that people do not lose out in retirement and instead are enabled to adequately replace their pre-retirement income levels.

Older men and women make a remarkable contribution to Irish society and this should be recognised with sufficient increases to both the contributory and non-contributory state pensions.

We will move to a total contributions approach for State Pension (Contributory) for the newly-retired by 2020. This will specifically acknowledge and allow for time spent caring, whether for our children or elderly loved ones. In tandem with that, we will work to resolve the various anomalies identified in the current provision of the contributory pensions.

As pensioners generally have fixed incomes, and can expect 20 or more years when they may be at least partially reliant on the State Pension, any uncertainty about future rates can cause anxiety, particularly among pensioners with no other source of income. We will ensure that the State Pension increases at or above the rate of inflation. Nobody should fear poverty in retirement.

### **Bringing in auto-enrolment to help all workers plan for retirement**

Currently only 35% of people in the private sector pay into an occupational pension. This means that 65% do not, and are therefore entirely reliant on the State Pension. We want to help these people save and prepare for their pension years in good time, so that they are well prepared to enjoy their retirement. Fine Gael in government brought forward the 'Roadmap for Pension Reform' and we are committed to its implementation.

We will introduce auto-enrolment into pension schemes for all workers under the age of 60 who are not already in a pension scheme. Contributions will be made by employees, employers and topped up by the Exchequer. This will achieve universal pension coverage and act as a major bulwark against pensioner poverty. There will be an opt-out for employees and an opt-in option for the self-employed, homemakers, carers and others. This will be in place by 2022.

In doing this, we will ensure that Ireland has the most effective, deliverable and sustainable automatic enrolment model resulting in an increase to the wellbeing, financial security and independence of future retirees.

### **Better integration to help older people with chronic conditions navigate the health service**

Treating chronic illnesses in the community through increased primary and social care capacity will ensure awareness, earlier diagnosis, intervention and treatment, better outcomes for patients and less pressure on our acute hospitals. It underpins Fine Gael's approach to healthcare reform.

As we age, we are more likely to develop chronic conditions that require us to regularly interact with the health service. Frequently, we will have more than one such condition and if our care is not well managed, we risk avoidable admission to hospital, resulting stress and bad health. Therefore, as part of Sláintecare, a dedicated fund will be in place to implement integrated care programmes focused on older people with chronic conditions.

### **Placing home care on a statutory footing**

Fine Gael believes that people should be helped to live as long as possible in their home and in their community. Fine Gael in government is developing proposals for the establishment of home care on a statutory footing so that people who require long-term care at home have the option of receiving it and are entitled to it by law similar to the entitlement of long term residential care under the Nursing Home Support Scheme that currently exists. These proposals are being informed by widespread public consultation. It will help to improve access to the home care services that people need in an affordable and sustainable way. The system of regulation for home care will help to ensure that the public can be confident that the services provided are of a high standard.

As this scheme is being developed, Fine Gael will ensure that the existing home care services are streamlined with duplication removed making it easier for people to understand what they can avail of and how.

### **Future of the Fair Deal Scheme**

Currently the capital value of an individual's principal private residence is included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is known as the three year cap.

Under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, contributions based on the capital value of farms and businesses are not generally capped at three years. Fine Gael is amending the scheme to apply the three year cap to farm or business assets. This measure is to ensure family succession can be effected where previously succession planning may not have been an option.

## Housing choice in older age

The housing requirements of people change through their life cycle. The housing requirements of an older couple, or an older person living alone, are usually different to when they were younger. While access to home care packages will allow people to remain in their homes for longer, in many instances their home is unsuitable for their changed needs and while they would like to remain in their community, there is no appropriate alternative accommodation. We will ensure that the approach to planning changes so that there is a good mix of accommodation, for people of all ages, in communities across our country. Under Fine Gael in government the Department of Health and the Department of Housing are working together for the first time ever to develop joint policy options for older persons. This new approach will ensure that health and social care options will form an integral part of developing new housing options with services attached to the developments.

## Reducing the costs faced by older people

In Budget 2019, Fine Gael reduced the prescription charge for medical card holders over the age of 70 from €2 per item to €1.50 per item. We will seek to lower these costs further in the years ahead.

Under the Drugs Payment Scheme, the maximum a household pays in a month for approved prescribed drugs, medicines and certain appliances is €134. We will seek to reduce the maximum a household pays further in the years ahead.

## Enabling those who want to work later in life, to do so

More and more older people wish to stay within the workforce for longer. With their wealth of experience, coupled with a tightening workforce, they have a significant and valuable contribution to make. However, while the legal barriers to post-retirement age working are being removed, there are still issues surrounding stereotyping and confidence. As part of the Future Jobs Programme, Fine Gael will ensure that more older people who want to continue to stay in the workforce are enabled to do so.

There are also older people who, while not wanting to remain in the workforce, have significant skills that they wish to contribute to society and in particular to their local communities. This could be as mentors or serving on the boards of community organisations. Fine Gael will ensure that this is a significant plank of the forthcoming National Strategy for Volunteering.



## Chapter 5

### Northern Ireland and the future of our shared island

Bunreacht na hÉireann affirms our national aspiration for territorial unity. Fine Gael, the United Ireland Party, shares that aspiration based on the principle of consent and a clear majority, North and South, being in favour. We believe that uniting people is even more important than uniting territory.

Fine Gael has consistently worked to achieve a peaceful and prosperous future for the people of this island. In government, we have helped agree the Sunningdale Agreement, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration, the Stormont House Agreement and the Fresh Start Agreement.

The strong and consistent calls from across all sections of the community in Northern Ireland for the devolved institutions to operate must be heeded. The devolved power-sharing institutions are at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement and they are the best means for achieving accountable, representative decision making for all the people of Northern Ireland. This is a critical time for Northern Ireland. Brexit and its impacts on Northern Ireland should be dealt with by elected representatives in Northern Ireland through the devolved institutions. There are many important decisions that have an impact on public services and people's lives that are waiting to be taken by a new Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. So the restoration of the devolved institutions needs to happen as soon as possible.

Fine Gael is deeply concerned at the continuing impasse in Northern Ireland. Some memories may have faded, but the legacy of loss, injury, fear and violence has left deep scars. The peace process is fragile and, like the Good Friday Agreement, must be protected.

Fine Gael in government has been engaging with the British government on the imperative for both governments to chart a way forward so that the operation of the devolved institutions of the Agreement can be restored. We are in regular contact with the British government and with the leaders of all the political parties.

In parallel with our efforts to get Stormont back up-and-running, we have sought to revive structures of the Good Friday

Agreement which fell into abeyance under Fianna Fáil. We have successfully reinvigorated the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, which most recently met in November. At that meeting, both governments re-affirmed their shared commitment to securing the operation of the devolved power-sharing Executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland, and the consequent resumption of meetings of the North South Ministerial Council at the earliest opportunity.

Both governments are agreed that a new political process is required to get beyond the current impasse and secure the necessary agreement between the parties on operating the devolved institutions again. We are working to see this process in place as soon as possible.

Protecting the Northern Ireland Peace Process is at the forefront of our approach to Brexit. This includes the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process, maintaining EU support for the Peace Process, supporting continued North-South cooperation and ensuring there is no border infrastructure of any kind on the island of Ireland.

The Good Friday Agreement has profoundly transformed lives on these islands. And it will continue to do so. It remains the cornerstone of the peace process and the fundamental framework for relationships across these islands. The people of this island voted overwhelmingly for it and continue to believe in it.

This is a shared island, with a shared future. We want to shape that future together for the benefit of all our people. Our vision for the island of Ireland embraces all identities, religions and minorities. We have always been about building relationships and bringing communities and people together. We recognise that unionism is integral to Irish culture, heritage and history and we respect it.

Our vision aligns with the Good Friday Agreement aspiration of “equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity” and fully equal rights for same-sex couples and LGBT people across the island. Our vision harnesses the potential of the entire island of Ireland, where students move freely around the island, where patients access high quality healthcare and where trade flows smoothly. Fine Gael is committed to identifying, resourcing and developing stronger partnerships on both sides of the border. Thousands of people cross the border each day. They are people running a business, going to work, going to university, visiting family or accessing public services. We need to facilitate that movement.

In the absence of power-sharing at Stormont, we will continue to act in the best interests of all the people of Ireland, North and South. In keeping with the architecture of the Good Friday Agreement, we want to develop the three interlocking relationships on our two islands – between communities in Northern Ireland, between North and South on the island of Ireland, and across the Irish Sea.

## **Deeper and wider North-South cooperation**

Regardless of Brexit, it makes sense on an island the size of Ireland to collaborate across a range of public services and on key infrastructure projects such as the N2/A5/N14 and the Narrow Water Bridge. We strongly support the North/South bodies and want to use them to foster deeper, practical North-South cooperation.

Fine Gael in government will work with our partners in the North to deliver necessary and transformative projects that are in our mutual best interests. These cover healthcare, transport, tourism, research, education and energy to name just a few.

## **North-South Connectivity**

Improved connectivity across all our island is essential to our combined long-term prosperity. Fine Gael is committed to improving the rail line between the three largest cities on our island, Dublin, Cork and Belfast. We will carry out an economic evaluation of a high speed rail link between Dublin-Belfast, Dublin-Limerick Junction and Dublin-Cork, and compare that to what could be achieved by existing line upgrades. We will then advance the best option. As previously stated, we want to improve access from Dublin to Derry and Donegal.

## **Further East-West cooperation after Brexit**

The United Kingdom will continue be our nearest neighbour, the largest market for many of our exports and where many of our family and friends will continue to live, study and work. The role of our respective governments as co-guarantors of



the Good Friday Agreement, the keystone of the process that has secured peace in Northern Ireland and underpins power-sharing and North-South cooperation, will be unchanged by Brexit.

We want to protect and strengthen our relationship with the UK in the years after Brexit. As set out in 'Global Ireland', the government will:

- review all aspects of our presence in the UK and strengthen our diplomatic and enterprise teams. As a first step, we will commit additional resources to our embassy in London and reinforce our agency presence in Manchester and Glasgow;
- open a new consulate in Cardiff next year and an additional consulate in another UK location post-2019; and
- confirm in early 2019 a new structure to facilitate high-level meetings of Irish and UK Heads of Government, Ministers and senior officials to sustain East-West cooperation after Britain leaves the EU.

### **Giving all Irish citizens a vote in the Presidential election**

The Office of the President represents more than just the citizens living in Ireland, it represents all Irish citizens. We support extending the franchise at Presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the state. This referendum should take place on the date of the local and European Elections in May 2019. If passed, this will allow Irish citizens in Northern Ireland and around the world to vote in the next presidential elections.





## Chapter 6

# Protecting our environment and moving decisively towards a carbon neutral future

Climate change is the existential challenge of our generation. We must protect our planet. Fine Gael's guiding principle is that we intend to hand over guardianship and stewardship of our planet to future generations in a much better state than we inherited it. We are a small country but we have a big role to play in meeting this challenge at home and on the world stage.

Our ambition is that:

- we move as a society towards a future where our fossil fuel usage is significantly reduced by 2030 and we are on a clear trajectory towards carbon neutrality in 2050;
- we have consensus, across society and politics, on how to achieve this so that future governments will not undo progress made;
- we reduce our waste, specifically single use plastics, and increase our recycling; and
- we protect our marine resources and improve air quality.

We acknowledge that progress to date in terms of reducing our carbon emissions has not been sufficient and that the policy tools employed heretofore have not yielded adequate results. We will therefore review all aspects of our climate action policy approach and, informed by that review, and the findings of the special Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, set out a new all-of-government plan to achieving our targets for 2030 and 2050 in early 2019. In developing new approaches, we will be looking at other countries to see what has worked well, and how it could be adapted and implemented here.

This will require significant new interventions that need buy-in from all political parties so that they are not reversed by future governments. It also requires broad societal backing for those interventions to be delivered upon, and public engagement will be a major part of this initiative.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

## **Project Ireland 2040**

'Project Ireland 2040' ends the laissez-faire, developer-led approach to planning which has been the status quo over our state's history. It provides a new approach to spatial planning that places the citizen and their needs at the centre of planning decisions. By its emphasis on planned future development we will be able to ensure that in the future the carbon footprint of residential, commercial and industrial activity is reduced by greater use of existing infrastructure, more focus on new developments to be within the existing footprint of town, villages and cities, and less greenfield development.

Furthermore, 'Project Ireland 2040's investment programme places climate action at the centre of future infrastructure development with €22 billion of the total €116 billion investment package devoted to the objective of transitioning to a Low-Carbon and Climate-Resilient Society.

## **Setting a long-term price on Carbon Tax to help move us away from fossil fuels**

The level of investment in 'Project Ireland 2040' for climate action is unprecedented. However it will not be sufficient by itself to meet our 2030 targets for emissions and renewable energy. Behavioural change at all levels in society is therefore crucial.

International experience shows that one of the most effective ways of encouraging such behavioural change is through signalling the future price of carbon i.e. how much petrol, diesel, coal, and other fossil fuels will cost. Therefore, as set out in Budget 2019 Fine Gael supports putting in place a long-term trajectory for Carbon Tax increases out to 2030. This will be informed by the recommendations of the Climate Change Advisory Council, as well as the report of the special Oireachtas Committee which is due to report in early 2019.

## **Helping people reduce their energy bills and consumption through better home insulation**

Improving the insulation of people's homes will keep homes warmer and reduce heating bills. It will also reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. The energy efficiency requirements of new homes being built are of the highest standards internationally. However there is a large amount of older homes which were built before those standards, and which need to be retrofitted with better insulation.

As provided in 'Project Ireland 2040', we support investment of €4 billion in the period 2018 to 2030, along with taxation and regulatory measures, in order to improve energy efficiency of Irish homes. Funding is provided for just under 30,000 home energy efficiency upgrades per annum to an average BER of C by 2021. Under 'Project Ireland 2040', we will increase grant supported energy efficient renovations to circa 45,000 to a BER of B from 2021.

## **Removing coal from the grid**

In line with 'Project Ireland 2040', Fine Gael will ensure that coal is removed from the Irish electricity generation network by 2025 by converting Moneypoint to a lower carbon alternative.

## **Growing the contribution of renewables to our energy mix**

Fine Gael is committed to Ireland making a major contribution to the European Union's target that 32% of all energy should come from renewable sources. The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) was recently submitted to the European Commission for approval.

We will monitor the implementation of the RESS and make changes where required in order to ensure that it delivers on its three underlying principles:

1. making the greatest possible contribution to the EU's 2030 targets in a cost-effective fashion;
2. community ownership and partnership; and
3. increased renewable technology diversity.

Offshore wind in particular can play a major role in the achievement of our long-term renewable targets. To date, Ireland has only one offshore fixed wind farm generating electricity off the Wicklow Coast. With recent advances in technology and falling costs, we will step up our efforts to promote offshore wind and ensure we have a well-functioning regulatory regime. We will prioritise the publication and enactment of the Maritime Area and Foreshore Amendment Bill.

We will ensure that the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) is delivered. This is open to all non-domestic heat users e.g. commercial, industrial, agricultural, district heating, public sector and other non-domestic heat users. The Scheme is made up of two mechanisms – an on-going operational subsidy for biomass boiler and anaerobic digestion heating systems and an installation grant for electric heat pumps.

## **A decisive move to public transport (trains, trams, buses and bikes)**

'Project Ireland 2040' is the first time that public transport has been placed at the heart of government expenditure and in the planning process. Over the next decade, more than €7 billion is committed to new public transport projects in our cities, while future planning and development is being required to place public transport at its centre.

Fine Gael is fully committed to over the next decade delivering the Busconnects programme in Dublin, Cork and Galway. This will significantly reduce journey times on buses, provide more direct routes and make the bus a significantly more attractive prospect for commuters. It will also segregate bikes from other traffic, thereby making cycling a safer, more enjoyable, and more attractive prospect also.

Fine Gael in government will also ensure the delivery of the Metrolink and Dart Expansion projects in the Greater Dublin Area. This will ensure that Dublin has a transport network on a par with its European and global peers. As stated in 'Project Ireland 2040', the new Cork Transport Strategy will evaluate the potential of a Light Rail Corridor or a Bus Rapid Transit to serve the envisaged huge increase in population in the Cork area. Further movement away from cars and towards walking, cycling, bus, tram and rail will help reduce our emissions. However, the decision outlined within 'Project Ireland 2040' to ensure that all new buses purchased for the urban bus network from mid-2019 are low emission will mean that the emissions from public transport will be reduced.

## **Promotion of electric vehicles and other low emissions vehicles**

Fine Gael wants to transition the car transport fleet to electricity. As set out in 'Project Ireland 2040', we are targeting at least 500,000 electric vehicles on our roads by 2030 and no new non-zero emission vehicles sold in Ireland after 2030. We will introduce and pass legislation to give effect to this ban. We will:

- build out the network of charging points;
- improve take-up of purchase grant scheme for taxis and hackneys;
- extend the VRT relief and the 0% Benefit in Kind rate for EVs;
- promote special €120 low rate of motor tax for EVs; and
- continue to fund the EV Public Awareness Programme.

Developing an extensive network of charging points is a key challenge in the take-up of electric vehicles. The €500 million Climate Action Fund sought applications in this regard and we will examine further capital investment to develop the network.

Natural Gas Vehicles are a more environmentally-friendly alternative to traditional petrol or diesel vehicles. Building on the accelerated capital allowance scheme announced in Budget 2019, we will continue to incentivise NGVs to diversify the national fleet.

## **Promoting cycling as a mode of transport**

Fine Gael wants to build on the recent increases in the number of people cycling to work in urban environments. To increase take-up, we must make the road network a friendly and safe environment for cyclists, while ensuring that all road users adhere to the rules of the road. As part of 'Project Ireland 2040', a network of next generation bus corridors under BusConnects will include segregated cycle lanes, providing a safe environment for inexperienced and experienced cyclists

alike. For example, in Dublin this will see almost 200km of high quality segregated cycling facilities provided. We are also investing €110 million in cycling/walking up until 2021 as well as €135 million for Sustainable Urban Transport.

## **Our agri-food sector playing its part in tackling climate change**

Irish agriculture is one of the most carbon efficient producers of beef and milk. In that regard, any reduction in output which then results in higher output by less carbon efficient producers would be counterproductive from a global perspective.

However, we must acknowledge that agriculture accounts for approximately a third of our greenhouse gas emissions. There is no room for complacency. We must continue to make improvements in terms of sustainability and environmental performance on all of our farms. Therefore we need to continue to introduce innovative policies to meet our long-term ambitions for the agriculture, forest and land-use sector. We will work towards reducing agricultural emissions insofar as we can, increasing carbon sequestration, and increasing fossil fuel and energy intensive materials displacement and substitution. We will achieve this through policies aimed at improving farm efficiency, animal breeding strategies, animal health and welfare policies and through the better use of technology. We will also continue to develop Origin Green which is raising the profile of sustainable farming.

This will allow us to move towards an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production. We will place climate mitigation at the centre of the successor strategy to Food Wise 2025.

## **Safe and sustainable water infrastructure**

Our water infrastructure is creaking due to decades of underinvestment. The decision to establish Irish Water as a public utility to replace the 34 local authorities responsible for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure was clearly the right thing to do given the progress made in recent years in terms of better water quality and reduced leakage. We now have a single body which has the ability to invest and plan for the future water needs of our expanding population. We will retain Irish Water in public ownership as a national standalone water utility.

'Project Ireland 2040' commits €8.5 billion to necessary investment in our water infrastructure over the next decade. Fine Gael will deliver upon this investment which will see a major programme of leak repairs, and invest in drinking and wastewater facilities across the state.

In line with 'Project Ireland 2040' we will continue to invest in the non-Irish Water, Rural Water Programme.

## **Banning single use plastics and promoting recycling**

There are a wide variety of essential uses for plastics in modern society. However plastics are also remarkably persistent, often have toxic and other harmful impacts and are a major contributor to litter both on land and sea. Fine Gael is fully committed to the reduction in our usage of plastics.

The European Commission proposed on May 2018 new EU-wide rules to target the ten single-use plastic products most often found on Europe's beaches and seas, as well as lost and abandoned fishing gear. Together these constitute 70% of all marine litter items. Action on this issue is best dealt within a European context to have the greatest impact. Once a decision is made on a European level we will move quickly to give effect to that in domestic legislation. We will also enact legislation to ban plastic microbeads used in cosmetics, cleansing products and detergents which are having a particularly detrimental impact on marine fauna and wildlife.

In addition to this, we will continue to support the efforts of Repak and retailers to reduce the level of packaging waste being placed on the market place and to increase the level of recycling. As reported by the Environmental Protection Agency, Ireland has a recovery rate of over 85% for all packaging waste (compared to an EU target of 60%) and a recycling rate of 67% (compared to an EU target of 55%). For plastics this is 80% and 36% (EU target is 22.5%) respectively. However, we must be conscious that recent decisions by countries, most notably China, to limit their intake of recycling waste makes the need for us to reduce the level of waste packaging being produced greater and also the need to increase the capacity within Ireland and the European Union for recycling to be carried out here.

## Clean lungs for all of Ireland - from our countryside to our city centres

Air pollution is a major cause of illness and premature death. In Ireland it is estimated that there are 1,600 premature deaths due to air pollution with the overall health-related costs being over €2 billion per year. Fine Gael will implement an ambitious national clean air strategy, which will dramatically improve the quality of our air in all parts of the country.

## Better prepared for more extreme and unpredictable weather

A major part of our response to climate change must be to better prepare ourselves for extreme weather events. 'Project Ireland 2040' provides for almost €1 billion to be spent on capital works programmes to minimise the impacts of river and coastal flooding on society through the implementation of the 29 Flood Risk Management Plans.

These schemes range from very large schemes costing in excess of €15 million each to smaller schemes that can be progressed by the Local Authorities. Five of the larger schemes are:

- Limerick city and environs;
- Tralee;
- Dundalk;
- Carlingford and Greenore; and
- Drogheda.

We must also ensure that our emergency response structures are robust and sufficient to respond to the increasingly regular extreme weather events that our country faces. We will ensure that in response to each major weather event, an emphasis is placed on learning how the response could be improved.

## Our work on climate change internationally

We will play our part in responding multilaterally to the global challenge of climate change. It is part of our vision for 'Global Ireland'. As Budget 2019 illustrated, we are serious about significantly increasing the international development budget up to 2030.

In 2017, we spent €58m of our international development programme on climate interventions, which represents approximately 11% of the overall Irish Aid spend. Fine Gael will ensure that climate action will take on an increasing significance in our overseas development programme in the years ahead, in line with the forthcoming White Paper on Ireland's international development policy.

Ireland is well regarded internationally for our work on climate change through our overseas development programme and for our leadership on the Sustainable Development Goals. As with our work internationally, we want to be a leader in responding to climate change domestically. As part of our overall review of climate policy in 2019, we will be examining best practice internationally to see what we can borrow from other countries, including the potential of implementing dedicated legislation, by way of all-party consensus, to ensure this and future governments protect our planet.





## Chapter 7

# Ireland – An island at the centre of the world and at the heart of Europe

Fine Gael believes in an Ireland at the heart of the common European home that we helped build. We brought Ireland into the Single European Act and Single Market and we are a pro-European party. Our commitment to Europe is aligned with our ambition to be an island at the centre of the world. On the international stage, we must be a voice for peace, multilateralism, free trade, free markets, security, sustainability and social justice.

Our policy therefore is:

- the building of a strong European Union focused on further integration where that benefits citizens and greater subsidiarity where appropriate;
- maintaining a close partnership with our nearest neighbour, the United Kingdom, after Brexit;
- expanding our links with and presence in all parts of the world; and
- taking a leadership role in multilateral bodies like the United Nations and on issues such as international development, hunger and education.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

### **Delivering Global Ireland - Ireland's global footprint to 2025**

Fine Gael is fully committed to implementing 'Global Ireland', the ambitious plan for the doubling of Ireland's overseas impact over the next seven years. The world is changing rapidly with events like Brexit; changing attitudes to trade, tax and migration; and the shifting of political and economic power to the global south and east. As a small country reliant on international trade, Ireland must respond to these trends now, not in five or ten years' time. That is why Global Ireland must



be implemented now. It will be done by doing things differently, doing things better, and harnessing all the overseas activities of government together to the greatest possible extent. In practice, this means:

- opening up new embassies and consulates in important locations around Europe and the world;
- strengthening existing missions;
- investing more in our agencies, such as the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia and Tourism Ireland to avail of new markets and opportunities;
- sharing our culture more widely around the world and deepening links to our global diaspora;
- building new air and sea connections; and
- welcoming more international students to Ireland.

We are also fully committed to Ireland's campaign to seek election to the United Nations Security Council for the 2021-2022 term.

## The future of Europe

Irish people are among the most pro-European citizens in the EU. We want to shape the Europe of the future, to share our designs and ideas and not just respond to the plans of others.

In looking at the future direction of Europe, Fine Gael believes it must be guided by the following principles:

1. continuing to do well what it currently does well;
2. focus on the big new challenges facing Europe and its citizens;
3. where appropriate, devolve some powers back to member states, municipalities and regions; and
4. engage citizens more and engage them more directly.

The solidarity of our EU partners throughout the Brexit negotiations has been, as expected, strong and united. The strength of support from the 26 member states demonstrates that our international standing is stronger now than it was at any time before we joined the European Union or since. That solidarity brings with it a responsibility to help face our collective issues, and to lead and shape the future of Europe.

## Encouraging greater engagement with Europe

If Ireland is to better shape Europe's future direction, then we require a greater level of engagement between Irish citizens and the EU. Promoting European education programmes such as Erasmus and Horizon 2020; encouraging more Irish people to work in the EU institutions; and crucially, increasing the linguistic abilities of the Irish people will give Ireland more credibility at a European level while offering Irish citizens even more opportunities to live, work and travel across Europe.

We are fully committed to implementing the 'Foreign Languages Strategy 2017-2026'. This sets out a roadmap to put Ireland in the top ten countries in Europe for the teaching and learning of foreign languages, through a number of measures to improve proficiency, diversity and immersion.

## Forging new alliances in the post-Brexit European Union

From the moment Ireland joined the EEC in 1973, we were closely aligned to the actions and influence of our nearest neighbour, the UK. Now that the UK is leaving the EU, we must forge strong alliances with other member states with whom we share common goals and interests.

Ireland has much in common with the Benelux countries, the three Nordic countries and the three Baltic countries, particularly with regard to tax, trade and enterprise. We believe it is in our national long-term strategic interests to closely align ourselves with those nations and develop deeper bonds in the years ahead. However, we should not confine ourselves to any one bloc. We are close to France on agriculture, are an island nation like Malta and Cyprus, and neutral like Austria for example.

These alliances can only be secured through regular contact and communication at a ministerial, administrative and political level.

## **Presence in the European Union**

'Global Ireland' commits us over the next seven years to strengthening our permanent representation in Brussels, as well as our embassies in Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and the Nordic/Baltic countries and to open a new consulate in Frankfurt, among other actions. We will also examine the possibilities of secondments between the Irish civil and public service and the civil and public services in other EU member states to build up these links and also allow for exposure to different and potentially better ways of doing things. While a small number of these schemes are already in places, there is scope to do much more.

However, increasing our diplomatic presence without ensuring strong political engagement is a recipe for failure. As long as Fine Gael is in government we will place a premium on ministerial attendance at European Council meetings. In the 2000s, ministerial attendance at European meetings dropped off, and this damaged our standing in Europe with other member states and with the EU institutions. We must ensure that our engagements with Europe are sustained. Only Fine Gael, as the most pro-European party can be relied upon to maintain this engagement which is essential to our long term interests.

Irish people have occupied some of the most senior positions in the EU civil service over the past four decades. It is important that we maintain and build on that record. Fine Gael in government will actively encourage and facilitate Irish civil servants and private sector workers to pursue careers in the EU institutions. We will continue efforts to familiarise graduates with the Stagiaire programme and the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO), the EU's recruitment service.

## **Fine Gael, a committed member of the European People's Party**

Fine Gael is a founder member of the European People's Party (EPP). The EPP brings together the centre and centre-right political parties from across Europe and advocates in favour of a strong, transparent and efficient Europe at the service of its citizens. It is the largest and most influential political grouping in Europe, spread across dozens of countries, with many EU heads of state and government, European Commissioners, as well as Presidents Tusk and Juncker among its members. Fine Gael's membership of the EPP means that Ireland has a respected voice within this important and influential bloc and also has the opportunity to shape its direction.

Fine Gael is fully committed to the fundamental values on which the EU was built – human dignity, the social market economy, freedom, democracy, equality of opportunity, respect for human rights and the rule of law – and we will fight for those values in our engagement with EU institutions and the EPP.

## **Continuing our deep and close relationship with the United Kingdom**

Fine Gael believes that our relationship with our nearest neighbour is more profound and enduring than the issue of Brexit. Our common history is complex and ever-changing and our economies are interwoven. The United Kingdom is the place that so many of our diaspora, our family and friends, call home, where they live, work, and study.

Post-Brexit, regular meetings with UK ministers simply will not happen as a matter of course, like they do now. It will be a priority for Fine Gael that regular contact and communication between the Irish and British governments is maintained at all levels. In parallel with our efforts to get the Northern Ireland Executive back up-and-running, we have sought to revive structures of the Good Friday Agreement which fell into abeyance under Fianna Fáil. For example, we have successfully reinvigorated the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, which most recently met in November.

## **New structure for Irish-UK cooperation**

Following the latest meetings of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, the Irish and UK governments have agreed to work up new proposals on how to maintain and strengthen a high level of bilateral cooperation post-Brexit. The new model would include summits led by the Taoiseach and UK Prime Minister. It would involve senior ministers and alternate between Ireland and the UK. An annual summit of all senior Ministers would allow for cooperation across a broad range of issues of shared interest – everything from energy to environment, and from transport to technology and employment. The details of the new model will be finalised early in 2019. These structures matter as much because of the personal

interactions they help facilitate as any kind of formal agendas. British and Irish politicians and officials need to keep working and meeting together, to ensure the understanding we have of each other does not diminish.

Once the final nature of Brexit is understood, we will review all aspects of our relationship with the United Kingdom and identify the areas which require greater strengthening and focus. As a first step in this, we will strengthen our representation in our embassy in London, and open up two new consulates, one in Cardiff and another in northern England.

## **Leading on international development**

Ireland has a proud history when it comes to the developing world thanks to the historic efforts of our missionaries, our NGOs and Irish Aid. This embodies our values, but also reflects our interests. Our values recognise that preventing war, ending hunger, tackling climate change and bettering the lives of those around the world that are less fortunate is simply the right thing to do. Our interests dictate that by doing this, we will be creating the trading partners of tomorrow, dealing with the source of Europe's migration problems and demonstrating to our peers in the developed world that we are prepared to give as well as to receive.

We are committed to making incremental, sustainable progress towards the UN target of providing 0.7% of GNI\* in ODA by 2030. Already progress has been made with an increase from €707m in 2018 to €818m in 2019. To reach the 0.7% of GNI\* target, that will need to increase to €2.45 billion by 2030 on current projections. Given the scale of this commitment, we will seek to establish all-party support for this commitment in the Oireachtas. Budget 2019 marked a significant first step on this journey in allocating an additional €111 million for overseas development assistance - the highest increase in over a decade.

Our commitment to significantly increase the ODA budget will keep us on track towards achieving our commitments under the 2030 Agenda and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

## **Re-imagining the relationship of Ireland and the EU with Africa**

A much more intensive and meaningful EU-Africa partnership is required if we are to deal effectively with our shared challenges. Fine Gael in government wants to move beyond our traditional focus on aid towards building new multi-faceted partnerships with a young, swiftly growing African continent including trade, security and education. It should be one based on mutual respect and which, through partnership, helps the two continents deal with the multiple challenges of climate change, food security, energy security, water security, migration, corruption, and regional conflict. We support an EU Marshall Plan for the countries of Africa.

## **Advocating for a renewal of the Middle East peace process**

Fine Gael believes in a two-state solution to the Middle East Peace Process, which will allow Israel and Palestine to live side by side in peace and security. Ireland will support international efforts to deliver in good faith on these long-overdue objectives. Ireland will play a leading role in strengthening the EU's response to the construction of settlements on Palestinian territory in order to help create the political and physical space in which a two-state solution can be achieved. We will also seek to build consensus at EU level. It is through multilateral engagement and maintaining open lines of communications that Ireland can act most effectively on these issues. We will deliver on our commitment to recognise the state of Palestine as part of a lasting settlement or if we feel it makes a constructive contribution to the Middle East peace process.

## **Being the European 'bridge' to the USA**

The Irish and US economies are closely intertwined with 150,000 people employed in Ireland by US companies and 70% of FDI into Ireland originating from the US. In the other direction, more than 100,000 people are employed in Irish enterprises located across all 50 states in the US. Policy, taxation and trade changes may present obstacles in the years ahead, but we are committed to strengthening and deepening that relationship culturally, diplomatically and economically.

Under Fine Gael in government, we have already expanded our network in the United States from its traditional base, in cities such as Washington, Boston, New York, Chicago and San Francisco, and economic hubs such as Austin. We are committed to the ambitious expansion of our diplomatic, enterprise and cultural footprint in the USA as outlined in 'Global

Ireland'. We will be publishing a new US and Canada strategy early in 2019, which will flesh out new initiatives to strengthen the transatlantic relationship. This will see us broaden our engagement with the diaspora, expand the IDA's presence in Washington DC, New York, Seattle, Raleigh Durham in North Carolina, and Mountain View in California, expand Enterprise Ireland's presence in New York and Boston, as well as increase resources for Tourism Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland.

In the context of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, we will position Ireland as the EU's bridge between Ireland and the United States, acting as a strong advocate for free trade, as well as closer economic and cultural ties across the Atlantic. We shall seek to lead within the EU on creating a common transatlantic approach to data protection, privacy and the protection of intellectual property.

## **Connecting with our Diaspora**

Fine Gael will develop a new policy and strategic approach to improving linkages with our 70-million strong Irish diaspora overseas, including the publication of a new diaspora strategy in 2020.

The Office of the President represents more than just the citizens living in Ireland, it represents all Irish citizens. That is why we support extending the franchise at Presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the state. This referendum will take place on the date of the local and European Elections in May 2019. If passed, this will allow Irish citizens - no matter where they live - to vote in the next Presidential elections. This will be a tangible demonstration of the import that Fine Gael attaches to our diaspora.

Fine Gael will continue to support Irish citizens in the US by (i) increasing pathways for legal migration by Irish citizens to the US and (ii) finding a solution for undocumented Irish citizens to regularise their status.

## **Maintaining our commitment on peacekeeping**

Since 1958 Ireland has had a continuous presence on United Nations peace operations. This is one example of the patriotism and professionalism displayed by members of the Defence Forces, both at home and overseas, that is of great pride to the Irish people, as well as being a real source of international leadership. We will continue to ensure that the Defence Forces have the appropriate resources to maintain that commitment in the time ahead. Utilising this experience and Ireland's position of military neutrality we will actively engage on the international stage and continue to espouse the importance of multilateralism in support of international peace and security. As part of this, we will also develop a new Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training in the Curragh.



## Chapter 8

### Security and justice in a modern Ireland

Almost one hundred years on from the establishment of the Garda Síochána, we are embarking on a major transformation. We established the expert Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland to undertake a root and branch analysis of policing in Ireland. Its blueprint for reform will transform An Garda Síochána into a model of policing excellence delivering the best policing services to the people of Ireland. We will set out an implementation plan and deliver upon it, so that the transformation of An Garda Síochána will be complete by its centenary in 2022.

As a country, we are rightly proud of the Defence Forces. We are proud of those who put their lives on the line on our behalf, especially overseas. Ireland is the only country with unbroken United Nations service. The Defence Forces contribute to the societal bedrock that underpins our national well-being across social, economic and environmental elements. In contributing to wider international security, particularly through Ireland's commitment to collective security through membership of the UN and the EU, the Defence Forces make an active contribution to broader well-being which in turn supports international relations and economic prosperity.

Our ambition is that:

- we have a world-class policing service focused on frontline policing;
- we protect Irish citizens and vindicate their rights through a reformed justice system which recognises and protects the rights of victims;
- we meet the targets for our Defence Forces as set out in the 2015 Defence White Paper;
- increased supports are provided for current and retired members of the Defence Forces; and
- innovative responses to new and emerging criminal threats are found.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

## **A reformed policing service, fit for the needs of a rapidly changing Ireland**

For decades in Ireland, there has been a debate about how best to modernise our policing service, the structure of which has changed little since independence.

In government, we recognised the damaging impact of recent controversies in An Garda Síochána and the urgent need for more effective oversight, accountability and cultural transformation. For this reason that we established an independent Policing Authority which is driving reform within the Garda organisation through consistent oversight and through promoting an ethical, accountable and professional model of policing.

Building on these reforms, Fine Gael established the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland to undertake a comprehensive analysis of An Garda Síochána and its oversight arrangements. In September 2018, the Commission published its landmark report. Fine Gael is committed to delivering a roadmap to implement its recommendations by the end of 2018. This roadmap will set out clearly our proposals in response to the Commission's recommendations.

We strongly endorse the message at the heart of the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland: that Gardaí need to focus on policing duties; too much of their time is spent on other work and this has to change. The report clearly states that more Gardaí are needed on the front line and should be highly visible in communities; a recommendation we strongly endorse which is also echoed in the most recent report from the Disclosures Tribunal. The Commission highlights the need for Gardaí to partner with communities as they undertake their policing work. We believe community policing must be the heart and soul of what An Garda Síochána does on a day-to-day basis.

We are committed to the work of the Effectiveness and Renewal Group for the Department of Justice and Equality, which will ensure that the department can best perform its important role in serving the public effectively.

## **Sustainable recruitment to the Gardaí and the Garda Reserve enabling more Gardaí to be out on the street**

The economic crash had a detrimental effect on Garda numbers as recruitment stopped. Fine Gael in government restarted Garda recruitment, and we will ensure that there are 15,000 Gardaí in place by 2021. Since we reopened the Garda College just under 2,200 new recruits have attested and been assigned to duties nationwide. Budget 2019 makes provision for up to 800 new recruits, recognising that the new Commissioner is best placed to determine needs in the context of the Commission on the Future of Policing Report.

The complexities of modern policing require appropriate civilian experts and support staff working alongside members of An Garda Síochána as they go about their policing work. Civilianisation is a crucial aspect of our recruitment drive and also our reform agenda for the Gardaí. Gardaí should be doing policing work, not paperwork. We will continue the emphasis on civilianisation to provide vital expertise and free up Gardaí for frontline duties.

The Garda Reform Programme includes a strategic review of the Garda Reserve; our vision is to build a strong Reserve that is rooted in local communities. We will continue to provide policy and financial supports to ensure that the Garda Reserve can become a successful integral aspect of community life in Ireland.

We recognise that criminals increasingly exploit technology and we will ensure that members of An Garda Síochána are appropriately equipped and trained to tackle all forms of criminality.

## **Update and modernise our justice system**

Family breakdowns and child custody and protection proceedings must be dealt with in a sensitive manner, without delay. We have introduced significant legislative reforms including the Mediation Act 2017 which encourages the greater use of alternative dispute resolutions which are less adversarial, less costly, and more efficient. We will continue to bring forward reforms to assist families at what can be a very difficult and vulnerable time. We will introduce a dedicated Family Court to streamline family law and structure the court to ensure it operates in a user-friendly and efficient manner in the best interests of those who avail of the court's services.



We will undertake a major review of the District Court to ensure this critical part of the justice system is equipped to deal with modern demands. We will establish a Judicial Council to promote excellence in the Irish judiciary. We will provide for sentencing guidelines in the Judicial Council Bill to promote consistency in sentencing.

We will introduce new legislation on criminal procedures which will facilitate pre-trial hearings to reduce the length of complex trials such as those involving white collar crime and corruption.

It is important that our courts perform their important work in an efficient way. To enhance court efficiency, we have asked the President of the High Court to review and reform the administration of civil justice in the state. We will support this important work and ensure that effective measures are taken to improve citizens' access to justice.

## **Supporting victims**

We will bring forward important changes to the parole system, placing the Parole Board of Ireland on an independent statutory footing and to take account of the concerns of victims and survivors.

We recently commenced a review of the protections for vulnerable witnesses in the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences to identify the practice and/or legislative steps which can be taken to better aid vulnerable witnesses in these tragic cases.

We recognise that under-reporting of sexual and domestic violence has long characterised these areas of criminality. Therefore, we will ensure a follow up survey of Sexual Assault and Violence in Ireland to update the data from the landmark 2002 report, and to ensure that government policy is informed by accurate, up to date data. We will take steps to ensure that such research does not take place on an ad hoc basis but becomes part of how we gather data as a state.

We will change the law so that victims of sexual offences are offered the opportunity to give a further victim impact statement when an offender applies to have their name removed from the Sex Offenders Register.

## **Giving effect to the Istanbul Convention**

The Istanbul Convention is a significant legal instrument in the fight against domestic and sexual violence. Since signing the Convention in 2015, Fine Gael in government has prioritised work in a range of departments and agencies to implement at an early date the legislative and administrative actions required to enable Ireland to ratify the Convention.

Those actions are set out in the whole-of-government 'Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021', the implementation of which is monitored by a group comprising stakeholders from government departments and agencies and non-governmental agencies. The enactment of the Domestic Violence Act 2018 is a significant advancement in the government's progress towards ratification of the Convention as it delivers a number of essential actions required. We will legislate for extraterritorial jurisdiction in respect of offences covered by the Convention and this will enable Ireland to ratify the Convention in 2019.

## **Tackling White Collar Crime**

We do not tolerate white collar or economic crime. In November 2017 we brought forward a suite of anti-corruption measures including tough new laws and a pilot joint agency task force which brings together a number of state agencies. Our suite of measures includes a review of the effectiveness of all state bodies with a role in the prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of engagement on fraud and corruption. We will consider the outcomes of this review and either increase the number of specific joint agency task forces or bring together all relevant state agencies in a new multi-agency body. We will be guided by expert advice and research outcomes.

We will establish the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement as a standalone statutory body, and give it the flexibility and resources to do its job to the highest possible standards. The Criminal Justice (Corruption Offences) Act 2018 will be rigorously enforced and we will ensure that robust anti-money laundering legislation is in place.

## Supporting the work of the Special Crime Task Force and Armed Response Units

We will ensure An Garda Síochána is resourced to tackle organised crime through the Special Crime Task Force and Armed Response Units. We will work closely with partner governments and police forces around the world to ensure that gangsters and criminals cannot exploit free movement and trade flows.

## Reducing Recidivism

Recognising that 25% of recidivists are responsible for 75% of crime, we will continue to work to reduce recidivism by extending the successful Joint Agency Response to Crime, which we established in 2016 to manage prolific offenders (J-ARC) to more locations around the state. We will also extend the Youth Joint Agency Response to Crime (YJ-ARC), launched in 2017 which targets prolific offenders aged 16-21.

## Introducing a Fagin's Law

We will legislate to criminalise adults who groom children to commit crimes and ask the Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality and the Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs to consider the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection regarding the age of criminal responsibility.

## Making the internet safer - driving implementation of the Action Plan for Online Safety

The internet has transformed our lives. It allows us to connect with loved ones in an instant or find information on pretty much anything. However, it is important to acknowledge that illegal and harmful content can be encountered easily online, and while this presents challenges for all internet users, it is children that are most vulnerable.

Online safety requires a whole-of-government response incorporating criminal justice measures such as strengthened legislation and greater enforcement to tackle illegal content coupled with action to help educate and inform people - in particular parents - how to avoid exposure to content or internet activity that while legal, may be harmful. That is why Fine Gael is driving implementation of the Action Plan for Online Safety.

The 'Action Plan for Online Safety' was published in 2018 and the actions contained in it cut across six government departments - underlying the range and breadth of the issues involved. Through this Action Plan the government will work with stakeholders to implement actions, over an 18 month period, that are achievable and which will have the greatest impact on online safety for everyone in Ireland. Among the actions are:

- creating a National Advisory Council on Online Safety to provide advice to government on online safety policy issues with stakeholder input and engagement;
- legislation for new online criminal offences;
- a national communications campaign and single identity – Be Safe Online – with key online safety messages targeted at specific groups, including children and young people; parents, guardians and teachers; and
- the creation of a single online access point through which all available Online Safety resources can be accessed.

Fine Gael is committed to protecting children online. We believe the era of self-regulation is over. However, if we are to introduce further legislation we must ensure that it is robust, effective, and meets the urgent public policy need to protect children which we are trying to address.

## Establishing an independent gambling regulator

We will introduce an independent gambling regulator to ensure that abuses are eradicated and public safety is protected. We will emulate best practice in the design of the new regulatory body and ensure that it is equipped to respond to a rapidly evolving gambling environment.

## Delivering the ambition of the 2015 White Paper on Defence

The publication of the 2015 White Paper on Defence set out a national policy framework for the next decade. This policy framework is flexible and responsive given the dynamic nature of the security environment and enables the Defence Forces to be adaptive to changing circumstances.

Fine Gael is committed to ensuring our Defence Forces are in a position to meet the security requirements of the state and to undertake our international obligations.

Capability development, equipment planning and infrastructure upgrades are essential, that is why we are investing in:

- force protection assets for the army including the delivery of ten new armoured logistic vehicles and an upgrade programme for the eighty MOWAG Armoured Personnel Carriers;
- three new fixed wing utility aircraft for the Aer Corp, replacing the existing supporting Cessna fleet and providing for the transportation of troops and equipment, medical evacuations and air ambulance taskings. The first two aircraft will be delivered in 2019;
- naval services capability following the delivery of a fourth Offshore Patrol Vessel and providing for mid-life refit of LÉ Niamh and LÉ Róisín;
- accommodation facilities in the Defence Forces Training Centre, Cathal Brugha Barracks and Casement Aerodrome; and
- training facilities in the Defence Forces Training Centre, Sarsfield Barracks, Limerick and Stephens Barracks, Kilkenny.

## Increasing supports for Defence Forces veterans

In wearing the uniform of the Defence Forces our soldiers embody the patriotism of citizens of our state. That relationship, between soldier and citizen, requires practical and formal expression. Therefore, we will continue to support the establishment of centres for retired members of the Defence Forces. These centres provide an important resource to our veterans and can assist them in accessing services while at the same time providing a social outlet and network for retired members. This will provide a public recognition of the unique role members of the Defence Forces play.



## Chapter 9

### Removing barriers to opportunity for women

We know that diversity and broad representation leads to better decision-making and a more productive environment and workforce. Fine Gael is committed to equality between men and women. We have made progress, but there is much more to do. Fine Gael is committed to ensuring that the barriers that still limit opportunities for too many Irish women are removed.

Votáil 100 provides a platform for significant progress in gender equality, in particular by our measures to tackle the underrepresentation of women in politics, on corporate boards, the gender pay gap and the promotion of strong female role models across all sectors.

#### Nurturing talent

We are driving the implementation of the 'Women and Girls Strategy 2017-2020'. We want young people to be inspired to enter fields that best reflect their talents, not their gender. Building on this strategy and other governmental initiatives, we will bring forward measures to promote female participation in areas where women are underrepresented. For example, we will use apprenticeships to encourage more women to work in this field of STEM, and as set out in the 'National Sports Policy' we will eliminate the gender sports participation gap. The recently published 'Gender Equality Action Plan for Higher Education Institutions 2018-2020' sets out how we plan to accelerate gender equality in higher education.

#### Promoting female entrepreneurship

Fine Gael in government is making real progress helping female entrepreneurs. In 2017, more than one in three start-ups supported by Enterprise Ireland were led by women. In 2012, that figure was just one in ten. While this increase is significant, we are determined to do more. Our ambition is that at least 40% of start-ups are female-led by 2021.

Budget 2019 increased funding for LEOs and Enterprise Ireland, both of whom play a key in supporting the global ambition of innovative Irish women. Initiatives include tailored activity such as competitive start funding, mentoring and training options.

## Ensuring that women achieve equal opportunity at the top

While women are making strides in educational attainment, it is not translating into earning power or senior decision-making roles.

In 2014, the government introduced further actions to strengthen female representation on state boards and reach the target of 40%. The gender breakdown of board members is now 40.7%, the highest proportion of female board members ever. However, the number of women serving as chairs, and indeed applying for board appointments, continues to require our focused attention.

Unfortunately, female representation on corporate boards is lagging far behind the public sector and our EU colleagues. Women make up on 18% of the boards of Irish registered ISEQ 20 companies as compared to an average of 26% for similar companies across the EU28.

This low representation in decision-making positions in Ireland represents a vast pool of untapped potential and under-utilisation of talent. Recognising this, Fine Gael in government launched Better Balance for Better Boards this summer with the intention of promoting a business-led approach to developing practical solutions and models to tackling this matter. We will ensure the measures that emanate from the working group of corporate leaders that has been established to drive this agenda, will be implemented.

## Tackling the gender pay gap

We will shortly enact legislation to require publication of the gender pay gap in large companies, and work to “name and fame” those companies that make the best efforts to breakdown gender gaps.

## More female political leaders

Fine Gael in government brought forward gender quotas for candidates in general elections and this has been a major driver of increased female representation in the Dáil. From 2023, 40% of candidates for election to the Dáil must be women for political parties to secure public funding. We are now introducing new measures to incentivise parties to run greater numbers of female candidates in the local elections.

## More affordable childcare and flexible workplaces

Affordable, quality and accessible childcare is a key enabler for parents who want or need to go out to work. Fine Gael in government has introduced childcare subsidies to families of children between 6-36 months in centre based care and to parents of children on low incomes, are in education, or hold a medical card or GP visit card. These families can receive assistance of up to €145 towards the childcare costs of their children up to the age of 15. The Affordable Childcare Scheme is one of the most effective ways in which the state can support families with childcare costs and reduce socio-economic disadvantage. We are committed to the speedy roll-out of the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

There is scope to increase the female participation rates in the 25-64 age-group. Workplaces need to introduce greater family friendly working arrangements if they are to attract and retain talent into the future. Remote working, flexible working hours, return to work supports, upskilling are tools forward-thinking companies must use to support, attract and retain staff. Fine Gael will ensure this is part of the forthcoming 'Future Jobs Programme'.

## Implementing a Women's Health Action Plan

We are committed to publishing a comprehensive 'Action Plan for Women's Health' in 2019 with a clear timetable for implementation. We will begin with the introduction of free contraception in 2019 and we will bring forward the necessary legislation to expand access further, including to long-acting reversible contraceptives. We will pass the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill and provide for public funding of IVF treatment.

The Action Plan will deal with the full range of health issues for women, drawing together actions from a range of programmes impacting the health of women and girls including the 'Early Childhood Programme' and the 'Tobacco

Programme', the 'Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme', the 'Perinatal and Mental Health Programme' and the 'Maternity and Infant Health Programme' as well as significant work under the primary care and social inclusion areas.

### **Proposing constitutional change**

We will bring forward a referendum to remove the sexist language of Article 41.2 of the Constitution which seeks to define the place of women as solely in the home engaged in domestic duties. The Constitution should be an inclusive document and this clause in particular does not have any justification today.

Outside the political sphere, we will build on the progress achieved to date through the 'National Strategy for Women and Girls' by asking the Citizens' Assembly to review the effectiveness of existing measures to tackle gender inequality and to propose new ones. The Citizens' Assembly will be given a mandate to broaden its engagement beyond NGOs to include interaction with women of all ages, from different backgrounds. The Assembly will submit a report to government within six-months setting out a roadmap to achieving greater gender equality in Ireland. Implementation of this roadmap will be monitored by the Office of the Taoiseach.

### **Using International Development Aid to promote greater opportunities for women internationally**

The promotion of gender equality and women's education is one of the priorities that will underpin our international development approach in the years ahead. This will involve funding to international bodies that are working on gender equality issues, as well as assistance to such programmes in Irish Aid partner countries. We will also increase funding to educational programmes. Education has the potential to break the cycle of poverty, particularly in relation to poverty experienced by women and girls.





## Chapter 10

### Responsible management of the public finances and building a resilient economy

Fairness is at the heart of Fine Gael's economic policy. Fairness to the citizens who pay their taxes. Fairness to those who get up early in the morning and make this country work. Fairness to the citizens who use and rely on public services. Fairness to the future generations who will inherit our country in the years to come. Bad economic management in the past was unfair to all. It resulted in huge job losses, public services being cut, taxes increased and the opportunities for future generations mortgaged by huge borrowing.

The economic mismanagement of the 2000s resulted in a lost decade for many Irish citizens, from which we are only now emerging. Fine Gael in government will never let this happen again. Care and prudence must be at the centre of our management of the economy so that we are able to take pre-emptive action to mitigate the impact of external risks like Brexit, changes to corporate tax regimes or international trade conflict. We need to keep building a mixed, resilient and balanced economy to ensure that we will never again be dependent on a single sector of our economy like construction.

As such, maintaining and developing a steady state economy where we balance our books, invest in the future and deliver incremental and sustainable increases in living standards over time is the foundation upon which our social and economic model must be built.

Our ambitions are that:

- for the first time in our nation's history we achieve sustainable full employment;
- the public finances are in surplus, that we are paying down our national debt and building up the Rainy Day Fund;
- the growing capacity of the economy enables better opportunity for all our people;

- we keep a singular focus on competitiveness and resilience, and maintain our open trading society and economy;
- talent based on high skills and innovation is the backbone of economic progress;
- the tax and social insurance system rewards work and provides a strong safety net; and
- we continue to develop world leading indigenous enterprise to match our existing position in foreign direct investment.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

## Careful management of the public finances

Fine Gael believes in responsible and careful management of the public finances based on three rules:

- when the economy is growing, we will run modest surpluses and use them to pay down debt and build up the Rainy Day Fund, thereby protecting ourselves in the long-term;
- we will not increase the rate of the current government expenditure by more than the rate of economic growth; and
- we will ensure that there is long-term and consistent level of commitment to investment in our national infrastructure.

These rules will ensure that we do not repeat the economic mistakes of the past and the unfairness that was visited on some many of our citizens during the course of the lost decade.

As a consequence of Fianna Fail's economic mismanagement, our debt levels are among the highest in the developed world standing at over €42,000 per person. Over the next five years we are spending €20 billion on interest payments on this debt, money that would be much better spent on reducing the tax burden on families or improving public services. Furthermore, while we can meet these repayments now, as the economy grows it makes sense to use some of that additional money to pay down our debt. This will protect us against future international shocks.

That is why in 2019 we are balancing the books. Thereafter we are committed to running modest surpluses and using those surpluses to pay down debt. We are also committed to using one-off and windfall gains to pay down our debt.

This is responsible management of the economy. That prudence is also why we are establishing a Rainy Day Fund and putting it on a legislative footing. This is a reserve that government can tap into if there is a significant and unexpected demand on the Exchequer in years to come.

We are guided by what we have learnt from the mistakes of the past and our commitment to never repeating them. We will ensure that when the Irish economy is in a period of sustained growth – as at present – the rate of growth in the government's current expenditure increase will, at most, be in line with the rate of economic growth. In the 3 year period before the recession public expenditure increased from €23bn to €36bn, a 57% increase, leaving us exposed when the economy turned.

However, we also recognise that we need to invest in our national infrastructure in the years ahead, both to catch up with underinvestment during the lost decade but also to prepare for the future now. So Fine Gael in government is driving implementation of 'Project Ireland 2040' and a €116 billion investment plan for the next decade, and capital investment is increasing by 25% in 2019.

## Investing for the future now

By 2040, we will have a population of 6 million. Our infrastructure already lags behind our European peers in areas like housing, roads, public transport, broadband, healthcare, water, ICT, and education. We also need to invest to prepare Ireland for a low carbon future and the consequences of climate change. Advances are being made, but due to the economic crash we have not been able to make the investments we needed over the past decade.

Fine Gael in government brought forward 'Project Ireland 2040', which consists of a €116 billion National Development Plan and is based on the National Planning Framework. For the first time in Ireland's history our planning and capital investment plans are meaningfully aligned. This will help ensure that future population and economic growth is more balanced than was the case in the past.

In 'Project Ireland 2040', the government commits to increasing the level of government investment in capital to about 4% of GNI\* per annum. This will bring us in line with mainstream European levels of capital investment, which is critical given our current demographic advantage over many of our comparator countries.

This is the appropriate and sustainable level of investment that we believe is prudent and will provide for the right level of investment in infrastructure to meet our current and future needs, without exposing the economy to risks of overheating, the crowding out of private sector investment, or the development of imbalances in the economy as occurred in the past. This approach will allow all parts of our country share in the nation's prosperity, and that this investment is done in a sustainable fashion.

## **A new vision for state enterprises**

Commercial state enterprises, both existing and new, should play an important role in the future economic and social development of Ireland. Where private enterprise fails or lacks interest or ambition, state enterprises are required.

For this reason Fine Gael has brought forward Home Building Finance Ireland and the Land Development Agency as commercial state agencies in the past year to deal with clear market failures. In the years to come we are open to the establishment of further state enterprises in situations of clear and significant market failure.

## **Introducing real accountability and culture reform to the banking sector**

Over a decade on from the Bank Guarantee, the collapse in the Irish banking sector must remain a salutary lesson. The lack of regulation and oversight by the banks' management and boards, by the Central Bank and by government must never be repeated.

Therefore, we will continue the reforms that we have been brought in at a domestic and European level over the last decade. It is clear from the Central Bank's 'Behaviour and Culture of the Irish Retail Banks' report that there is still a long road to be travelled before the sector is fit for purpose. We will monitor the effectiveness of the new Irish Banking Culture Board and will act further if the banking sector is not improving its performance.

## **Diversifying our economy to protect our prosperity**

Foreign direct investment has been at the centre of Ireland's economic model for many decades and will continue to play a central role in the years ahead. However, in order to build lasting prosperity and mitigate against external risks it is crucial that we continue to rebalance our economy so that the domestic sector continues to play a more significant role.

Our indigenous SMEs employ 70% of those working in the private sector. As the result of cross-governmental effort and consistent policy making Ireland has developed a global reputation for FDI. We need to develop a similar reputation for our indigenous SMEs, especially those with export potential. This will form a central plank of Fine Gael's economic policy in the years to come.

We will cut the red-tape that ties up so many of our SMEs and improve the training and development opportunities available to their management and staff. We have published legislation to reform the collection and levying of commercial rates, some of which dates back to the 19th century. We will seek to enact that legislation as a matter of priority. In those sectors where Ireland enjoys comparative advantage, we will develop and implement long-term plans such as 'Foodwise 2025'. We will also ensure that current loan and equity funding gaps being experienced by SMEs are tackled by way of SBCI and EIB funding, as well as through greater competition in the banking sector.

## **A sustained focus on productivity across all of the economy**

Increasing productivity across all sectors of our economy is the only way that we can achieve economic growth, improve living standards and full employment. Irish workers are among some of the most productive in world. However it is clear that there is a significant and widening productivity gap in the Irish economy - as in most countries - between the top performing, and mainly foreign-owned firms in manufacturing and services, and the rest of the economy.

Improving productivity outside of these top performing firms, and narrowing the gap, is of the utmost importance. It is at the core of the recently announced Future Jobs Programme, which is about preparing Irish workers and employers for the

opportunities and challenges of a changing world. As part of this, we will continue to develop initiatives that will strengthen strategic leadership, management and business skills within Irish companies.

Higher and Further Education will be reprofiled to deliver better and more lifelong learning for those in work to prepare for changed workplace requirements. A particular focus will be placed on developing initiatives to give managers in smaller companies access to business school and management education. We will work closely with employers and the enterprise community to secure buy in and engagement for apprenticeships in a wide variety of traditional and non-traditional areas.

## Expanding economic opportunity

Increasing living standards for the future is a central element of the social contract that underpins our democratic system. Due to the effectiveness of our tax and welfare system we have ensured that the gains from economic growth have been distributed equitably. As the ESRI has demonstrated, while household disposable incomes have grown strongly in Ireland over the past 30 years, income inequality has been broadly stable compared with a trend towards increased inequality internationally. As a result, low, middle and high-income households in Ireland have all seen substantial growth in their incomes – unlike the slow and unequal growth seen in the UK and the US.

However, the very success of our tax and welfare system in correcting for our high levels of inequality of market income may have insulated us from tackling the deeper-seated causes of poor market outcomes. We need to increase our focus on policies that tackle income inequality before redistribution. This includes measures in the labour market like:

- boosting minimum wages and enhancing wage subsidies like the Working Family Payment;
- education initiatives that increase investment in pre-school, lifelong learning and vocational training like apprenticeships as well as increased access to third level in areas where participation is low; and
- wider market reforms that tackle the cost of living by boosting competition and consumer protection.

## Protecting our 12.5% Corporation Tax Rate

Fine Gael is committed to the maintenance of our competitive 12.5% Corporate Tax rate. However, we will continue to engage constructively on international tax reform while critically analysing proposals that may not be in Ireland's long term interests. In that regard Fine Gael in government brought forward the Roadmap on Corporation Tax Reform and are committed to its implementation.

The Roadmap provides certainty about our future direction. It reaffirms eleven clear commitments for further action and provides detail on the timing of those actions. It also outlines Ireland's commitment to continuing our engagement at international forums on work to prevent aggressive tax planning by multinational companies.

We acknowledge there are concerns about the long-term sustainability of the historically high levels of corporation tax. That is why in Budget 2019 we will use some of those revenues for the Rainy Day Fund.

## Avoiding repeating the mistakes of the past on public pay

Fine Gael will honour the terms of the current Public Service Stability Agreement, which commits to €1.2 billion in pay restoration and pay increases for public servants up until 2020. It is a negotiated pathway for the dismantling of the financial emergency legislation (FEMPI).

However, we must avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. The level of public sector wage increase we saw during the 2000s proved to be unsustainable. Any increases in the future must be sustainable for the long-term, and public servants who saw their take home pay slashed as a result of Fianna Fail's irresponsibility know this. Therefore, we will ensure that any public sector pay increases are affordable and sustainable; we never want to be in a position where pay needs to be cut again. That will guide our approach to a successor agreement to the current Public Service Stability Agreement.

We are conscious that public servants not only want sustainable pay increases, but a rewarding and fulfilling career. Fine Gael appreciates that certain areas of the public service feel particularly demotivated. We will seek to continue to enhance public servants' working conditions and career development opportunities, through support for greater mobility in the public services and greater opportunities for training, promotion, and upskilling.

Fine Gael will ensure that additional expenditure on pay is spent prudently and that we continue to reform the way in which our public sector performs. Recent years have proven that spending more money on recruitment and services is not enough to tackle some of the most challenging issues we face.

We believe the recent agreement on post-2011 new entrant pay provides a credible pathway to resolving this issue for the 60,000 public servants impacted. It equalises the length of time both new and existing members of staff will take to reach the end point of their salary scales, costing €200 million up until 2025.



## Chapter 11

### Quality jobs with a stronger safety net

More people are working now than ever before in our country's history. We are approaching full employment, where there is a job for everyone who wants one. The experience of the lost decade that followed the crisis with its trauma of mass unemployment, emigration, and loss of hope, means that government and politicians cannot become complacent and assume that full employment can be taken for granted. We have never before in our country's history achieved sustainable full employment. That is our challenge now, and it is one that Fine Gael will embrace.

Our ambition is that:

- every person has the opportunity to get a job, go to work and earn a decent wage;
- we are prepared for the major changes that artificial intelligence, robotics and other disruptions that will come to the workforce in the years ahead;
- we give people greater security through a radically reformed Social Insurance system; and
- government helps workers in having the opportunities to up-skill and retrain so people have continued opportunities throughout their working life.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

#### Future Jobs Programme

We must ensure that we are prepared for the technological changes that continue to radically redefine the type of work being done. Developments such as robotics, artificial intelligence, and advanced manufacturing are all changing the workplace. We must ensure that the current and future workforce is prepared for those changes and that we actively embrace them so as to maintain our national prosperity. For example, although estimates vary substantially, some studies



indicate that up to 40% of jobs are likely to be substantially impacted by automation over the twenty years while the transition to a low-carbon future will radically change sectors of the economy.

Furthermore, as we look to the future, 'Project Ireland 2040' projects a population increase of about 1 million people in Ireland in the next 20 years. This will require the creation of 660,000 additional jobs to achieve and maintain full employment. We must also prepare for a further economic environment where our use of carbon for energy is significantly reduced.

We must face these challenges now. The concern is that given strong economic performance, we become complacent, less concerned about, and less prepared for the forces of change that are already upon us. As we reach full employment, there are also concerns that we will repeat the mistakes of the past and fail to manage a potentially overheating economy.

Fine Gael in government is driving the development of a new Future Jobs Programme. This will set out on annual basis the key actions that need to be delivered across government in the areas of skills and talent, innovation, productivity, preparing for a low carbon economy and participation. Delivery of this will help guard against repeating the mistakes of the past and ensure our long-term national prosperity.

## **Winning the international war for talent**

There is an international war for talent. Ireland must be the most adept at providing the talent to deliver new technologies to support innovation and to develop entrepreneurship.

Ireland must equip employers and workers to anticipate and adapt to a changed workplace and ensure that those who might be displaced are upskilled.

The National Skills Council, and the nine regional skills fora, will drive Ireland's ambition to be a world leader in anticipating and responding to skills needs. We will expand Springboard and focus it on upskilling in areas of skills shortages for people who want to upskill, who are re-entering the workforce, or to people who have been made redundant.

## **The 'Project Ireland 2040' Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund**

As part of 'Project Ireland 2040', a Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund has been established and which had its first call for applications this year. Disruptive technology is that which has the potential to significantly alter markets and their functioning and significantly alter the way that businesses operate. While it involves a new product or process, it can also involve the emergence of a new business model. Disruption is about the combination of technology and business model innovation.

€500 million is available for co-funded projects involving enterprises and research partners over the next decade. This fund is to promote collaborative enterprise-driven partnerships that will develop, deploy and commercialise disruptive technologies to transform business. SME participation is an essential requirement in every consortium.

We will closely monitor the success of the first rounds of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund and assess whether there are other methods of leveraging greater private or European investment in the fund.

## **Ensuring that everyone who wants to work, can**

Fine Gael believes in the value and importance of gainful employment. With the decrease in unemployment we have helped those looking for work. The next step is to help people who have lost connection with the workforce. Unfortunately there are barriers and disincentives to people seeking gainful employment which need to be removed. Therefore to place a whole-of-government focus on reducing such disincentives, we will set a target of increasing the work force participation level. Some of the measures required to improve this are highlighted separately within this document (e.g. supports to access training, childcare, etc.) but will also include increasing income disregards for benefits when a person is returning to the workforce as well as allowing them to maintain benefits and entitlements for a period. Delivery of the 'Action Plan for Jobless Households' is important in this.

Currently there are over a quarter of a million people with disabilities receiving a social welfare illness or disability weekly payments in Ireland. Almost half of these are receiving Disability Allowance. Ensuring people with disabilities are enabled to achieve their employment ambitions is one of the most significant labour market and social policy challenges. Fine Gael is

committed to continuing to implement the recommendations in the 'Making Work Pay Report' e.g. measures such as fast-tracking the return to Disability or Invalidity Pension for people where employment does not work out, thereby reducing the 'risk' factor of taking on employment opportunities.

## Prepared for the Digital Revolution

A digital revolution is transforming the world we live in. The development of artificial intelligence and increased automation present challenges and opportunities. The pace of change is set to accelerate. By one popular estimate, 65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately work in a completely new job type that does not yet exist.

This presents a challenge to our workforce, but also to our society more generally. Our education system must help people to adapt to these rapidly moving tides. We will:

- enable the teaching of computer science at Leaving Certificate to all schools that want it;
- integrate coding and computational thinking into the curriculum; and
- allow every school to integrate digital technology into learning where it can improve the capacity of students to learn.

However, we must also equip those in the workforce currently to deal with these changes. We cannot assume that because we as a country are among the leading technologically advanced economies now, that we will remain so in the future. We therefore will ensure that the Future Jobs Programme prioritises lifelong learning to prepare today's workers for the challenges of tomorrow. We will also seek to promote within the Irish public sector a culture of early adoption of technology, thereby placing technological adoption at the heart of public services.

## We will give people more control over their career path

Fewer and fewer people have just one career and one employer throughout their working lives. Having to change jobs and careers, through choice or requirement, is increasingly the norm. This means that people need to have access to training and upskilling in a manner that is flexible and suited to their needs. As part of the 'Future Jobs Programme', we will:

- open up training opportunities related to a person's career and the ability to access career advice/mentoring based on a person's insurance record without the need to become unemployed;
- increase by 10% the number of those aged 25-64 engaged in lifelong learning by 2020 and by 15% by 2025; and increase by 25% the total number of students studying on a flexible basis;
- give all students the opportunity to undertake a work placement by 2025;
- introduce initiatives to up-skill the workforce particularly in the areas of hospitality, food, retail, childcare and community care using models such as apprenticeship and support traineeship and blended learning suited to those in work, so that those working in those sectors can build their skill sets and develop better career paths;
- create a stronger system of recognition of prior learning so that a wider portfolio of experience can be certified for people with histories of varied working or voluntary activities; and
- continue to evolve employment law so that vulnerable workers have protection.

## Investing in Higher and Further Education

We are increasing funding for third-level education through modest increases in the National Training Fund of 0.1% in both 2019 and 2020. In addition there has also been significant increases in the Exchequer contribution. In total, the funding for higher education is more than €300 million higher in 2019 than in 2016.

This allows for the provision of targeted investments in skills and education – 15,000 new places in the higher education and further education and training sectors, 1,200 craft and earn-as-you-learn places; 1,100 traineeships; 8,000 places through Skillsnet Ireland and Springboard; and 5,000 new lifelong and flexible learning opportunities. Further additional funding for the sector will follow the Oireachtas Committee recommendations.

Through 'Project Ireland 2040' Fine Gael will significantly ramp up capital investment into the higher education sector–

from approximately €800m over the past decade to €2.2 billion over the coming decade. The funding will enable both new buildings and extensive building upgrades.

Through 'Project Ireland 2040', Fine Gael have brought in a dedicated €300m capital budget (over the next decade) to the Further Education and Training (FET) Sector for the first time. This will enable us to develop modern, fit for purpose 21st century FET centres and meet the capital costs associated with expansion and modernisation of apprenticeships.

### **Delivering a €300m Human Capital Initiative to drive innovation at third-level**

A new Human Capital Initiative was announced as part of Budget 2019. This will involve investment of €300m in higher and further education over the 5 year period 2020-2024, with €60m being made available in each of those years. The Initiative will incentivise continued reform and innovation, drawing on international best practice through such mechanisms as graduate conversion, accelerated course completion, flexible and blended learning, intensified focus on employability and strengthened linkages and relationships with enterprise.

### **Apprenticeship and Traineeship**

By 2020, we will double the number of apprenticeships and treble the number of traineeships compared to 2016, expanding this model into 100 new occupations, and providing new opportunities to thousands of people at a variety of levels in the qualifications framework. We want to make this route an option open to 20% of school leavers.

We will encourage the University, TU and IOT sectors to work with employers to develop the apprenticeship and traineeship route within higher education. We will develop programmes to improve progression to apprenticeship by groups at a disadvantage.

### **Ensuring that workers have proper protections**

A strong, talent-based economy depends on the interests of workers and their employers being largely aligned. While there will always be a friction, promoting conflict and antagonism is to the detriment of all. Fine Gael believes that workers' rights should be properly protected from unscrupulous employers. We are therefore legislating to provide further protection to people in precarious employment and in particular to outlaw exploitative zero hour contracts. We will monitor the impact of this legislation and strengthen it further if necessary.

Fine Gael recognises the positive role that trade unions can play in the workplace and in society, especially where they are representing members in vulnerable positions. While we are opposed to any return to national wage agreements and a return to social partnership, we believe that a more collaborative approach between government, trade unions and employer bodies can bring benefits to the public at large. We will seek to consult with both trade unions and employer bodies at an early stage on matters of common interest such as pension reform, employment legislation and childcare provision.

### **Making Ireland a start-up leader**

Promoting a national spirit and culture of entrepreneurship is essential to facilitating a strong pipeline of future start-ups. There needs to be a continued focus upon the 'National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship' which targets doubling the jobs impact of start-ups on our economy over the five years to 2019.

### **A global innovation leader, ranking in the top ten countries in the world for scientific research**

In this uncertain world, it is clear that innovation will be crucial to Ireland's sustained economic development. We will put the funding in place to ramp up PhD enrolments. It is essential to our long-term international competitiveness.

We are focused on ensuring that over the next decade we are consistently within the top ten countries in the world for scientific research. Among the measures to achieve this, will be continued prioritisation of the work of Science Foundation Ireland. The government is now providing funding to 17 SFI Research Centres, up five from the beginning of 2017. As is set out in 'Project Ireland 2040', we will continue the programme, bringing the total number of centres to 20. The new centres will undertake excellent scientific research in partnership with industry to address critical and emerging areas of the economy including advanced additive and smart manufacturing, neurological diseases, and the bio-economy. We will also prioritise the upgrading and expansion of the Tyndall National Institute in Cork so Ireland stays at the forefront of new technologies.

## Ongoing tax reform with fairness at its core

Fine Gael's policy on income tax is built around three core principles. First everyone should make a contribution. Second, those who can contribute the most should contribute the most. Third, those on the average wage should not pay at the higher rate.

First, everyone should make a contribution. We believe that everyone who is in full-time employment should pay income tax or USC for both economic and social reasons. Economically, it is important to have a wide tax base so that our tax revenue is more stable and to allow lower rates of tax. It is also an important part of our social contract that everyone contributes to our main source of tax revenue from which we pay for social services and infrastructure; not that everyone pays the same amount but that everyone makes a contribution.

In government Fine Gael has consistently reduced taxes for the lowest paid so that part-time workers have been taken out of the tax net. At present income tax is only paid on salaries above €16,500 (after accounting for the main tax credits) and USC is paid on salaries over €13,000.

Second, those who can contribute the most should contribute the most. It is only fair that those who earn more should pay more in income tax - that our income tax system is progressive. This also implies low tax rates at low salaries which then increase the incentive to take up employment. According to the OECD Ireland already has the most progressive income tax system in the EU. The latest figures show that the top quarter of earners will pay 85% of all income tax and USC revenues in 2018, and the top 7% will pay for more than half of all income tax and USC.

Third, those on the average wage should not pay at the higher rate. It is not fair that people earning only the average wage pay the top rate of tax. Half of any overtime or bonus that they earn will be lost in tax. The average wage in 2017 was €37,600 for all workers, and €46,400 for full-time workers. However, individuals start to pay the top 40% rate of income tax once their salary reaches €35,300. This is out of kilter with our nearest neighbour the UK where the 40% rate of tax is only reached at over £46,000, putting us at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining employees.

Since 2014, Fine Gael in government have increased the point at which single people pay the top-rate of tax from €32,800 to €35,300. We will seek to accelerate this further in the years ahead. In addition to increasing the point at which people pay the top rate of income tax, we will continue to raise living standards and grow disposable income by reforming personal taxation as follows:

- raise the Earned Income Tax Credit for the self-employed and the Home Carer's Tax Credit to match the PAYE Tax Credit;
- raise the threshold for CAT below which a parent can pass on assets to their children; and
- merge USC and PRSI to build a stronger social insurance safety net.

## Building a stronger safety net

Rather than abolishing the USC outright, we will merge it with PRSI into a single social insurance payment. The end goal – a social insurance system based on the contributory principle that delivers real benefits and security to those that pay in - is a goal worth achieving. The benefits of such a system would include improved supports at different life stages and acts as a safety net at difficult times, for example:

- better sick pay entitlements;
- paid parental leave;
- enhanced medical and other treatment benefits; and
- unemployment benefits that are linked to the level of contributions.

The social insurance system will move to a Total Contribution Approach for state contributory pension entitlement and ensure that a long record of contribution is recognised in entitlement.

## **A new deal for the self-employed**

This reformed social insurance system is linked to our 'New Deal for the Self-Employed'. The reformed social insurance system will work to provide the self-employed and those in the 'gig' economy with a safety net in circumstances where their business or careers are interrupted. In Budget 2019, we extended Jobseekers Benefit to the self-employed and will expand other benefits, such as Carer's Benefit, in the years ahead. The equalisation of the Earned Income Tax Credit with the PAYE Tax Credit is also part of this agenda.

## **A fair and improving Minimum Wage**

In December 2010, Fianna Fail cut the Minimum Wage to €7.65. This hit the lowest earning workers the hardest. Since Fine Gael came to power in 2011, we have increased the Minimum Wage to €9.80 an hour. This is among the highest in Europe, which is appropriate given our high national wealth and high cost of living. We will continue to be guided by the Low Pay Commission, which brings together employer and employee interests and makes recommendations as to what changes should be made to the wage rate guided by broader economic developments.



## Chapter 12

### Building a better health service

Fine Gael wants to create a health service where people have universal access to affordable, quality healthcare in a timely manner. We can deliver more health services in the community so people get a good range of care close to home. We will increase bed capacity and staff numbers so hospital care can be provided in a timely manner. We can and must promote healthy lifestyles to support people staying well and living longer, healthier lives. Many parts of our health service do work well and we have dedicated healthcare professionals right across our services. Many health outcomes have significantly improved. But it is clear that our current health service needs major reform and is not currently the right size or shape to meet the needs of our growing and ageing population.

Our ambition is for a health service that:

- is compassionate, accountable and patient-centred;
- is focused on prevention and wellbeing as well as illness;
- is efficient and delivers value for money for taxpayers and patients;
- has enough capacity to meet the medical and social care need of our citizens;
- provides care to our people in a timely manner.
- enables citizens to access more care close to home in their communities;
- cares for its older citizens, enabling them to stay in their own homes as long as possible; and
- offers more choice and involvement in decision-making for people with disabilities and their families.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

#### Implement the Sláintecare Plan

In the aftermath of the 2016 General Election, we established a cross-party committee to agree a 10 year plan to reform our health service - Sláintecare. We are now building on that unanimity, and through a detailed implementation plan we are



transforming the all-party vision into reality. Over one hundred actions will be implemented in the next three years, reaching right across the health service to deliver better care for all.

Significant change such as this needs to be driven and championed, an Executive Director has been appointed, the Sláintecare Programme Office is already in place and an Advisory Council, comprising patient representatives, clinicians and international experts is providing advice and leadership.

## **Good governance of our health services**

With a budget of €17 billion the HSE is the largest state agency and one of our most important. It provides essential services in every village, town and city, playing an important role in our lives often when we are at our most vulnerable.

It is vital that we ensure good governance, performance and accountability across all its layers, without which reform will be fleeting. This will be achieved through the establishment of an independent Board for the HSE. We have already appointed a chairperson designate and will pass legislation not only to underpin the new Board but to remove layers of bureaucracy and create regional structures to better align community and hospital care. These new governance structure will set the tone for the culture of the organisation, which must be based on the principles of independence, inclusiveness and compassion.

## **Major long-term investment in our health services to improve access to care**

After years of budget cuts, Fine Gael oversaw increased health budgets from 2013 reflecting improvements in our economy. This substantial investment has resulted in 3,000 additional nurses, 1,500 more hospital doctors, improvements in pay and the provision of extra beds across the country.

Under 'Project Ireland 2040', we are providing €10.9 billion for 40 capital projects improving access to quality healthcare services, including major projects like the National Children's Hospital, the National Forensic Mental Health services, the relocation of the National Maternity Hospital and the provision of additional long term residential accommodation for older people.

We are also delivering local improvements with new emergency departments in Kilkenny and Limerick, and additional plans for new EDs in Drogheda, Galway and Beaumont. There are now 125 Primary Care Centres in operation, with over 80 sites at various stages of development.

This funding will provide for 2,600 acute hospital beds, this includes new dedicated elective only hospitals in Dublin and Cork and 4,5000 social care beds. It will accelerate the roll-out of eHealth infrastructure.

We will build on the progress already made in tackling waiting times for some of the most common hospital operations and procedures including cataracts, hips, knees and tonsils. Investment in the National Treatment Investment Fund led to over 8,000 people receiving offers for treatment in 2017, in the first nine months of this year that figure had almost doubled. In 2019 we are further increasing funding to €75 million, to ensure more people are treated and spend less time waiting.

A similar focus is required to target outpatient waiting lists. In 2019 40,000 outpatient appointments will be arranged through the National Treatment Purchase Fund.

## **Making further advances in public health**

Protecting the health of citizens is a duty of the state. Healthy Ireland is our national action plan to help people live healthier and longer lives. The most recent Healthy Ireland Survey demonstrates good progress on reducing the prevalence of smoking, citing the introduction of plain packaging as good motivation to quit. However, successive surveys have found problems with levels of alcohol consumption. The implementation of the recently enacted Public Health (Alcohol) Act will be instrumental in reducing harm from excessive alcohol consumption. The introduction of a tax on sugar sweetened drinks has positively impacted on the sugar content of many drinks.

For too long the issues of sexual health and reproductive rights were considered taboo, or often ignored. In 2015, we launched the first national approach to sexual health and wellbeing to promote positive attitudes, instilling a healthy attitude to sexuality in young people and ensure access to high quality information, education and services. We will continue to drive forward implementation of the 'National Sexual Health Strategy 2015 - 2020', including the roll out of a PrEP programme in 2019.

Following the repeal of the 8th amendment to the Constitution, we are committed to legislating for the provision of doctor-led termination service providing care at home and ending those lonely journeys to access healthcare abroad.

As part of our development of a National LGBTI Inclusion strategy, we will consult with leading LGBTi+ voluntary and community organisations to ensure accessible community-based services and supports across the country, improving training for health and social care professionals and developing a communications plan to raise awareness of mental health resources.

We will develop a best practice model of care for Trans People in line with World Professional Association of Transgender Healthcare (WPATH) standards of care. We have funded new posts in both adult and child and adolescent trans-health services and will continue to do so to address waiting times for specialist endocrinology services. We will deliver a framework for the development of National Gender Clinics and Multi-Disciplinary Teams for children and adults, funded by the Acute Hospitals and Mental Health divisions of the HSE based on the 2017 Service Development Model.

## **Improve patient safety**

Speaking up is one of the critical aspects of patient safety. We have enacted legislation providing the legal framework to support voluntary open disclosure and are committed to introducing legislation providing for mandatory open disclosure and the mandatory reporting of patient safety incidents to HIQA.

A new Patient Safety Council will be tasked with undertaking a detailed review of existing open disclosure policies to ensure fitness for purpose.

## **Resourcing mental health services**

Mental health challenges, in particular depression and anxiety, are amongst the most pervasive issues facing us today. Effective resourcing of our mental health services is vital to providing help when it is needed.

Additional funding has been targeted at mental health services since 2012 providing for an increase in CAMHS teams, the recruitment of more than 1,500 posts, the continued development of counselling services across primary and secondary care including Jigsaw, the development of clinical programmes on self-harm and eating disorders and the extension of seven day a week services.

A significant budget of almost €1 billion for 2019 will provide for further recruitment and the delivery of new services, focusing in particular on early intervention and support services which assist in dealing with mental health challenges before requiring hospital care. New services will also be brought on stream via the use of digital technology that will give service users the choice to connect with clinicians in the shortest possible time frame, complementing existing services in acute and community settings.

## **Better care close to home**

General practitioners caring for patients in their homes and communities is the bedrock of our health service. We are developing a new GP contract providing for multi-annual investment enabling practitioners to better meet the needs of their patients and promote general practice as a viable career choice. This is essential to ensure the increased number of GP training places which we are committed to, are filled.

We have already made changes to entry provisions to the GMS scheme to accommodate more flexible GMS contracts, extended the retirement age to 72 and introduced an enhanced support package for rural practices.

Making the shift towards primary care in order to deliver more care close to home is paramount and a key principle of Sláintecare. There are 125 primary care centres in operation and 83 further are at various stages of development. These are supported by 16 Community Intervention Teams (CIT) which we will continue to develop and expand building on progress to date. CIT referrals are now 17% above the same period in 2017, helping to ease the pressure on hospitals by treating people at home, in a residential setting or in the community.

We will continue to increase the Primary Care Workforce. Over 130 new psychology posts for counselling services for children and 83 Speech & Language Therapy posts have been filled, and we are recruiting 40 additional Occupational Therapists. We will continue to increase funding for Paediatric Home Care Packages.

Advanced nurse practitioners are highly skilled clinical leaders contributing to solutions for some of the challenges in our health service including access to services, reducing delays and supporting early discharge. The first 120 advanced nurse practitioners commenced the new programme in 2017, with 30 further in October 2018.

## **Making cervical cancer a rare disease**

In the aftermath of all the suffering, pain and worry caused by the CervicalCheck crisis it is incumbent upon us to set out a positive way forward, to recommit to our screening programmes and strive to make cervical cancer a rare disease as a lasting legacy to those affected. Our move to HPV testing and the extension of the HPV vaccine to boys will be key in making this a reality.

We know that screening saves lives and will continue to invest in CervicalCheck, BreastCheck and BowelScreen.

All 50 recommendations of the Scally Report will be implemented including the establishment of a National Screening Committee, an Independent Patient Council and the introduction of a statutory duty of candour.

## **Traveller and Roma Health**

We know that by reducing health inequalities, we can deliver real benefits for all of us and for future generations, but health and wellbeing is not always evenly spread across our society. Health inequalities are experienced by members of the traveller community, demonstrated by the disproportionate impact from chronic disease and lower mortality rates. To deal with these challenges, we will ensure integrated primary care services aligned with comprehensive national projects, including

- accessible primary care projects, family support programmes, counselling, dedicated public health nurses;
- targeted mental health promotion and suicide prevention services; and
- ongoing engagement between our health service and representatives of Traveller and Roma communities to ensure that health policies being provided deliver for the needs of communities.

## **Improve organ donations**

Irish people are extraordinarily generous in donating organs to save lives, and outcomes for transplant recipients in Ireland continue to rank amongst the best in Europe, but the need for organ transplants continues to increase. It is important that we do all that we can to enable individuals and families to make this life-saving decision and are committed to introducing an opt-out system for organ donation.

## **Giving patients access to the medicines they need**

Securing access to new and innovative medicines for Irish patients is vital and this must be achieved in a safe and sustainable manner. The challenge of securing affordable access to new medicines is not unique to Ireland. That is why we must seek out initiatives leading to better access to medicines for patients, including membership of the Beneluxa Initiative joining with other European countries to work together in increasing access to new medicines for patients. We have also put in place a Rare Diseases Technology Committee to provide for the expert assessment of orphan drugs and other medicines for rare diseases. We are developing a National Biosimilars Policy to help patients access cheaper medicines in a similar way as we are already delivering via generic substitution.

## **High quality end-of-life care**

We have made significant improvements in specialist palliative care services including new hospice beds and the establishment of a children's palliative care programme. We have increased the number of specialist palliative care beds country wide by 50% in the last five years will increase the number by a further 50% over the next five years ensuring there will be a hospice serving every region in the country. We will open units in Mayo, Waterford and Wicklow in 2019. Plans are underway to build units in Drogheda and Cavan, and a further inpatient unit is planned for the Midlands.

We will continue to support Community Specialist Palliative Home Care Teams in all HSE areas, fund designated home care packages and resource specialist palliative care provided in 39 acute hospitals. We are increasing resources for the Children's Palliative Care Programme supported by Consultants with a Special Interest in Children's Palliative Care and Children's Outreach Nurses to coordinate care for children with life limiting conditions and their families.



## Chapter 13

### A sporting nation, proud of our language, culture and heritage

Our culture, heritage, language and sport define us as a people. They bring us together, are central to good physical and mental health, and give us great pride.

Our ambition is that:

- every child has the opportunity to take part in sport, the arts and to appreciate our national heritage;
- gender, background or location is no barrier and that every community has access to cultural and sporting facilities and enjoyment;
- use and enjoyment of the Irish language is increasing in Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas alike;
- the majority of our population, at every age level, is partaking in regular sporting activity (be it casual or organised); and
- our heritage is properly protected, promoted and to the greatest extent possible accessible.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

#### **Doubling investment in culture, heritage, the Irish language and sport to double impact**

Across culture, heritage, the Irish language and sport we will double the budget by 2025. 'Project Ireland 2040' provides for sustained investment programmes in all those areas over the next decade.

In terms of the current expenditure, increased expenditure in the first instance will be focused on delivering 'Culture 2025' and the Creative Ireland programme. The 'Irish Language 20 Year Strategy' will guide investment in that area and the recently published 'Sports Policy' will form the basis for sports related expenditure. In heritage, investment will be subsequent to

the developing of comprehensive policy programmes. As with all areas of expenditure there will be a need for the taxpayer to see and understand the impact of their investment in these activities, and public engagement will be a major part of all activity.

In the area of sport, this increased funding will be dependent on progress towards the high-level targets in the Sports Policy 2018-2027, in particular the elimination of the gender gap in sporting participation, and the increase of active sporting participation in the adult population from the current level of 43% to 50%. Similar targets will be developed for participation in cultural and heritage activities, especially increasing participation by disadvantaged socio-economic groups.

## **Delivering Creative Ireland**

Creative Ireland is the legacy programme arising from the hugely successful 2016 Centenary Programme. We will work to ensure that this ambitious five year strategy which places culture and creativity at the heart of public policy is implemented in full.

## **Developing our cultural infrastructure**

One of the key pillars of Creative Ireland is enhanced investment in our cultural infrastructure. As a nation we are rightly proud of the role of our National Cultural Institutions in our country's development. The National Gallery of Ireland reopened its doors to the public in June 2017 following a €30 million renovation of its historic wings. In 'Project Ireland 2040' the government has committed to the first multi-annual programme of capital investment in our cultural infrastructure. Over the next ten years, the following capital works will be carried out in our National Cultural Institutions:

- National Library of Ireland renovation;
- National Archives of Ireland renovation;
- National Museum of Ireland master-plan redevelopment;
- National Concert Hall renovation;
- Crawford Art Gallery redevelopment;
- National Theatre redevelopment;
- Irish Museum of Modern Art renovation;
- National Gallery of Ireland – further phases of the master-plan redevelopment;
- Chester Beatty Library improvements.

Geography should not limit people's ability to fully partake in our national cultural life. 'Project Ireland 2040' provides for €40 million over the next decade for the highly successful nationwide Arts and Culture Capital Scheme that was introduced by Fine Gael.

We will develop initiatives so that the National Cultural Institutions are brought on tour to towns across the country. We will also enable greater national touring programme by artists. Included in this will be the National Symphony Orchestra which, funded by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and residing in the renovated National Concert Hall, will be fully staffed and will offer a national touring programme and educational and outreach programmes.

## **Developing Ireland as a Global Hub for Film, TV and Animation**

Ireland has a growing indigenous media production and audiovisual industry, already supplying the media content buyers and distributors around the globe. We will drive this development through an investment of over €200 million, enabling Ireland to become a global leader for the production of film, TV drama and animation, growing employment in the sector to over 24,000 and increasing gross value added to €1.4 billion.

This ambitious goal will be enabled by a comprehensive suite of initiatives. These include reform and extension of Section 481 Film Tax Relief; optimising the funding schemes available including TV drama, games and regional productions; assistance for skills development for the sector; and regulatory reform.



## Decade of Centenaries - Valuing our history

The period from 1912 to 1923 was one of the most eventful in Ireland's history. The programme of commemorations since 2012 has marked those events with appropriate dignity and respect. In particular, the 1916 Commemorations Programme helped assert a common ownership of our history and heritage.

Building on this experience, we will ensure that as we come to commemorate the War of Independence and the Civil War that this is done in a way which is balanced and respectful. We will not seek to challenge anyone's loyalties but rather to foster greater understanding. We will be guided in this approach by the All-Party Consultation Committee and the Expert Advisory Committee.

## Supporting urban regeneration with cultural centres

Throughout Ireland, cultural activity is a powerful driver of quality of life and wellbeing. Cultural productions can play an important part in the regeneration of urban Ireland, whether through music, drama, dance or other forms of performance. We will facilitate this through finance and mentoring for the development of existing and new centres for cultural activity, comprising of spaces for both creatives and wider arts and community groups, as well as performance and exhibition space.

## Improving linkages between the arts and schools

Through the Creative Children initiative, we will work to ensure that every child in Ireland will have access to tuition and participation in art, music, drama and coding by 2022. The first phase of this programme will be launched later this year.

## Achieving the ambition of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language

Our approach to preserving and promoting the Irish language is driven by recognising the need to improve education, increasing the number of daily Irish speakers, recruiting more Irish speakers to the public service and ensuring services are provided through the language.

The '5-Year Action Plan 2018-2022' cements those ideals. We have ensured a dramatic increase in funding and assistance for Early Years, for childcare, for classroom language assistants and for parents raising their children through Irish.

We are committed to the targets of the '20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030' to grow the number of Irish speakers outside education from 83,000 to 250,000; to increase the Gaeltacht's Irish speaking population by 25%; and to have 2 million people with Irish by 2030.

The Official Languages Bill will demonstrate our focus on putting the language at the centre of government as we strive to ensure that 20% of new public service recruits can and will provide those services in Irish.

We place particular importance on language planning at community level, and it is central to the new definition of the Gaeltacht. It is a unique policy internationally and we will continue to drive it. Our targets have already been surpassed and now we are aiming for 15 plans to be approved across the Gaeltacht regions by the end of 2018.

We also will enable opportunities for areas outside the existing Gaeltacht to achieve statutory recognition as Irish Language Networks or as Gaeltacht Service Towns.

We recognise the need to provide public services to Irish speakers, in particular for the 26 Gaeltacht planning areas, but also the 16 Service Towns and the three Irish Language Networks in Clondalkin, Ennis and Loughrea. We are committed to developing a new Irish Language Centre in Dublin as a flagship focal point for the language.

The traditional Irish language education policy has not been a success. New approaches are now being adopted and must be encouraged by all stakeholders. We will implement the first ever Gaeltacht education strategy, adopting the total immersion approach within Gaelscoileanna and Naonraí.

Innovations within Irish language education need to be advanced. The new curriculum for Junior Cycle emphasises spoken Irish within the classroom, developing projects that engage pupils and build communities of language use within the school and the wider community.



New Irish-medium schools and streams will be provided where communities outside the Gaeltacht demonstrate that there is a demand.

We will test the potential for virtual classrooms to allow for more subjects to be taught through Irish at senior cycle in the Gaeltacht. We will broaden the footprint of innovative and high-tech projects, combining Irish medium education and technology in schools and youth centres in all regions. Our aim is for it to develop into the leading creative technology network for youth development through Irish, with a focus on creating digital media and STEM material.

## **Recognising the importance of our national and built heritage**

Our natural and built heritage is central to our sense of identity, of place and of Irishness. We must protect it in the first instance and pass it onto future generations. We must explain it so that it can be properly understood and enjoyed, and we must utilise it for tourism and other industries to improve the livelihoods of citizens, particularly in our rural economy. Fine Gael's approach to heritage is based on those principles and for this reason we will develop a new, whole-of-government heritage policy.

This new heritage policy will complement the significant investment in our national heritage over the next decade that Fine Gael has prioritised in 'Project Ireland 2040'. In line with 'Project Ireland 2040' we will adopt and implement a masterplan for the development of our National Parks and National Reserves. We will also build on successful community-led programmes such as the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund which provide grant aid to protect and maintain important historic buildings in our local communities throughout the country. In addition, we will work to progress flagship national projects such as the restoration of the Ulster Canal.

We will ensure that funding is provided to protect and enhance Ireland's heritage estate of 780 monuments and sites. We will introduce a programme of site accessibility works, both in terms of physical access but also explanation, to allow greater appreciation of our national heritage.

## **Encouraging greater experience and understanding of our heritage**

We will encourage new partnerships between Ireland's heritage and tourism bodies to make sure that Ireland's potential as an international heritage tourism destination is explored in a sustainable way. Ireland's National Parks and Nature Reserves will play a key role in this, increasing Ireland's attractiveness for this growing national and international market and aiding rural social and economic development.

Programmes that encourage greater understanding and appreciation of Ireland's built and natural heritage will also be encouraged and developed. Popular schemes such as the Heritage in Schools programme and the new Junior Rangers programme, which engages junior schools students directly with Conservation Rangers, will be funded to ensure participation is maximised.

We will investigate the practicalities and merits of establishing an offshore maritime area as Ireland's seventh national park. This would form part of the expanded Marine Protected Areas, and allow for a greater engagement and learning experience for Irish people of their maritime environment.

## **Provide funding for national, regional and local sporting facilities**

There is a need for regular and predictable funding streams for sport at a local, regional, and national level. There is also a need for the creation of a funding stream for national sporting organisations to bid for state assistance for national sporting infrastructure.

In terms of capital funding, Fine Gael has ensured that over the next decade there will be €300 million available for sports. This includes continuation of the Sports Capital Programme, which Fine Gael restarted, and which is essential to sports clubs across the country. 'Project Ireland 2040' also includes funding for a Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund which is for sports capital projects that require funding larger than the Sports Capital Scheme.

## **The role of the education system in enabling lifelong physical activity**

The establishment of PE as an examinable subject for the Leaving Certificate demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that PE is a core part of our children's education.

Therefore, 'Project Ireland 2040' commits to a PE build and modernisation programme so that students in all post-primary schools have access to appropriate facilities for PE. Enhanced and modernised PE facilities will also provide extra amenities for local communities.

## **Placing an emphasis on improving sporting activity across all sectors of society**

The health benefits of lifelong sporting activity are obvious. Some sporting activities are particularly suitable for participation across a person's lifespan such as swimming, cycling and running. A strong emphasis needs to be placed on these activities from an early age, particularly through PE, so that people have the foundation skills to continue with them throughout their lives. For these three sports in particular, schemes to help older people partaking in such sporting activity will be developed and enabled by central and local government (e.g. Parkruns).

Research has consistently shown that women are less likely than men to continue sport through their teenage years and into adulthood. There will be a major focus on encouraging female sports participation at all ages. We are committed to eliminating the gap between male and female sporting participation over the next decade.

For a wide variety of factors, the take-up and participation in sport is lower for those who have a disability. Increasing participation levels by people with disabilities is especially important. Research as to the most appropriate measures to take is needed and will be prioritised to enable the right interventions to be made to boost participation levels.

## **Enabling high-level sporting performance**

Increased investment in high performance sports should be focused on improving Ireland's relative performance in elite competitions, in particular the Olympics and Paralympics. Our performances should be benchmarked against leading peer nations i.e. New Zealand and Denmark. Funding is being moved from an annual funding cycle to a multi-annual basis so that elite athletes have higher degrees of greater planning certainty. Furthermore, there will need to be a greater emphasis on identifying sports to focus elite investment where we have the greatest opportunity for success.



## Chapter 14

### A housing system with the citizen at the centre

A home is one of the most basic needs a person has. Fine Gael believes that one of the fundamental responsibilities of the state is to make sure that there are enough safe and secure homes for every citizen. Home ownership is not in the reach of many today, and we believe it should be. Fine Gael is the party of home ownership. In tandem with that there should be the option for individuals and families to rent in secure, good-quality and long-term tenancies either in the private market or through an expanded social housing stock.

Our ambition is to ensure:

- there is a strong construction sector focused on the building of homes in all price ranges, not on land speculation;
- that we are building in excess of 25,000 new houses per annum in 2020, rising to 35,000 in the years thereafter, and those houses are in locations with access to employment, public transport, and other essential amenities;
- 12,000 new homes are added to the social housing stock each year by 2021 and that level is maintained thereafter;
- that the homelessness crisis is ended and the time people spend in emergency accommodation is as short as possible; and
- that we have tenant protections, both in legislation and in practice, that allow renters to enjoy secure, high-quality and long-term accommodation and provide landlords with a fair return on their investment.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

#### **Plan-led development, not developer-led development**

We must always be careful to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. The sprawl that took place over the last twenty years, where housing was built far from people's places of employment, was a major and avoidable mistake. It has resulted in parents spending hours in traffic when they should be with their children. It meant houses were built long before community facilities, schools, sports fields or other local amenities were even considered. It resulted in dormitory towns and villages which are empty during the working day. It was developer-led planning that only benefited the developer.

We fundamentally reject that developer-led planning approach and have replaced it with plan-led development. 'Project Ireland 2040' and the 'National Planning Framework' is that plan. Under 'Project Ireland 2040' future growth should be in the first instance, compact growth. Within the footprint of our existing cities, towns and villages. This focus will be aided by the Land Development Agency which will develop strategic landbanks within our urban areas as residential communities.

By prioritising new development within the infill or hinterland of existing urban centres, we will breathe new life into our city, town, and village centres. This will be of benefit to not only those who live in those city, town, or village centres but also their neighbours living in more rural areas, as their local urban centre will now have the centre of gravity to grow and thrive.

To achieve compact growth, and recognising the changing needs of individuals and families for housing, Fine Gael will make planning guidelines that facilitate greater density in city and town centres as well as in the immediate hinterland of public transport.

However, there are major challenges in developing the centres of many of our urban areas as residential for a wide variety of reasons. Therefore, to help achieve this goal, a €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund was established under 'Project Ireland 2040'. An initial call for applications has been issued with the first successful applicants to be announced before the end of 2018. Fine Gael will ensure that there are regular rounds of bidding for this fund over the next decade so that local authorities and areas which have not yet fully developed urban regeneration projects, or are unsuccessful initially, have the opportunity to bid again.

'Project Ireland 2040' provides a clear framework for the future growth of the country and the funding to match it. 'Project Ireland 2040' on a national level, and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, will allow us to properly prepare and plan for that growth in a timely and planned fashion. This will help ensure that the failings of planning over the past thirty years are not repeated.

## A sustainable home building sector delivering between 25,000 and 35,000 homes per annum

This year, almost 20,000 new homes will be built in Ireland, the highest level of output in a decade. We anticipate 25,000 new homes being built in 2019. From 2020 onwards, we want to ensure that the home building sector produces between 25,000 and 35,000 homes per annum. This level of output will ensure that enough homes are being provided for a growing population and to catch up on recent years without repeating the mistakes of the past. This is in line with 'Project Ireland 2040' and will be assisted by the Land Development Agency and Home Building Finance Ireland.



## Delivering more affordable and subsidised housing

The most efficient way to provide affordable housing is to increase supply, in particular the supply of starter family homes as well as apartments. However there are people, particularly living in and around our major cities who are earning good

wages, do not qualify for social housing, but are also unable to afford to buy their own homes on the open market. Fine Gael is particularly conscious of the need to have a strong supply of affordable homes to buy and rent.

To help people in this situation, Budget 2019 provided the largest affordability package in a decade at €310m. This investment will be used to service local authority land so that homes can be built on that land, and then sold at a discount to people, with the Local Authority retaining an equity share in the home. This will provide 6,200 new homes over the next three years.

It must be acknowledged though that there are different definitions of affordability based on geography, income and family circumstances and the problem does not impact all areas equally. For example, roughly one-in-two first time buyers in the 12 months to June 2018, purchased homes for less than €250,000 and average house prices in some regions and many counties are less than €200,000. Therefore, this investment will be targeted at Local Authorities in our major urban areas.

As part of our plans to use state lands more efficiently, we have mandated the Land Development Agency to bring vacant and underutilised land into use for housing. Where this is done, at least 30% of those homes will be made available through an affordable housing scheme, in addition to at least 10% of those homes being council homes. These homes will be provided at a discount and the state retains an equity stake in the home reflecting the discount.

## Helping first time buyers

As part of our commitment to home ownership, Fine Gael believes that young families should be helped in buying their first home. In October 2016, Fine Gael in government brought in the Help to Buy (HTB) incentive. This was to assist first-time buyers with the deposit required to purchase or self-build a new house or apartment to live in as their home. The incentive provides for a refund of Income Tax and DIRT paid over the previous four tax years and capped at €20,000. Since its introduction, over 15,000 first time-buyers have been approved for this scheme, with 9,470 having drawn down the refund.

## 12,000 new social homes each year

In 2017 the number of social homes was increased by over 7,000 through new builds, renovations, acquisitions and long-term leasing. This will exceed 8,000 in 2018, move to 10,000 in 2019 and by 2021 reach 12,000 per annum. Under 'Project Ireland 2040', this level of additional social home provision - 12,000 per annum - will be maintained with the vast majority of the additional stock being new builds.

So between now and 2027, more than 112,000 new social homes will be added to the public housing stock. This is a massive increase and the commitment to maintaining this level of investment into the medium term will ensure that the mistakes of the past - in particular the stark fall off in social housing and the resulting high rents in the private rented market - do not occur again. In tandem with this massive increase in social housing supply, there will be an accompanying social housing reform agenda. This will ensure that the rules governing the provision of social housing are up to date, appropriate and fair to all concerned.

## Realising the potential of the Land Development Agency

The recently established Land Development Agency's (LDA) initial focus will be on developing publicly-owned lands for housing. This will significantly improve the supply of housing over the next five years with sites for 3,000 homes already secured, and sites for another 7,000 identified. Alongside the development of publicly owned lands, the LDA will also assemble strategically located but underutilised lands. These lands will then be developed and brought into use for housing and mixed use in line with current and future needs.

The LDA, with its clear long-term commercial mandate, will provide a counter-cyclical impetus in a marketplace that has for too long, and to the detriment of the citizens, been excessively focused on short-term profits. This approach will also ensure that the attractiveness of land hoarding as against land development is undermined. Based on European experience, the LDA is expected to develop 150,000 homes over the next two decades representing in the order of 25% of the expected housing demand.

Fine Gael will ensure that the LDA is given the full phalanx of legislative powers including CPO powers and €1.25 billion from the Strategic Investment Fund to fully deliver upon its potential.



## Encouraging apartments to be built in our urban centres

A consistent supply of new, well-built apartments in our city and town centres is a major part of responding to the housing supply challenge. We are seeing a huge increase in the development of apartments, with planning permissions for apartments having increased by over 180%. We have changed the rules to enable more modern forms of apartments, to increase availability and decrease costs. For example, we believe that many people buying apartments in urban cores do not need an expensive underground car parking space and so we have reduced the need for car parking in areas in urban cores or immediately beside public transport.

We are introducing new rules to enable higher rise developments that are sympathetic to their surroundings. This will enable more apartment living in urban centres, close to where many people work and wish to live their daily lives.

## Ensuring that we have a rental sector that provides long-term security for tenants and landlords

Over the past two years, Fine Gael has significantly strengthened the protections for tenants. We are now enacting legislation to further protect renters by introducing sanctions for breaching the rent caps, bringing in rent transparency, and requiring longer notice periods for tenants when their lease ends. In Budget 2019 we provided additional funds to the Residential Tenancies Board to increase its staff and resources and thereby allow it to protect vulnerable tenants better and tackle rogue landlords.

## Developing cost rental as a real option

Fine Gael is determined that cost rental homes become a major part of our rental landscape in the future, making a sustainable impact on housing affordability, national competitiveness, and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live as well as work. This is line with the best experience from other European countries.

Cost rental are schemes whereby tenants pay a rent that is closer to the cost of maintaining the property, and is lower than the market rent. Two cost rental projects have been announced for Dublin. Learning from these projects, Fine Gael will seek to expand the cost rental model in all our cities. Cost rental will be an important part of our rental market, providing certainty of tenure and rent to those who want to rent in the long-term, while also allowing breathing space for young people and families to save for a deposit while they rent.

## Undermining the land speculators

The hoarding of zoned land and the non-use of vacant properties is a contributor to the housing crisis. The Vacant Site Levy has been introduced by Fine Gael in government. This levy is a site activation measure, to ensure that vacant land in urban areas is brought into beneficial use and will result in a 3% levy on such properties left vacant in 2018 and increasing to 7% for those left vacant in 2019.

Drawing on the work of the Law Reform Commission, which was mandated by Fine Gael in government, we will bring forward legislation that will consolidate and modernise Compulsory Purchase Order law. Part of this will be to improve and streamline the CPO powers of local authorities, as well as other state agencies including the Land Development Agency.

## Providing finance to small and medium sized developers

While there has been improvements in the willingness of the banking sector to fund small and medium sized developers, the lack of appropriate finance options still presents a major obstacle for this element of our home building sector. This is especially the case for a developer building smaller projects or building outside our major urban areas.

To close this gap, Fine Gael in government is establishing Home Building Finance Ireland. HBFI is being set up with €750 million from the Irish Strategic Investment Fund and will begin operations before the end of 2018. It will provide up to 80% funding on projects with a minimum capacity of ten units. To ensure that HBFI's loans go to projects that can be advanced quickly and contribute to our ambition of building more than 25,000 new homes per annum by 2021, projects will be expected to have full planning permission and the sponsors to be fully tax compliant.



Home Building Finance Ireland is designed as a temporary intervention which will be reviewed in 2021 for its effectiveness and then every two years thereafter. The continuation of HBFI will, therefore, be regularly monitored, with a view to the entity exiting the market in due course when sufficient supply of funding occurs.

## **A pathway out of emergency accommodation**

Increasing the supply of housing and in particular social housing, as well as further strengthening of tenants' rights, is the primary long-term tool in dealing with the unacceptable number of people in emergency accommodation.

In the short-term though we will continue to utilise the Housing Assistance Payment to subsidise 42,000 number of households to maintain their tenancies and avoid entering homelessness. We have ensured that money is provided to set up the Homeless HAP Placefinders service on a national basis. The Homeless HAP service helps families in emergency accommodation by helping them to find private rented accommodation themselves through bringing them to viewings, and other direct interventions to assist them in securing permanent accommodation. Over 2,000 families are now being helped by the scheme.

We will also continue to invest in Family Hubs so that the use of hotels and B&Bs by families experiencing homelessness becomes rare. Hubs offer family living arrangements with a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation, with the capacity to provide appropriate play-space, cooking and laundry facilities, and communal recreation space, while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Families in hubs move onto secure, own-door accommodation much more quickly than those in other forms of emergency accommodation, as they are provided with significant wrap-around assistance when securing a long-term home.

## **Ending prolonged rough-sleeping with Housing First**

While the provision of social housing or secure long term private sector tenancies is the solution for the majority of people in emergency accommodation, it will not be sufficient by itself to reduce rough-sleeping and long-term homelessness.

Many people who sleep rough, and who are frequent users of emergency hostels and shelters, have complex needs around mental health and addiction, or have come out of state institutions. They require individualised care and assistance to successfully move from homelessness to a sustainable tenancy. Fine Gael understands this and that is why we are committed to the implementation of Housing First. With Housing First, the priority is to assist a person who has experienced homelessness into permanent housing as quickly as possible, where they can receive the tenancy and health aids that they require. Housing First recognises that a stable home provides the basis for recovery in other areas. Already under Housing First 250 number of people have been housed with an 85% tenancy sustainment rate which shows that Housing First is working. Another 221 tenancies are being created over the next year with 663 to be created by 2021.

This will help build upon the progress to date in reducing rough-sleeping which has fallen 40% in Dublin from 184 people in Winter 2017 to 110 in Spring 2018. Through implementation of Housing First on a national basis we will make rough-sleeping rare over the next three-years.

## **Local Property Tax to part-finance local government**

The Local Property Tax is an important part of the funding of local government and provides a fairer alternative to more taxes on income or jobs. Therefore, Fine Gael is committed to retaining it. Removing it will leave a hole of €485m in the public finances.

A review of the Local Property Tax is now being carried out by the government. House prices have increased significantly since the valuations for the LPT were set in 2013. Therefore, we are working to ensure nobody faces a large or sudden increase in their LPT.

## **Good quality, affordable student accommodation**

Over the past two years, more than 5,500 additional student bed spaces have been built while over 7,000 more are under construction. A further 7,000 student beds have received planning permission in recent times as well. This is in line with the National Student Accommodation Strategy which identified a target of 24,000 student beds by 2024. We will continue to

work so that the supply of student accommodation continues to increase. We will enact legislation to introduce rent caps on specifically-built student accommodation.

### **Regulating short-term tourism lets**

The emergence of short term lets, most notably Airbnb, have greatly improved the tourism offering in Ireland and across the world. In the main, it has been an extremely positive development, allowing for new experiences for tourists and a way for home-owners to earn some additional money. However, the practice of letting out full houses on repeated short-term lets has had the effect of reducing the supply of housing that would normally be available for long-term rent.

Therefore we will introduce regulations that prohibit short-term lettings of a house or apartments for more than 90 days a year, unless planning permission is granted by the relevant Local Authority. This will only impact situations where the whole house or apartment is put up for short-term letting and will not stop the situation where a person places a room in their home up for a short-term let or places their home for short-term let or home swap for less than 90 days.



## Chapter 15

### Continued evolution of the state

Irish people have always placed the value of family, community, enterprise, social justice, diversity, openness and internationalism, equality before the law, and individual liberty at the core of our politics and our society. As we approach the centenary of our state's foundation, we remain committed to those values, and so we must ensure that those values reflect how the state operates and interacts with citizens on a day-to-day basis.

Our ambition is that:

- we have a political system that is robust and protected from external interference and threat;
- we build a new, modern, and appropriate relationship between church and state;
- the citizen and consumer is at the centre of economic decision-making; and
- that our Constitution evolves to reflect the needs and aspirations of our ever-changing nation.

*Among the actions that will be brought forward to meet this ambition are:*

#### **Establishing an Electoral Commission and regulating online political advertising**

We will establish an Electoral Commission and reform our legislation covering online advertising. The Electoral Commission's role will be to educate and inform the public about elections and referendums, to update and maintain the electoral register and to conduct elections. As part of this, we will regulate online political advertising and introduce a consistent regime relating to political advertising across all media. This will all help to ensure that citizens can retain high levels of confidence and trust in our electoral system, something which has been undermined in many other democracies.

## 100 years on from independence, a new and appropriate relationship between church and state

It is frequently overlooked, that when the Irish State was founded in 1922, it did not set up a Department of Health or a Department of Social Welfare until 1947. These are now our two largest and best funded government departments accounting for more than half of government spending between them today. Providing healthcare, education and welfare is now considered a core function of our state. That gap was left to the civil society, in particular the Catholic Church to fill.

Ireland is now a very different and more diverse place than it was in the past. One in six of us were not born here, and there are more and more people who adhere to other faiths, or who are comfortable in declaring that they subscribe to no organised religion. We believe that the time has come for us to build a new relationship between church and state in Ireland - a new covenant for the 21st century.

This new covenant is one where religion is no longer at the centre of our society, but in which it still has an important place. One with greater diversity and choice when it comes to the patronage of our schools – and where publicly-funded hospitals are imbued with a civic and scientific ethos.

## Respecting people's privacy in the online era

The protection of people's personal information is increasingly important and relevant given the exponential increase in that data since the advent of the internet age. In order to protect that information and to ensure that such information can only be collected and used with the consent of the individual, Fine Gael in government brought forward the Data Protection Act earlier this year.

The Data Protection Act incorporated the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) into Irish law, enhancing data protection standards for everyone, modernising our data protection framework, and ensuring consistent rules across the EU. We greatly value the role of the independent Data Protection Commissioner who is responsible for upholding the legal rights of individuals under our Data Protection framework. Over the last few years, we have trebled the resources of the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and the 2018 Act makes provision for the recruitment of additional Commissioners and the creation of the Data Protection Commission. We will continue to ensure the Data Protection Commissioner has appropriate resources and adequate powers to protect citizens' rights.

## Stronger consumer professions

Consumers are rarely put at the centre of public policy and decision making. Despite progress in recent years, it is still the case that powerful vested interests have much greater sway with regulators and within the public policy process than consumers. We have started to rebalance that relationship and will make it a central priority of government in the years to come.

We will bring forward a new Consumer Rights Bill which will update and strengthen Irish consumer law in-line with best international practice. This is a major piece of work and will involve a significant public consultation so that it is informed by the ordinary experiences of consumers. In advance of that, we will ensure that legislation to improve consumer protections in relation to gift vouchers and to end ticket-touting is enacted.

As part of our new Consumer Rights Bill, we will require that all reports by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission receive, within three months a reasoned response, from the line Minister on behalf of government.

## Facilitating well-informed debates on constitution reforms proposals

Any amendment to our Constitution requires careful consideration by the people. Citizens must be given ample time to consider the issues and to take part in well-informed public debate. Therefore, we will layout a new timetable for referendums to be held over the next two years. This will allow all involved in campaigning on the issues to plan ahead and to facilitate public debate.

The value of this planning and process was demonstrated by the largely respectful debate surrounding the referendum on the Eighth Amendment in May 2018.

We will bring forward a series of referendums in the coming years to reform and modernise the constitution so that we have a 21st century constitution for a 21st century republic.

We will hold a referendum to remove Article 41.2.1 from the Constitution. The Article suggests that women belong in one sphere only – carrying out “their duties in the home”. The constitutional provisions relating to divorce cause unnecessary suffering to people who want to move on from broken relationships and build a new future for themselves. The four-year waiting period that a couple must spend separated before being eligible for divorce serves nobody’s interests and therefore we will bring forward a referendum to delete this provision. We will also bring forward a referendum to give Irish citizens who live outside of the state a right to vote in the Presidential election.

## **Improving the way we make laws**

Fine Gael in government brought in the system of pre-legislative scrutiny which is shown to be the most effective way of involving parliamentarians in the design and nature of legislation. We will continue this practice and see how it can be better improved. We will work with all parties so that all legislation (both government and Private Members) undertakes pre-legislative scrutiny, with legislation only moving directly to Second Stage when it is of genuine urgency.

There are legitimate concerns about the pace of the drafting of legislation within government. We will undertake an independent review of the legislative drafting process which benchmarks the operational approach here to other comparable jurisdictions.

**FINE GAEL**   
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