

**BUILDING
BETTER
TOGETHER**

LABOUR PARTY
Manifesto 2024



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FOREWORD

Like you, I believe in Ireland's future. In the next five years, I believe that, working together, we can transform our communities.

Values matter in politics. They drive our ambition for Ireland and shape our policies. We are determined to see Labour's values of equality, fairness and solidarity shape the future of Ireland. In this election campaign, we will be seeking the trust and support of the people to enable us to do just that.

Never before have values been as important in an election campaign. In recent years, we have seen sinister forces seeking to sow division, turn neighbour against neighbour, and spread lies and disinformation. I am proud to lead a Party that will always challenge those far-right forces – we will not pander to them.

Labour has ambitious, constructive, and costed plans to tackle the problems that blight so many lives - problems caused by the last government's failings.

We will build affordable homes, end the scourge of low pay and protect welfare from inflation. We will ensure that every child has a school place and the care they need.

We also want to do much more. We want to build a better Ireland together.

A **sustainable Ireland** that protects and enhances our environment.

A **fairer Ireland** where every child has the best start in life.

An equal Ireland which rejects racism and division and values tolerance and community.

Our manifesto 'Building Better Together' sets out our six core missions for change on housing, work, climate, the cost of living, health, and a charter for children's rights. Over 37 chapters, our manifesto sets out a comprehensive progressive vision for changing Ireland.

In this election I am seeking your support in this endeavour. I am asking you to give your No. 1 vote to your local Labour Party candidates so that we can **build better together**.



Ivana Bacik TD
Labour Party Leader



OUR VISION

BUILDING BETTER TOGETHER

Labour has a bold vision for change with six key missions to transform Ireland.

These are:

1. **Build More Homes** – the civil rights issue of our generation, our mission is to transform the housing system and provide secure, affordable homes by building more than 50,000 new homes a year.
2. **A New Deal for Working People** – thousands of working people in Ireland are still in low pay, insecure employment or getting a bad deal. Our mission is to ensure that work is rewarding, safe, and secure.
3. **Climate Action and a Just Transition** – using the power of the State our mission recognises that the climate crisis threatens the future of people and the planet. We will accelerate decarbonisation and provide sustainable solutions to benefit families and communities.
4. **Transform our Health Service** – cut waiting lists, fully staff our health services and implement Sláintecare so that we provide health and care services that are accessible, safe, and available when people need them.
5. **Cost of Living Action Plan** – taking on the root cause of high prices, our mission is to provide better supports for families who are struggling to make ends meet and to give consumers the protection they need from price gouging.
6. **A Charter for Children's Rights** – our mission is to ensure every child has the best start in life and for the State to take seriously its duty to support all children, especially those living in poverty.

Throughout our manifesto, Labour is proposing bold Ideas for the future of Ireland. Whether it's a stronger role for State enterprises, a public model of early years education and care, or the need for greatly improved public services in education, mental health, transport or policing we have constructive, realisable plans.

Labour will invest in lifelong learning, strengthen accountability, develop a new social contract for care, work to end poverty, support the arts and plan for a future united Ireland. We will realise rights and use our global voice to challenge injustice like the genocide in Gaza or Russia's illegal, brutal war against the people of Ukraine.

Labour will build better together, and each chapter of our manifesto outlines our plans to make Ireland a fairer, more sustainable and equal society.

PART 1

**OUR SIX MISSIONS
TO TRANSFORM
IRELAND**

I. BUILD MORE HOMES

Our Mission is to transform the housing system in Ireland and deliver secure and affordable housing for all by building at least 50,000 new homes a year, protect renters and strengthen their rights, tackle vacancy and dereliction and end the scandal of homelessness.

The Housing for All plan has clearly failed to deliver enough new housing and the last government did not take the opportunity over the last three years to revise delivery targets and make the substantial extra investment needed in social and affordable homes. The number of people experiencing homelessness is at record highs while rents are up 27%. House prices are up 10% alone over the last year to record highs, and 38% since the last general election.

Housing is the civil and workers' rights issue of a generation, and many young people have lost hope of ever owning their own home. Labour will change that, and we have a long history of delivering homes at scale. In government Labour will develop a new ambitious housing plan to build an average of at least 50,000 new homes a year over the next five years. It will be:

- » Underpinned by the recommendations of the Housing Commission.
- » Built on our policy commitments to transform the housing system.
- » Premised on the creation of an overall Housing Delivery Oversight Executive.
- » Realised through the establishment of a State Construction Company.

DELIVERING NEW HOMES

Ireland currently has a shortfall of at least 250,000 homes. Housing Commission research has outlined how Ireland may require up to 62,000 new homes per year until 2050 – that would be over 1.5 million new homes – and far more than the revised 2025 target of 41,000 new homes in the government's Housing for All plan.

Labour is ambitious on housing – we must be, but to deliver the scale of affordable and cost rental housing needed will take time to surpass

50,000 new homes a year due to the failure of the last government to act earlier and scale up new construction.

Housing plans must also factor in the need to retrofit and refurbish a further 50,000 homes each year over the course of the next 5 years and the demand this will place on the construction sector. CSO figures show that there are more than 160,000 vacant properties around the country – nearly 8% of our entire housing stock. This is shameful in the midst of the worst housing crisis this State has seen but provides an opportunity to provide additional units in the short term.

HOUSING TARGETS

Labour will build an annual average of 50,000 new homes over the next five years from 2025 to 2029 and scale delivery from 2027 on up to over 60,000 a year. Plans for next year are all but locked in, but if elected to government we will seek to immediately ramp up increased provision of social and affordable housing.

Labour will increase the direct build of new social housing by 50% up to 15,000 a year by 2028. Our long-term goal is 20% of the housing stock as social housing. This will require an additional capital allocation of €2.8bn per year by 2029 (all in costs including land). Inclusive of affordable housing and cost rental measures, capital spending will increase by approximately €1bn a year, every year.

Labour's plan to Build More Homes includes delivery of:

- » An average of 6,500 affordable homes a year with 30,000 over five years, rising to 11,000 by 2030.
- » An average of 5,000 cost-rental homes a year with 25,000 over five years, rising to 6,000 per year by 2030.
- » An average of 13,400 social homes a year with 67,000 over five years, rising to 18,000 per year by 2030.

	2025*	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Social	10,000	12,000	13,500	15,000	16,500	16,500
Cost Rental	<i>See below</i>	4,000	5,000	5,000	6,000	6,000
Affordable Housing	6,400	4,000	5,000	7,000	9,000	11,000
Private Housing	24,600*	25,000	26,500	28,000	28,500	30,000
Total	41,000*	45,000	50,000	55,000	60,000	65,000
Additional Capital		€1.1bn	€1.0bn	€0.9bn	€1.1bn	€1bn

*Revised Housing for All targets, includes combined targets for cost rental and affordable housing.

These are our minimum necessary targets to reflect demand and capacity, and we expect these to be exceeded. Labour will carry out an annual review of housing targets and seek to increase these further as output increases. We have the ambition to deliver the state investment and policy framework necessary to tackle the housing crisis.

Ireland is now a prosperous State but has failed to deliver enough housing. What we cannot afford is another government that lacks ambition.

STATE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

The private housing market has consistently failed to deliver the level of housing development required. The boom-and-bust cycle of the private construction sector has undermined long-term housing delivery and the retention of construction workers.

Labour will reshape the housing system by providing a permanent state capacity for the delivery of housing. This will act in the long term to stabilise the consistent delivery of new homes, and act as a counterbalance to the for-profit delivery model.

Labour believes in a State-led solution to the housing crisis, and we will transform the Land Development Agency into a State Construction Company (SCC), which over time will develop a direct build capacity by employing construction workers to build not-for-profit housing on state-owned land in partnership with local authorities. In the meantime, projects will continue to be tendered. We will aim to deliver at least 10,000

social, cost rental and affordable homes through the SCC within three years of operation through a mix of delivery models.

Funding

Labour will deploy up to €6 billion of the Apple windfall as seed capital for the SCC building on the additional allocations already made to the LDA, and ongoing investment in social housing, cost rental and the local authority affordable purchase scheme. The SCC will be able to tap State funding channels and private markets.

Driving down costs

Up to one third of the price of a typical home is due to margins, finance, and land. Using the scale of the SCC we will ensure more affordable homes as follows:

- » The State will absorb land costs and cut out profit taking on sales. The cost of land for social housing is included in our proposed funding allocations.
- » The SCC will be given new CPO powers to build a pipeline of development land for new housing, working in partnership with local authorities.
- » It will assemble brownfield and regeneration sites with a mandate to achieve higher densities and in-fill development in urban settings and close to transport links, in line with future plans developed under urban development zones.

- » It will drive construction innovation and productivity and deploy modern methods of construction (MMC), timber build, and modular building at scale.
- » Template designs, adapted for individual settings will allow for the more affordable development of multi-unit apartment complexes.

A portion of SCC homes will be ringfenced for key worker housing to ensure affordable accommodation for essential public service staff.

Construction Jobs

The SCC will offer secure, well-paid, and pensionable jobs to workers in the construction sector, as well as ensuring collective bargaining rights and trade union recognition to raise employment standards in the construction sector more broadly and make construction a more appealing and viable career. The SCC will offer apprenticeship programmes and address the training deficit in the Irish construction industry which has arisen partly because of the dependency on short-term privately financed projects.

EMPOWER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Labour will cut red tape and devolve more power and responsibility to local authorities to build and deliver homes. This will reverse the ever-increasing centralisation of housing responsibilities. We want to get Councils back building, working in partnership with the SCC. We will:

- » Provide block grants to local authorities for building new homes in line with annual targets and resource the recruitment of skilled staff.
- » Establish Regional Housing Executives comprising groups of local authorities to pool skills and resources for the delivery of social and affordable housing. These will operate under the well-established shared services model and will contract with the SCC or the private sector to build homes.

LAND SUPPLY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Much of the cost of housing is tied up in land value and speculation adds significant costs. Labour will overhaul and reform the system of compulsory purchase orders, building on the work of the Law Reform Commission, to make it faster and more efficient, and we will also:

- » Introduce a land price register through Tailte Éireann.
- » Ensure sufficient public land is available to local authorities and the SCC for the construction of new housing.
- » Introduce greater regulations to control the cost of land and bring down house prices by enacting Labour's Acquisition of Development Land (*Assessment of Compensation*) Bill 2021 to give effect to the recommendations of the Kenny Report and enable local authorities or the SCC to purchase land at 125% of the existing use value.
- » Implement Land Value Sharing.

Labour will also develop other measures to support additional delivery of sites and housing supply. We will:

- » Develop incentives to encourage the conversion of redundant commercial properties to residential use.
- » Encourage more infill/mews development in urban areas.
- » Examine the use of emergency development levies and stamp duty to disincentivise speculative commercial development in favour of home building.
- » Increase stamp duty on the bulk purchase of homes including apartments.

Serviced Sites and Infrastructure

Local authorities will have a stronger co-ordinating role, through Regional Housing Executives in the provision of infrastructure and servicing of sites for housing development. Labour will continue to invest in Uisce Éireann and provide an additional €1bn in capital to fast-track water supply and waste treatment facilities.

AFFORDABILITY

During the passage of the Affordable Housing Act, Labour proposed that affordability of housing should be tied to incomes rather than market value. The market-led approach to housing delivery has failed to deliver at a price that the average worker and family can afford. The current affordable and cost-rental schemes maintain the link to dysfunctional and inflated market rates. Labour will deliver genuinely affordable housing, with rents and house prices based on what people can pay, not what the market decides they should pay.

Labour will seek to deliver affordable homes costing between €250,000 and €400,000, depending on size and location, reducing costs as outlined under the proposals for a SCC, and will regularly review the level of state subsidies to maintain lower prices.

We will seek to reduce cost rents by providing longer term financing of cost rental developments over 50 and 60 years as outlined under our financing proposals.

Labour will develop a pilot affordable housing delivery model based on leasehold to examine mechanisms to drive down costs further and to ensure that the land remains in long term public control.

GROWING THE CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE

Labour will implement a strategic plan to grow the construction workforce and make the Housing Agency responsible for implementing it. We will:

- » Promote construction careers and grow the construction workforce.
- » Launch a promotional campaign to recruit home members of the Irish diaspora working in construction around the world.
- » Improve pay and conditions for craft apprentices and other trainees.
- » Develop initiatives to bring more women into the sector.
- » Examine the inclusion of craft trades on the critical skills list.

Labour will outline a five-year commitment to public investment in social and affordable housing, and a decade-long plan to reshape the housing sector with stronger state involvement that will provide career certainty for skilled workers in the construction sector. The creation of a SCC and increased direct hiring by local authorities will provide further certainty for future workers.

Apprenticeships and Construction Education

Labour will ensure we train more craft apprentices to build the homes we need. There is a dropout rate of up to 20% while the number of young people entering some key craft apprenticeships fell in 2023. Poor pay is a major problem.

Labour will ensure apprentices are paid at least the living wage and abolish apprenticeship fees. We will explore additional financial support and grants for employers to grow the number of trainees, and ensure public bodies take on more apprentices.

Legal Pathways to Work in Construction

Labour will provide new pathways for migrants to work in our construction sector, introduce new conversion and training courses for international recruits, and examine the addition of craft trades to the critical skills list, subject to annual review.

Ending Bogus Self-Employment

The growth of subcontracting has worsened conditions for workers in the sector and created a culture of bogus self-employment. Labour will introduce new statutory measures to create a presumption of employment status.

FINANCING

The State has the resources to construct the level of housing we need, and Labour will deploy increased levels of capital spending into social and affordable homes. A recent report for the Department of Finance estimated €11.5bn of private financing will be required per year to reach a target of 50,000 homes a year. Labour will increase the direct build portion financed by the State as outlined by over €5bn a year by

2030 and put in place significant new financing mechanisms for private home construction and to support approved housing bodies. Labour will:

- » Establish a State Investment and Development Bank that will finance private housing development using a portion of the €8.4 billion placed in the Future Ireland Fund.
- » Develop a new long-term financing product for Approved Housing Bodies, underwritten by the State to provide financing at 3% or less over 50 and 60 years. This will reduce the cost of financing cost-rental and make cost rents more affordable.
- » Unlock private savings by developing a Housing Solidarity Bond via State Savings with an attractive interest rate to redirect private investment from vulture funds towards housing development.
- » Provide further opportunities for Credit Unions to underwrite mortgages and invest in housing using surplus savings.

PHASING OUT PRIVATE SECTOR SUBSIDIES

Over the last eight years the State has relied on demand side measures that have increased housing prices and continued to expand private rental schemes. Labour will transform these into more targeted sustainable measures.

Replace Help to Buy

The cost of the Help to Buy Scheme is over €180m a year and research shows it has contributed to house price inflation, is not targeted, and disproportionately benefits high-income households.

Labour will phase out the Help to Buy scheme over time by 2029 and develop a more income-targeted Save to Buy scheme for the purchase of new homes with income limits on the tax refund available. We will also develop a Rent to Buy scheme for those in cost rental, where they have successfully paid their rent for three years and see a portion of their payments converted into a deposit for purchasing their own home.

For both proposed schemes, income limits will be in line with those for affordable housing support.

First Home Scheme

The shared equity scheme is counted by the outgoing government as an affordable housing measure but acts to inflate prices and subsidise private developers selling homes at up to €500,000.

Labour will phase out the First Home Scheme from 2026 in favour of real affordable housing provided through local authorities and the new State Construction Company.

HAP and RAS

The long-term failure to provide enough social and affordable housing leaves the State reliant on private rental payments such as HAP and RAS to meet housing needs. Over time Labour will phase down the need for these by building enough social housing. We will reform HAP to reset it as a short-term support and include those housed under HAP on the social housing waiting list as continuing to have a social housing need.

Long Term Social Leasing

Labour will end the use of any new long term social leasing contracts. We will develop a programme to provide for the purchase of these properties to add to the stock of social housing.

Croí Conaithe (Cities) Scheme

Labour has called for funding under the Croí Conaithe (Cities) scheme for private apartment development to be conditional on the delivery of cost rental or affordable purchase, and we will examine the ability to introduce this change for outstanding developments, and then phase the programme down as the SCC focuses on its own projects.

Savings made from the removal of these schemes will be reinvested to increase and improve our social and affordable housing stock including estate regeneration.

TACKLING VACANCY AND DERELICTION

Labour will undertake a new national survey and mapping exercise of vacancy and dereliction to provide a comprehensive database of vacant homes and derelict sites. We will then introduce a new comprehensive plan to tackle dereliction, and resource local authorities to CPO properties left vacant or derelict for over three years with a new streamlined process. Labour will also:

- » Resource local authorities to hire more staff to tackle vacancy and dereliction and undertake the CPO of properties and provide additional capital funding to fund acquisitions.
- » Increase the Vacant Homes Tax to ten times the rate of LPT with a minimum charge of €3,000 per year.
- » Ringfence revenue from the VHT and Residential Zoned Land Tax for the local authorities it came from, to fund vacancy and dereliction measures.
- » Overhaul the Derelict Sites Acts, increase the levy and improve collection by using the Revenue Commissioners to collect unpaid levies.
- » Introduce compulsory sale orders as another lever for local authorities to force the owner of a derelict site or building to put it up for sale.
- » Extend the Living Cities initiative to more towns across the country.
- » Make the Vacant Homes refurbishment grant available in instalments along with zero-interest loans for retrofitting measures.
- » Increase capital grants for the Built Heritage Investment and Historic Structures Fund to support maintenance and regeneration.
- » Introduce a new scheme to support the conversion of 'above the shop' spaces into use as housing.

Our national survey will also identify vacant publicly owned buildings such as in the HSE estate and redevelop these as key worker housing.

SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Labour has outlined our ambitious targets for delivery of social and affordable housing and will implement the following additional policy changes.

Social Housing

Between social housing waiting lists and HAP there are nearly 120,000 households with an unmet housing need. Labour will seek to increase the share of social housing to 20% of Ireland's overall housing stock, and over the medium-term double capital investment. We will:

- » Deliver mixed tenure housing developments that promote social cohesion by dispersing social units among affordable units and ensure that community infrastructure like schools and primary health services are in place from the outset.
- » Provide increased funding for turning around vacant social housing 'voids'.
- » Ensure that the framework for allocations prioritise those living in long-term homelessness.
- » Establish an independent statutory appeals process for social housing eligibility/assessment.
- » Increase social housing income limits to €45,000 per single person and benchmark future increase to wage growth.
- » Gradually phase down reliance on HAP subsidy, but in the interim, we will allow HAP tenants to remain on the social housing list and will not consider their housing need as having been met while they are in receipt of the payment.
- » Prioritise the development of more social housing for one-adult households.
- » Invest in estate regeneration and energy efficiency upgrades of existing social housing.

Affordable Home Ownership

Labour will introduce new targeted measures to support people to buy affordable homes by developing 'save to buy' and 'rent to buy'

schemes. We will keep income limits and subsidies for affordable housing development under annual review.

We will amend the Incremental Tenant Purchase Scheme to ensure greater cost recovery by local authorities, ringfence funds for delivery of new social housing and investigate the use of longer-term covenants to retain a repurchase option.

Approved Housing Bodies

AHBs will continue to play a key role in addressing the challenges facing the housing sector in Ireland for individuals and families. Labour will ensure continued support for AHBs to provide social and affordable housing, increase their output to help Ireland meet our housing need, and explore options to support consolidation of smaller AHBs to build scale and capacity.

Labour will reform the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) loan and seek to convert a portion of it to grant funding to address issues of debt and gearing levels, as well as providing flexibility in Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) funding to facilitate future exceptional increases in costs and interest rate increases to maintain viability. We will develop longer term financing options, underwritten by the State to reduce the level of cost rents charged to tenants.

Labour will scale up cost-rental accommodation and ensure that delivery is strengthened by addressing policy and process gaps and prioritise robust data and research to enable monitoring and evaluation. We will expand income eligibility criteria for Cork, Limerick, Galway, and the greater Dublin area in line with that of Dublin.

Given their position in the housing market and in the provision of social housing in Ireland, AHBs will have a key role in our efforts to decarbonise our housing stock. Labour will provide increased grant funding to AHBs of up to 100% to support deep retrofitting and energy efficiency upgrades.

Housing Cooperatives

Labour will support the rollout of more housing cooperatives by making infill and new sites available for development and support improved access to finance. We will also explore the

introduction of a new model of AHB based on a system of mutual home ownership through housing cooperatives to allow residents more say over the organisation and the management of their homes.

BUILDING STANDARDS AND DEFECTS

Labour will establish and resource a strong Building Standards Regulator to ensure the mistakes of the past are not repeated with on the ground compliance, and we will hold an inquiry into the construction defect scandals.

Labour will put in place a defects remediation scheme, managed by the Housing Agency to fund fire safety, water ingress and serious structural defect repair works in apartments and duplexes including reimbursement for those who have already paid for, or are paying for remediation. We will increase grant limits for the Enhanced Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme in line with construction inflation and fund the replacement of foundations where required. Labour will also:

- » Make latent defects insurance compulsory for all new residential and mixed-use buildings.
- » Update company, contract, and tort law so that the rights and responsibilities of building and homeowners with regard to builders and developers is rebalanced.
- » Reform the Multi-Unit Developments Act with responsibility moving to the Department of Housing, improve governance and establish a regulator.

PLANNING

Good planning is at the heart of well-functioning communities. Labour will review the recent rushed changes introduced by the Planning and Development Act to address the mistakes that will have been made and restore more autonomy to local authorities. As part of our reform of local government we will seek a transformational overhaul of the planning and development process through a Green and White paper process consistent with the principle of subsidiarity.

Labour will resource the planning system to ensure it can deliver on ambitious housing targets and our climate and infrastructural needs. We will train and recruit the hundreds of additional qualified staff needed in local authorities and An Coimisiún Pleanála.

We will also:

- » Introduce a 'use-it-or-lose-it' policy to tackle land speculation and address unactivated planning permissions.
- » Amend the expiration date of planning applications from 5 years to 3 years and only extend applications where there is a valid and genuine reason for delays in commencement.
- » Require all planning applications for housing developments of 5 or more units to include statements of funding and financial viability, so that local authorities can be certain from the beginning that the development will be completed.
- » Implement a rule which would extinguish planning permission in the event of sale of land and require a retrospective payment of the vacancy or dereliction tax for the period the land was undeveloped.

STRONGER RIGHTS FOR RENTERS

The private rental market in Ireland is broken and renters live in constant fear of eviction. Labour will be guided by the recommendations of the Housing Commission, but we will fundamentally change the balance of power so that people are protected in their homes. Landlords will be able to remove tenants who fail to pay their rent or meet the terms of their lease but otherwise the grounds for eviction will be severely restricted. We will introduce an immediate freeze on rent increases and evictions until housing supply dramatically increases and introduce a Register of Rents. As part of our overhaul, Labour will consolidate the Residential Tenancies Act, update the regulatory framework and introduce the following reforms:

More Secure Homes

- » End no fault evictions, and stop evictions if a property is being sold, ending the practice of vacant possession.
- » Limit evictions on the grounds of refurbishment only to when it is not fit for habitation.
- » Restrict eviction on the grounds of extended family use to personal use only of spouses and children with stronger regulation and enforcement.

Fair Rents

- » Provide for a Register of Rents to give the number and length of previous tenancies, the rent being paid and previously paid.
- » Introduce a system of Reference Rents for the setting of new tenancy agreements.

New Rights

- » Introduce a Deposit Protection Scheme administered by the RTB.
- » Give tenants the right to ask for a property to be let without furniture or white goods.
- » Provide for model tenancy agreements from the RTB and stop the prohibition on pet ownership and hanging clothes to dry in a garden or balcony.

Obligations and incentives for Landlords

- » Provide for an obligation to declare that a rental property complies with regulations, and a right to information for tenants on any refurbishment or renovation that led to an eviction or rent increase.
- » For HAP tenancies allow applications for the SEAI Warmer Homes scheme on condition of a minimum five-year lease, with clawback clauses.

Minimum Standards

All too often, homes in the private rental and public sector do not receive sufficient maintenance, leading to issues like mould or infestations that can pose a genuine health risk for tenants. Labour will introduce statutory minimum standards for housing quality and:

- » Strengthen RTB powers to investigate standards and increase the number of housing inspections.
- » Introduce an NCT-style system of certification to ensure minimum standards are met in private rental and social housing accommodation.
- » Legislate to adopt a legal definition of sustainable, quality housing that includes each element of adequate housing identified by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- » Include a legal definition of 'overcrowding' in private rented accommodation.

Structural Changes

Labour will phase down the HAP, RAS, and other current expenditure delivery streams over time through provision of enough social housing, and we will:

- » Ensure those availing of HAP and other schemes remain on social housing lists and are not deemed as having their needs met.
- » Empower the RTB to regulate local authority tenancies.

Residential Tenancies Board

Labour will ensure the RTB is adequately resourced to reduce delays in decision making and ensure that future cases are resolved in a timely manner. We will:

- » Strengthen RTB determination orders by making these legally enforceable to avoid lengthy court proceedings when one party fails to comply with the order.
- » Empower renters with a public information campaign on their rights.

Stopping Illegal Evictions

Labour will legislate to make forceful eviction a criminal offence where the RTB has deemed the eviction to be unlawful.

SHORT-TERM LETS

The long running failure to properly regulate the short-term letting sector continues to strip homes from the residential sector. Labour will

address this and give local authorities the power to levy charges on tourist accommodation including AirBnB type lets. In many rural areas and Gaeltachtaí large numbers of houses are being used for tourist accommodation, stripping communities of much needed homes.

For nearly a decade Labour has put forward proposals for stronger regulation. We will ensure that short-term lets cannot be advertised on booking platforms unless the property is registered with Fáilte Ireland and has received the relevant planning permission for change of use, and introduce significant penalties on booking platforms for non-compliance. This will be enforced through strong inspection teams in local authorities.

HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness has reached record highs under this government with child homelessness soaring by over 76% since Housing for All was published. Official figures also don't capture hidden homelessness. Rough sleeping has significantly increased. Our plan to increase the provision of social and affordable housing and introduce stronger renter's rights will address the underlying causes, and Labour will adopt a new approach that seeks to exit more people out of homelessness, prevent further increases and support those in homelessness. We will:

- » Publish a new Homelessness Reduction and Prevention Plan to meet the objectives of the Lisbon Declaration by 2030.
- » Introduce dedicated funding for homeless prevention measures including a ban on no fault evictions and collect accurate data on the real level of hidden homelessness.
- » Expand Housing First and wraparound supports for those exiting homelessness and explore new pilot projects for those hardest to reach.
- » Expand the Tenant in Situ scheme by 300 homes to 1,800, and retain the cost rental scheme, provide more autonomy to local authorities to act on vacant social housing and homelessness prevention and increase their resources.

Labour will put more support in place for families and children, particularly lone parent families which comprise nearly 60% of families in homelessness. Labour will pass our *Housing (Homeless Families) Bill* to require local authorities to recognise and prioritise the needs of the child when assessing families for housing supports, and:

- » Ensure that every child experiencing homelessness is assigned a Child Support Worker, dedicated school transport and mental health supports.
- » Establish a statutory limit on the time a family or individual can spend in emergency accommodation and introduce regulations on the appropriate type of accommodation and introduce quality inspections.
- » Greatly increase the provision of care leaver accommodation and the number of one bed homes to support single people at risk of homelessness.

Labour will audit existing spending in the sector, review existing structures, and ensure the pay of staff in Section 10 organisations is linked to public pay agreements to improve retention.

THE RIGHT TO A HOME

Labour will hold a referendum to protect the right to a home and access to adequate housing in our Constitution.

ADDRESSING SPECIFIC HOUSING NEEDS

Labour will implement a series of bespoke housing policies to support specific housing needs. Further details on these plans are included throughout our manifesto.

Victims of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness, particularly for women. Labour will strengthen our laws to ensure that victims of domestic violence are not forced to flee their home and can remain in possession of the property or tenancy rather than the perpetrator, and where they cannot return home have alternative accommodation made available to them.

We will also:

- » Deliver a five-year plan to provide enough family refuge places to comply with the Istanbul Convention by bringing total provision to over 500 places and ensure every county has at least one refuge.
- » Update guidance for social housing allocation schemes so that victims of domestic violence are given priority and ensure that all relevant housing staff are provided with appropriate training in relation to domestic violence.

Older People

As people grow older, they may require adaptations and support to allow them to continue to live at home. Labour will:

- » Increase the income limits and maximum award for the Housing Aid for Older People Grant in line with inflation so that more older people who require adaptations can remain in their own home.
- » Expand the Housing with Supports model and ringfence a proportion of social housing for older people with adherence to universal design principles so that housing is age appropriate.
- » Develop a voluntary national 'rightsizing' scheme to support people who want to move to more age-friendly housing within their own community.

People with Disabilities

Labour will fully implement the National Housing Strategy for Disabled people, and ringfence 10% of social and affordable housing for people with disabilities with universal design standards and fully wheelchair accessible housing.

Labour will increase the maximum awards under the Housing Adaptation Grant to €60,000 to account for the real costs of having work done and to make sure that those who have acquired disabilities can remain in their own home, and index income limits to wage growth. We will also ensure when work is approved that it is aligned with the SEAI Warmer Homes scheme to deliver energy upgrades at the same time.

Traveller Housing

Labour will work with Traveller representative organisations to develop a new National Traveller Housing Strategy based on the 2019 Expert Review to end the poor conditions faced by many in the Traveller community, give local authorities binding targets and ensure that culturally appropriate housing is made available to members of the community on the social housing list.

Student Accommodation

Students are at the coalface of the rental crisis, facing exorbitant rents, or else are forced into torturous commutes, living in overcrowded and substandard accommodation, or dropping out of college altogether due to the lack of affordable options. Much of the purpose-built student accommodation coming on stream is effectively “luxury” accommodation and utterly unaffordable for most students.

Labour will significantly increase direct capital funding for student accommodation to ensure that access to education remains equitable and attainable for all. We will also:

- » Develop a rent index for student accommodation so that students and parents don't face unfair hikes in rent.
- » Introduce new protections for students living in digs-style accommodation.
- » Allow technological universities to borrow to build student accommodation.

Labour commitments on retrofitting and energy efficiency upgrades are outlined in our Climate chapter.

2. A NEW DEAL FOR WORKING PEOPLE

Our Mission is to end low pay and give workers more power at work through an ambitious programme to raise pay, promote collective bargaining, provide more control over their working lives, greater opportunities to transform their career, and security in retirement.

Ireland has a strong economy and a relatively low unemployment rate but too many people struggle to make ends meet. Housing remains the greatest workers' rights issue in Ireland, and we have a plan to transform the delivery of housing and build over 50,000 new homes a year. Access to affordable local childcare is a vital support for working parents and Labour will address the shortage of places with a public scheme.

Ireland has the weakest workers' rights in western Europe and is an outlier on trade union recognition in the workplace. There is growing evidence of aggressive efforts by employers to block trade union access to organise and support their members. Trade union density is at a deep low of 22% with collective bargaining coverage of around 40%, half the projected target of 80%. Substantial reforms are needed as low levels of collective bargaining are a key driver of high market income inequality, leaving too many workers on low pay and in precarious work.

That is why Labour will transpose in full the provisions of the **Adequate Minimum Wages Directive** and in government we will:

- » Put in place a comprehensive programme to promote collective bargaining.
- » Ensure workers can exercise their right to collectively bargain.
- » Protect workers and trade union representatives against victimisation, and dismissal, and unions against acts of interference.

- » Ensure appropriate facilities are provided so that trade union representatives can carry out their role comprehensively.

Greater workplace democracy leads to increased productivity, flexibility, and innovation, and will enable more sustainable and resilient economic growth.

Labour will implement in full the final report of the Labour Employment Economic Forum **High Level Group on Collective Bargaining** covering recommendations on JLCs, the increased use of technical assessors before the Labour Court, encourage good faith engagement in enterprises, and introduce training and a code of practice.

To drive this process and ensure robust protections for workers, Labour will establish a new **Department of Work and Social Protection**, transferring the workplace regulation division from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Labour has an ambitious programme that will deliver a new deal for working people to end low wages and give employees more power at work. Our proposals are built around five key objectives:

- » **The freedom to organise and bargain collectively.**
- » **Raising pay and ending poor working conditions.**
- » **Greater control for workers.**
- » **Opportunities to transform your career.**
- » **Security in retirement.**

THE FREEDOM TO ORGANISE AND BARGAIN COLLECTIVELY

Acting alone workers are too often denied their fair share but through collective power they can secure their share of the wealth they helped create. Ireland must develop a framework of enabling conditions for collective bargaining by October 2025, and Labour will implement the following measures to promote collective bargaining:

Victimisation and Unfair dismissal

Labour will overhaul the overly restrictive Unfair Dismissals Act. No worker should be punished for organising or seeking to organise for better pay and conditions at work. We will break down barriers for workers seeking to organise or access trade unions and stamp out egregious employer behaviour that has a chilling impact on staff. Currently, there is a cap on payouts to four weeks' pay and compensation based only on actual losses not exemplary damages. To avail of protections, an employee must have 12 months service and demonstrate they are seeking work after the dismissal. In contrast, whistleblower legislation provides for up to five years compensation for those unfairly dismissed.

Labour will introduce penalties for egregious employer behaviour, lift the cap on payments and ensure compensation is awarded based on the severity of the action taken. This will send a clear message to protect union members and their representatives from victimisation, dismissal, and acts of interference.

Public Procurement

The State spends billions on public procurement every year across Departments, agencies, and local government. Billions more are provided in State grants and tax incentives. Labour will require recipients of State funding and contracts to commit to engaging in collective bargaining and the recognition of trade unions representing their workers. Labour will advocate and support the revision of EU public procurement legislation to strengthen the social clause.

Fair Pay Agreements

Labour will establish more employer-trade union Joint Labour Committees across all low paid sectors of the economy to set Fair Pay Agreements of binding minimum pay and conditions for workers. We will end the employer veto that has blocked progress when groups refuse to engage in a collective wage setting process. This would allow for the adoption of Employment Regulation Orders to create an equal playing pitch with a floor on pay and conditions.

Additional Measures

Labour will also introduce a further series of measures to:

- » Provide a legal right of access for workers to trade union representatives.
- » Ensure the industrial relations and enforcement machinery of the State is properly resourced and fit for purpose.
- » Restore tax relief on trade union subscriptions.
- » Legislate to protect trade union membership deductions at source.
- » Strengthen social dialogue in line with the 2023 EU Council recommendation.
- » Strengthen the capacity building of social partners including through the European Social Fund (ESF+).
- » Ratify the International Labour Organisation Collective Bargaining Convention 154(1981).
- » Oblige all public bodies and those in receipt of public funds to implement sectoral agreements and Labour Court recommendations.

RAISING PAY AND ENDING POOR WORKING CONDITIONS

Labour will raise pay, deliver improved conditions for workers, and increase funding for the WRC and the Health and Safety Authority to uphold standards. We will ensure workers are free to organise and be represented by a trade union which remains the best way to address low pay and other issues in individual workplaces.

A Living Income

Labour will ensure the national living wage is set at 60% of median hourly earnings by 2026, and we will legislate for a binding annual requirement on the Low Pay Commission to progressively increase it to 66% as a floor on low pay. Our objective is a wage that if paid to a single adult living alone and in full-time employment would enjoy a decent standard of living. We will instruct the Low Pay Commission to further develop a measure of the cost of living with reference to national statistics, including rent levels, and poverty indicators, to form part of the annual

rate setting process so that the prescribed living income is fair, sustainable, and delivers a minimum essential standard of living.

Eliminate Bogus Self-Employment

Labour will create an automatic assumption of employment and a right to certainty of hours for those in precarious employment. There are sectors in Ireland where employees have long been forced into bogus self-employment arrangements such as construction and media. This costs both workers and the state in lost benefits and social insurance payments. The arrival of gig work through online apps and platforms has accelerated the trend in the name of flexibility but at the expense of the most vulnerable workers.

Equal Pay for Equal Work

Labour will strengthen the gender pay gap legislation and fully transpose and implement the pay transparency directive to ensure equal pay for equal work including its provisions promoting collective bargaining on measures to tackle pay discrimination. Companies with 50 or more employees will be required to report from 2025 but the existing framework doesn't pick up on the number of women in part time work versus full time work. Labour will include organisations with more than 25 employees, set up a centralised database of the pay gap, and require employers to agree a plan of action and targets with trade unions to reduce the gap.

Ban Unpaid Internships

Labour will ban unpaid internships and outlaw 'open market' internships. All work should be recognised, respected and at the very least paid the national living wage. Everyone should be able to access the opportunities from an internship, not just those with the financial means to do so.

Pay Rates for Young People

Labour will legislate to abolish lower rates of the national minimum wage for young people. There is no acceptable reason any longer for discriminating based on age with sub-minimum rates.

Apprenticeship Pay

Labour will pay apprentices at a minimum the national living wage. The current NMW does not apply to craft apprentices in training and lower rates of pay are set as part of national agreements. The current NMW is already insufficient to live on, and we need to pay our apprentices better to recruit the construction workers we need to build at least 50,000 homes a year and deliver on the National Development Plan.

Care and Community Work

Those working in outsourced public services in the care and community sector through Section 39, 56 and 10 bodies should be paid properly, and Labour will ensure they have a seat at public pay negotiations. We will also promote cooperatives as an alternative to for profit social care.

Statutory Redundancy Cap

The €600 per week cap on statutory redundancy has been in place for twenty years and was last reviewed in 2005. Based on the formula that applied previously the rate should now be set at over €1,000. Labour will increase the rate over the period of the next five years, and index it to future wage increases.

Improve the Permit System

Labour will reform the employment permit system to protect vulnerable migrant workers, with the freedom to change employers, immediate family reunions rights, a reduction in the annual renewal fee, and stronger regulation to stop exploitation.

GREATER CONTROL FOR WORKERS

Labour will move the dial on the structural power imbalance at work. We will ensure workers have greater control over how they are managed, monitored, and paid at work, and ensure they are free to organise and be represented by a trade union which is the best way to secure greater control in the workforce. We will introduce worker directors starting with appointments to the board of every state agency through staff elections.

Artificial Intelligence

Labour will regulate the use of AI and algorithmic management in the workplace, and limit its use in recruitment, remuneration and day to day supervision. We are concerned at the growth in monitoring through AI applications and in work surveillance. We will establish an expert group to report on developments, and proposals for statutory protection.

Labour advocates a just digital transformation based on human-centred digitalisation and the effective regulation of AI through the incorporation of the 'human in control' principle into EU law.

Platform Work and the Gig Economy

Whether it's ordering a takeaway, getting shopping delivered or a taxi home from a night out, online platforms have transformed how we live. Labour will regulate platform work in line with the EU platform work directive, ensure gig workers have access to information about their pay and legislate for transparency in algorithmic management.

The Right to Switch Off

Labour will introduce a real right to switch off in with clear protections in place to stop the blurring of lines between work and home. People are working longer hours than ever before, and technology has turned our homes into 24/7 offices. We will promote work-life balance and introduce protections for mental health risks, online harassment and shaming at work.

Public Holidays

Labour will designate Good Friday as a public holiday and hold a public consultation on when a further date should be added to the calendar. A day off on Good Friday is at the discretion of employers and Ireland currently has ten official public holidays, still below the EU average of 13.

A Just Transition

Labour will ensure a just transition for workers in sectors impacted by our transformation to a fossil fuel free economy and will introduce protections for workers due to extreme weather conditions and temperature limits for work.

OPPORTUNITIES TO TRANSFORM YOUR CAREER

We want to give every worker and potential worker the chance to make the most of their work lives and break down the barriers to greater hours and to employment. Labour believes that a real right to flexible work for all workers will be particularly transformative for people with disabilities, those trapped in part-time and low paid employment, lone parents and those who can't access work at all because of caring responsibilities in their lives.

A Right to Flexible Work

The pandemic transformed the options available for flexible work and the freedom to work from home. Those gains are now being eroded as employers force workers back to the office. Labour will legislate for a strong right to flexible work to replace the current right to request and code of practice.

Four Day Week

Real world evidence shows that a four-day work week is boosting profits for companies and improving work life balance for employees. Labour will encourage ongoing trials and adoption of four-day weeks or six-hour days, and support more flexible working arrangements with safeguards for pay levels.

A full year of Paid Parental Leave

Labour will ensure new parents can take a year of combined paid leave and extend it further by expanding parents' benefits over time in line with existing parental leave entitlements. We will increase the rate of maternity, paternity and parents' benefit due to the low income replacement rate and introduce pay related payments starting with maternity benefit. Ireland is well below EU and OECD norms, of payments equivalent to at least 50% of average earnings. The Health and Safety Benefit for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers will be increased to the same rate as maternity benefit.

Reproductive Leave

Labour will introduce reproductive health related leave to embed compassion in the

workplace. This will provide up to 20 days paid time off work for all women who experience pregnancy loss and up to 10 days leave for those undergoing fertility treatments. We will also require employers to implement menopause and menstrual policies so that workplaces are inclusive and supportive for women, restore the delayed increases in statutory sick leave, to reach 10 days by 2026, and double domestic violence leave to 10 days.

Freedom to Learn

Labour will introduce a freedom to Learn scheme, funded from the National Training Fund to provide skills vouchers, free part time degree and master's courses as part of our strategy for lifelong learning. This will allow workers who are mid-career to 'stop and switch' and choose a new career direction for themselves. It will be managed by Solas and be demand driven where a worker has a minimum of 10 years of continuous social insurance contributions inclusive of credited leave.

People with Disabilities

Labour will introduce a new, resourced Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities. Ireland has one of the lowest disability employment rates in Europe and we will introduce a cost of disability payment, provide increased resources for assistive technology, and reform the Wage Subsidy Scheme, Reasonable Accommodation Fund, and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme.

SECURITY IN RETIREMENT

Labour will ensure retired workers have access to the industrial relations mechanisms for pension scheme changes and other related issues. In our Social Protection proposals, we outline measures Labour will take to implement a pension promise to link increases in the state pension to 34% of average earnings, protect defined benefit pension schemes, provide pension increases for cohorts of CIE and An Post pensioners, and develop the auto-enrolment scheme further.

Auto-Enrolment Pensions

Labour has long sought the new auto-enrolment pension scheme that will begin in September 2025, to ensure employers contribute to their worker's retirement savings. Labour will review the operation of the scheme and options to provide pension advice and products such as paying pensions directly to workers on retirement rather than a lump sum. This would provide increased security, reduce risk, and better access to the lower costs and higher returns of a large State fund. We will ensure the new scheme does not undermine existing occupational schemes.

Gender Pension Gap

Women live longer than men and are more likely to take time out of paid work for caring responsibilities. This results in lower pension savings, and there is a reported gender pension gap of 36% in Ireland. Labour will establish an expert group to develop proposals to address this such as provision for a partner to make pension contributions on behalf of a mother, or workplace policies such as an employer making increased contributions after a return from maternity leave.

Frontline Uniformed Services

To address the impact of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme on members of frontline uniformed services, Labour will introduce an occupational supplementary pension as a key retention measure for post-2013 personnel in the Defence Forces, An Garda Síochána, the Prison Service and Fire Service, to bridge the gap for those forced to retire early.

3. CLIMATE ACTION AND A JUST TRANSITION

Our mission is to secure a just transition and meet our ambitious climate targets and carbon budgets using the power of the State to drive action on energy, retrofitting and the circular economy.

2024 will be the warmest year on record. The climate catastrophe is the greatest existential threat facing humanity. Climate breakdown is already impacting Ireland and climate models predict that things will continue to get worse as the Earth exceeds 1.5 degrees of warming. Storms, flooding, rainfall events and droughts are all becoming more frequent and severe. Sea level rise and tidal surges are eating away at our coastlines. As a small nation, we cannot solve this crisis on our own. Ireland can, however, take a leadership position in all international negotiations in solidarity with other small islands and developing countries to ensure that global climate action is aligned with science, and that it is fast and fair.

A NATIONAL MISSION

Acting on our climate pollution means phasing out fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas, and transforming our energy system so that it is using less energy overall, with most of our energy usage coming from renewable electricity instead. It also requires us to prepare for greater uncertainty and risk, whether from weather related extremes, or systemic risks from our exposure to catastrophic weather events elsewhere that, for example, lead to a surge in commodity prices or a drop in yields of essential foodstuffs.

Getting off fossil fuels will save everyone and the economy as a whole money in the long run. But to kickstart the energy revolution the state must lead in setting out a national energy transformation strategy that subsidises the upfront investment costs. The state must also shape energy markets to prioritise energy efficiency, fairness and social equality. Labour

is committed to decarbonising every sector of the economy without relying on loopholes, greenwashing or offshoring, and the next government must address aviation emissions.

Under Labour, the Department of Climate Action and Environment will develop an updated and ambitious climate action strategy that is science-based, people-centred and that delivers emission reductions consistent with our legally binding carbon budgets. This will be a national mission.

Difficult decisions will need to be made, and Labour will not shy away from making those if necessary. We will bring annual emissions of greenhouse gases down by c.8% per annum during the lifetime of the next government to meet our binding national and EU 2030 targets and transform Ireland's energy system so that there are warm homes and affordable and reliable public transport for all. Our long-term goal is net zero by 2050 at the latest, but this may be brought forward if necessary to align with climate science.

EMISSION TARGETS

The Climate Change Advisory Council has warned that failure to meet our 2030 targets will result in fines of over €8 billion. Labour will meet our targets in a socially just way that shifts the policy burden off the backs of householders and ordinary workers onto polluters, particularly corporate entities, and high individual emitters. We will:

- » Create new, green jobs in the circular and sustainable energy economy.
- » Revitalise neglected industries, buildings, and trades to kickstart a people's energy transition movement.
- » Act to eliminate fuel, energy, and transport poverty, especially among low-income households, people with disabilities, students, and renters.
- » Work to create a just economy where people and nature thrive.
- » Reshape the Irish economic model so that it is energy efficient, respectful of planetary boundaries, and delivers wellbeing for all.

- » Ensure that all carbon tax revenues are fully ringfenced for climate action and related Just Transition measures.

THE END OF THE FOSSIL ENERGY ERA

Labour will ban the importation of fracked gas and will seek a clear commitment at the UN to end fossil fuel extraction and endorse the development of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Labour will maintain the ban on offshore drilling or any further extraction of fossil fuels on Ireland's land or waters, with no renewal of existing licences when they expire. We will seek to end all further investment in fossil fuel infrastructure such as gas pipelines, gas (including liquified gas) storage infrastructure or fossil fuel power generation installations except for that which is required to balance the grid in the short term.

We will support research into, and deployment of, other carbon storage and utilisation technologies and renewable gas only where these result in verifiable absolute emission reductions consistent with the IPCC timeframes for net zero, and where they do not result in secondary environmental impacts.

A JUST AND TIMELY TRANSITION

Labour will draw up a plan to close all coal, peat and oil burning power stations in line with our national carbon budgets and renewable energy strategy, while using the existing subsidy to support affected workers and communities. We will provide a Decent Job Guarantee to any worker who loses their job due to Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy. This will mean re-employment in another state enterprise, with retraining and upskilling provided.

Labour will place the Just Transition Commission on a statutory footing and implement any recommendations for sector-specific decarbonisation plans. We are committed to using the social partnership model to ensure stakeholder participation in all aspects of the climate and energy transition.

Labour will expand the commercial semi-state sector involvement in renewable energy, energy management services and retrofitting, sustainable afforestation and forest management and bog restoration. We will give each a new mandate to align with achieving our climate, biodiversity, and nature restoration ambitions.

REPOWERING IRELAND

Labour will launch a new renewable energy strategy to ensure that at least 80% of Ireland's electricity needs are met by renewable energy sources by 2030 by designating renewable energy acceleration zones and by issuing mandatory targets to local authorities for renewable energy designations in county development plans. This will require an unprecedented scaling up of renewable energy projects and grid improvements nationwide.

Labour will ensure An Coimisiún Pleanála and local authorities are resourced and staffed with specialist planning and ecological expertise so that they can decide on strategically important sustainable infrastructure projects aligned with this goal within 18 weeks. We will also ensure MARA and the NPWS are adequately resourced. We will amend the planning and climate acts, if necessary, to ensure that the annual Climate Action Plan, the legally binding carbon emissions targets, and the obligation on public bodies to make their decisions in a manner consistent with climate action, are paramount in the decision-making process.

Labour will establish new grant schemes to support local energy transition and climate action plans. We will remove barriers to community energy schemes and promote small-scale renewable energy projects via Local Enterprise Offices and the SEAI. We will also provide a fund to support decarbonisation zones in each local authority.

Labour will draw up a national energy efficiency plan that delivers Ireland's targets under the Energy Efficiency Directive, by focusing on innovative solutions to energy, fuel and transport poverty as well as ensuring that public bodies are exemplars in energy conservation measures.

CLEAN, RENEWABLE ENERGY

Labour will accelerate the development of wind and solar power and deploy €1 billion of the Apple windfall as financing to take direct equity stakes in offshore wind projects. We will direct the new Strategic Investment and Development Bank to manage this and deploy further resources to ensure we deliver on Ireland's untapped renewable energy potential. Within the first year of a new government, we will:

- » Outline a new framework to deliver critical enabling infrastructure such as grid, ports, and advanced energy parks.
- » Put in place an administrative one stop shop with a National Energy Coordinator to deliver the plan.
- » Ensure that by the end of 2025 we have accelerated and completed the zoning of our offshore development areas, designated Marine Protected Areas, and initiated a process to develop scalable floating demonstration projects.

Labour will create a new Strategic Ports Infrastructure Fund to support offshore construction. We will also ensure that EirGrid and ESB Networks rapidly scale up the resilience of our transmission network so that the grid becomes more robust. Funding for the EV charging network needs to increase by 50% over the next three years with a local authority programme to provide on-street e-charging facilities.

Labour will develop a national energy storage strategy with increased investment in battery and thermal storage options alongside projects like Silvermines Hydro. We will seek changes to EU rules to define pumped hydroelectricity plants as energy storage, and part of grid operations, rather than as power stations. This will allow EirGrid to invest in more of these facilities as a mechanism to manage variable electricity supply from wind. We will support and invest in all energy storage and interconnection infrastructure that is required to support the renewable electricity goal.

ALIGNING THE ENERGY SYSTEM WITH FAIRNESS AND EFFICIENCY

Labour will introduce a legal moratorium on new data centre developments until a robust legislative and regulatory framework is established that ensures they pose no threat to our binding limits on climate pollution or the security of our electricity supply. We will establish a transparent register of all data centres and large energy users to track their energy and water demand and require all existing data centres to develop decarbonisation plans within 12 months.

Labour will pass a Heat law to set out a regulatory framework for district heating schemes using waste heat from industry, incineration, and data centres. Resources from the Infrastructure, Nature and Climate Fund will be deployed to support the development of these new heating networks.

As surplus offshore wind power comes onto the grid, Labour will implement a renewable national hydrogen strategy to completely phase out fossil fuels and address strategic energy independence needs. We will also develop options for carbon capture and storage and explore the potential of tidal and geothermal power and other new technologies like sustainable aviation fuel.

Labour will extend the schools photovoltaic scheme to provide all schools and colleges with solar panels and seek to facilitate the donation of free excess solar generated electricity to local communities instead of spilling the excess to the grid. We will work to provide enhanced training, learning and engagement opportunities for local communities to participate in energy transition projects. We will invest in green skills, apprenticeships, and new training opportunities to staff the climate transition.

Labour will review the biomethane strategy to ensure that it achieves absolute greenhouse gas emissions reductions without resulting in additional land being converted to grass production. Biomethane plants should be integrated with local energy plans and incentivised to improve farm waste management

and provide onsite renewable energy while also creating additional income streams for farmers.

WARMER HOMES FOR ALL

For too many people, upgrading their home is out of financial reach even with generous grants and the new low-cost loan product. Our priority is to first improve the energy efficiency of households with the lowest income, who are also most at risk of energy poverty. Labour will ensure we meet national targets of over 50,000 retrofits a year as part of our goal of delivering one million new and upgraded energy efficient homes over the next decade.

Social Housing

Labour will establish a multi-annual funding strategy for retrofitting and installing renewable heating systems and solar PV in all social housing by 2030. We will upgrade at least 5,000 social homes a year and ensure that funding for this programme allows the worst-performing buildings to be prioritised.

Local Community Energy Advisors

To encourage retrofitting in private and rented homes, Labour will appoint a network of Local Community Energy Advisors to provide face-to-face and tailored support with retrofit and heat pump grants, loans, and other incentives. The network will work with communities to boost uptake of existing programmes and build momentum for whole-area retrofitting.

Warmer Homes Scheme

The SEAI Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme provides free of charge energy efficiency upgrades to low incomes households. Demand for the scheme is high and there are long delays from application to completion. Labour will:

- » Increase funding for the Warmer Homes Scheme to address delays and improve access.
- » Include the automatic installation of renewable heating systems like heat pumps and solar panels.
- » Expand the scheme to include rental properties receiving the Housing Assistance

Payment on the condition of a minimum five-year lease being offered to the tenant with clawback measures if the tenancy is terminated.

Labour will review all SEAI and HSE grants to ensure that the rationale for energy upgrades is linked to health outcomes. We will develop a targeted strategy to improve energy efficiency in mobile homes for Traveller communities, including a new trailer rental scheme with residential heating and insulation standards. We will also ensure housing adaptation grants are coordinated with SEAI upgrades.

Labour will pilot a dedicated retrofitting programme for rural households relying on solid fuel and oil heating systems based on CSO data and the social deprivation index.

Bridging the Affordability Gap

Cost remains a major barrier for many to retrofit their home. While SEAI programmes offer significant grants there is still a gap for too many households who cannot access private finance.

Labour will introduce a zero-interest loan product like models in France and the Netherlands, and a new Home Retrofit Tax incentive modelled on the Home Renovation Incentive, which will be available to households earning less than €100,000, and claimable on the first €10,000 of work. This would complement available grants and low interest loans and help bridge the affordability gap in a targeted way.

A Heat Pump Revolution

Replacing oil boilers and solid fuel heating systems will have a significant impact on reducing our emissions and improving air quality over time but Ireland is nowhere near reaching our heat pump installation targets.

Labour will work to lower costs and trial a new Heat Pump Scheme as part of our pilot rural household retrofitting programme that will fully fund the installation of up to 4,000 heat pumps a year for low- to middle-income households in rural and socially deprived areas. We will also develop a subsidised heat pump social tariff through an Energy Guarantee Scheme

that would provide a cheaper rate of electricity for operating the system. The cost of other upgrades to bring the home to be heat pump ready would be met from existing SEAI schemes and the National Retrofitting Fund.

National Retrofitting Fund

Labour will create a new National Retrofitting Fund under the SEAI using €2.5 billion from the Apple tax windfall to be deployed over 5 years with additional allocations from the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund. We will use these dedicated resources to:

- » Rollout whole area retrofitting consisting of street by street, estate by estate or whole parish plans backed up by at least €1bn of funding, where the State will pick up the cost of energy efficiency upgrades, co-ordinated by local Community Energy Advisors. An offer will be made to cover all homes, with some level of clawback for higher incomes households and rental tenancies.
- » Develop a new dedicated scheme for apartment complexes, multi-unit developments and approved housing developments.
- » Provide a fund to support SMEs and the Community and Voluntary Sector carry out energy efficiency upgrades.
- » Ringfence at least €750 million for public sector pathfinder projects for upgrades of schools, Garda stations, hospitals, and other public buildings.

Labour will also seek to phase in minimum BER standards in the private rental sector and provide support from the National Retrofitting Fund for upgrades.

THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY, RECYCLING AND WASTE COLLECTION

Labour will prioritise the role of waste avoidance, re-use, and repair as a focus of national waste policy and seek to eliminate the use of single use plastics. We will penalise litter pollution and illegal dumping by increasing funding towards waste enforcement and rolling out a nationwide

segregation education campaign to improve the quality and quantity of recyclable material collected from businesses and households. We want to see a greater focus on mandatory targets instead of voluntary agreements and promotional campaigns. The Circular Economy Act 2022 should be implemented straight away. We will also strengthen the right to repair.

Labour will revise the EPA and Waste Management Acts to give the agency greater powers to tackle environmental crimes with a focus on pollution prevention and the avoidance of environmental damage.

Labour will seek to develop a National Repair and Recycling Company to coordinate the recovery of specific waste streams such as textiles, plastics, and rare earth metals. We will increase the waste recovery levy to support this work and provide new grants for repair cafés. We will begin the remunicipalisation of waste collection by first changing the law to allow local authorities carry out a single tender for waste collection in designated areas and seek to introduce a waste waiver scheme to support low-income households.

Additional Labour Party proposals on Climate Action are outlined under Transport, Biodiversity and Nature Restoration, Agriculture and Foreign Affairs, and elsewhere through our manifesto.

4. TRANSFORM OUR HEALTH SERVICE

Our mission is a health service where everyone can get the treatment they need, when they need it, where we manage chronic disease and support people through their treatment and recovery, where staff are valued and get to work in modern facilities with technology that helps them do their job better and treat patients faster.

Over 700,000 people are on rising healthcare waiting lists with nearly 600,000 on a list for an outpatient appointment to see a consultant. Despite increased investment, there are ongoing problems that need to be resolved and Labour has a plan to do this.

LABOUR'S PLAN FOR BETTER HEALTHCARE

Labour will deliver on the promise of Sláintecare with consistent funding and political follow through, ongoing reform and value for money to transform our health service. We will review progress made to date and publish an updated Sláintecare model to account for demographic change.

Labour will establish a Sláintecare Transition Fund starting with an initial €1 billion to drive reform, and ringfence the Universal Social Charge as a Health contribution and place any future revenue increases due to employment growth in the new fund.

Despite record funding over the last five years, it has not been provided as part of a consistent and serious reform plan, but rather because of the pandemic or political rows at Budget time. This leaves the HSE with little capacity to plan for the long term. No rigorous provision is made for demographic change or maintaining existing levels of service. By reforming the budget process Labour will publish annual detailed plans to account for population change and the existing level of service (ELS) in early summer to allow for responsible budgeting and the proper provision of the healthcare people need.

Despite the growth in the annual health budget by €7.5bn since 2020 we still have serious capacity deficits with patients waiting too long and overcrowded emergency departments. There are constant staffing issues, a failure to invest in technology, and with a growing and ageing population. We need more hospital beds and healthcare facilities. To break the cycle of crisis we need a new approach to resolve the underlying problems in our health service. Labour has a Health Plan to transform our health service so that people get the care they need when they need it with four key objectives:

- 1. Invest in Primary and Community Care.** We will extend free GP to all, and ensure people have access to care at home, or at their local primary care centre to relieve pressure on our overcrowded hospitals and emergency departments.
- 2. Value Healthcare Staff.** We will develop a comprehensive workforce strategy to ensure we have enough trained healthcare workers in every discipline, with measures to ensure we retain those we have by recognising their concerns and valuing their contribution including with key worker housing and ensuring staff safety.
- 1. Use Technology to Improve Outcomes:** We will ensure that new modern drugs are available quickly to cure and treat people, improve the efficiency and quality of care with digital health records, and use new techniques like AI machine learning to speed up diagnosis and treatment.
- 4. Build Enough Beds and Buildings.** We will invest more to build enough new acute care and step-down beds, expand public nursing home care, ensure that our creaking hospitals are modernised and climate proofed, and that we build the new elective and maternity hospitals our health service badly needs.

PRIMARY AND COMMUNITY CARE

Labour will publish a new updated plan for the development of the Primary Care Centre network and focus on delivering the full suite of

publicly funded community centred healthcare. We will fully staff the Enhanced Community Care Programme supporting specialist teams for older people, chronic disease, healthcare networks and intervention teams, while funding diagnostic and assessment hubs.

Ireland does not have enough GPs and people must wait too long for an appointment. Labour will:

- » Consider the findings of Strategic Review of General Practice when completed.
- » Develop a new model of salaried GPs employed directly by the HSE and allow GPs work in partnerships by addressing taxation issues.
- » Increase the number of training places and expand e-health GP services.
- » Fund more practice nurses who will be directly employed by the HSE.

FREE GP CARE

No parent should worry about money when their child is sick, and Ireland is the only country in western Europe without universal access to GPs. We would immediately act to provide free GP care to all children under 18, expanding eligibility for 500,000 children, and then seek to expand it further. We also make available a free medical health screening and mental health assessment for every young adult.

COMMUNITY PHARMACY

Labour supports the Community Pharmacy Model, and we will introduce a Minor Ailment Scheme and expand community prescribing. A new agreement must be negotiated for community drug schemes to address dispensing fees, administration costs and restoring indexation to public pay agreements.

VALUING STAFF

Labour will resource and implement a comprehensive workforce planning strategy to support the training, recruitment, and retention of staff and address the impact of conditions on staff morale. Staffing across the health service will need to expand by over 30,000 over the next

five years. Difficult conditions also damage our ability to both recruit and retain staff and often simple changes can make a real difference. We will:

- » Implement Safe Staffing ratios and a zero-tolerance approach to assaults on healthcare workers.
- » Engage with staff to identify problems and grassroots solutions to problems impacting on staff morale, including non-pay measures.
- » Restrict the use of agency staff only where required and ensure full time roles are hired instead of expensive outsourcing.
- » Develop key worker housing by refurbishing vacant HSE properties.

Labour will guarantee every healthcare graduate a job in the public health service and introduce bursaries and placement recognition payments for student nurses, and allied healthcare students. We will ensure students on mandatory placements and internships are properly compensated for their work.

SAFE STAFFING

The government sanctioned HSE recruitment freeze has severely impacted the ability to provide safe and timely care to patients who need it most. Unions representing healthcare workers estimate thousands of posts have been effectively abolished due to the recruitment freeze.

For patient-facing roles that are safety critical, Labour will introduce a safe-staffing framework across the health service. A revised approach to safe nurse and midwife staffing is crucial and must be mandated by legislation to enforce standards. We will expedite the passing of the Patient Safety (Licensing) Bill so that frameworks on healthcare staffing are underpinned by legislation.

Labour will seek to hire an extra 2,000 nurses and midwives over each of the next three years to ensure the health service is properly staffed, replace lost roles, and meet safe staffing requirements, including the ongoing hiring of Health Care Assistants.

Labour will lift the new recruitment moratorium under the HSE's Pay and Numbers Strategy and restore abolished positions. We will ensure that vacancies that arise in the health service due to normal retirement, career progression and maternity leave can be filled by local clinical management and fund the additional recruitment needed for appropriate staffing and the expansion of services to account for demographic changes and the implementation of Sláintecare.

ENOUGH DOCTORS

Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors are the backbone of the medical workforce but are very poorly treated. Labour will improve their conditions and treatment and implement the recommendations of the NCHD taskforce report.

There are hundreds of vacant consultant posts and Labour will invest in training and infrastructure to provide future recruits. We will create a new role of occupational health consultant and expand the number of radiologists.

ACCESS TO MODERN DRUGS

There is a growing public/private divide in access to new medicines and drugs, particularly in oncology. Between 1,000 and 2,000 public patients are denied access to medicines that could save their lives. Labour will set up a new clinically led pilot programme that would allow oncologists overseen by the National Cancer Control Programme to prescribe medicines that have been approved by the European Medicines Agency but are not available yet for reimbursement to public patients.

Ireland is a world leader in the pharmaceutical sector but lags other comparator countries in the number of clinical trials carried out here. We will put in place a new system to more than double the number of clinical trials in the Irish healthcare system and ensure patients with rare diseases have access to life saving orphan medicines. Patients should not have to wait longer than one year for access to treatments that have been approved by the EMA.

We will work to secure savings on the drugs budget through the greater use of generic medicines, and improved access to off-patent drugs.

DIGITAL HEALTH RECORDS

The rollout of digital health records and improved ICT across the health service is essential to boost productivity, improve outcomes and provide quicker access to care. Many health staff don't have access to a computer or even Wi-Fi, and patient records still are paper driven in most areas. Labour will deliver this essential project through the new regional health areas.

Labour will develop proposals to rollout new technology and digitalisation to speed up diagnostic processes and the analysis of health data while ensuring that a human remains in control, with medical professionals deciding on any treatment pathway.

REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES

Labour will ensure hospitals and regional health areas are fairly funded on the same proportionate basis with access to services like 24-hour cardiac care. University Hospital Limerick still lacks capacity and is underfunded compared to the national average for other Model 4 hospitals, and we would address this allowing it to hire more staff for new beds as additional capacity is delivered. Labour will provide a Model 3 hospital in the Mid-West with an Emergency Department and expedite the HIQA review on where that should be located. We will also ensure the community services are rebalanced to reflect the needs of the region and ensure more public nursing homes are built.

BUILD MORE BEDS AND HOSPITALS

Over 5,000 new additional public hospital beds will be needed by the end of 2030. Labour will commit additional capital funding to the health service to build new beds but also ensure existing facilities are fit for purpose and energy upgraded.

We will fund an extra 300 acute beds per year above existing levels to deliver at least

an extra 1,500 over five years and meet our target of 5,000. A further 20 ICU beds a year will be funded, and a mix of step down and rehabilitation beds.

We will commit the funding needed for the delivery of the new National Maternity Hospital and ensure it is robustly managed and speed up delivery of the four elective hospitals. Labour will commence the delivery of the four elective only public hospitals and advance the opening of the planned surgical hubs.

Labour will carry out a review of HSE community nursing home facilities and develop a capital plan to provide at least 100 new community nursing home beds per year.

REDUCE PATIENT COSTS

Labour will reduce the Drug Payment Threshold to €50/month and phase out prescription charges for medical card holders. We will also reduce car parking charges by half at hospitals and waive these for patients attending for continuous treatments such as cancer patients.

Labour will expand provision of medical cards increasing income limits annually in line with wage growth, including to anyone with a serious disability. We will develop a long-term plan to phase in full free medical cover for all patients not covered by private health insurance.

CANCER SERVICES

Labour will deliver new development and multi-annual funding for the National Cancer Strategy every year. We will increase funding for treatment, address the delays patients face for chemotherapy and radiography, and ensure public patients have access to modern drugs. We will implement the findings of the National Radiation Therapist Review Report to address the 30% shortage of staff and address other staffing issues like the need for 99 more medical oncologists by 2028.

Labour will expand existing screening services for BreastCheck from 45 to 74, and BowelCheck from 50 to 74. We will develop new cancer screening programmes for lung, prostate and gastric cancers and assess screening proposals

for ovarian and uterine cancers. We will also invest more in communications and awareness initiatives and improve accessibility for underserved groups.

Labour will continue to fund the 221+ Patient Support Group, fully fund the lymphoedema and lipoedema model of care, and ensure continued implementation of the Scally report recommendations. We will provide automatic medical cards for cancer patients, increased welfare supports and legislate for a right to be forgotten so a diagnosis does not have to be disclosed after five years.

MATERNAL HEALTH

Labour will develop a new National Maternity Strategy, review the quality and capacity of maternity facilities across the country, and develop a building plan for three replacement maternity facilities for the Coombe, Rotunda, and Limerick. We will ensure safe midwifery staffing by recruiting more, increase menopause supports and expand provision of free period products.

Labour will seek to address the public health nurse shortage as outlined below and incorporate two additional GP visits for pregnant and postpartum women. One would be during pregnancy dedicated to infant feeding advice and another at six months postpartum when most babies are being introduced to solid foods and mothers may be considering returning to work. To support breastfeeding, we will promote existing supports, double the number of lactation consultants in both community and hospital settings, provide free breast pumps where needed and fully implement and enforce the WHO code of marketing of breast-milk substitutes. We will also expand the national newborn screening programme by doubling the number of rare diseases screened for.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Labour will ensure every child has access to the care and treatment they need. As outlined in our manifesto, we will end the shocking delays in access to mental health and disability services for children and young people. Labour will end

the scandal over scoliosis and spina bifida and commit all necessary resources to ensure access to paediatric orthopaedic and urology services within four months.

PUBLIC HEALTH

There is a major deficit in public health nursing numbers that continue to fall, and urgent action is needed to address the backlog of early developmental checks for children. The Capacity Review Report indicated 700 new PHNs are required by 2031. Labour will develop a new recruitment and training strategy for PHNs with increased places, retention of salary when training, and fast track pathways for community registered general nurses.

Labour will introduce greater restrictions on nicotine products and implement the ban on disposable vapes and restrictions on flavours, alongside increased support for people battling nicotine addiction. We will introduce stricter regulations on the sale and marketing of high fat sugar and salt foods, review the sugar sweetened drink tax, and seek to extend it to ultra processed foods, and invest a portion of revenues into measures to tackle childhood and adult obesity. Labour will introduce tax incentives to promote sports club membership and reduce costs for gym and activity classes.

VACCINES

Increasing the number of freely available vaccinations will reduce pressure on primary and acute care settings. Labour will increase uptake of the flu vaccine and progressively make it free for all. We will provide a catch-up programme for the chickenpox vaccine, and free shingles vaccine for those at risk, and restore funding for the Laura Brennan HPV vaccines catch up programme.

STRATEGY PLANS AND TARGETED SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

Labour will provide consistent funding for the implementation of national strategies to improve care and treatment in focused areas. Many specialist areas of the health service also require urgent reform and additional

resourcing. Labour will pursue targeted service improvements, including the following:

- » Develop a new national cardiovascular policy after publishing the review of cardiac services, fully implement the National Stroke Strategy, and resource acute stroke units and community services, rehabilitation, and patient support.
- » Fully fund and implement the Dementia model of care over the next five years and prioritise brain health.
- » Publish, resource, and implement a new rare disease strategy and expand screening programmes.
- » Resource and expand the National Ambulance Service to adequately respond to emergencies and meet target response times.
- » Improve awareness of sepsis through care pathways, monitoring, and research.
- » Build a world leading Genetic Service and invest in genomic medicine.
- » Develop a new National Obesity Plan that takes into account new drugs.
- » Future proof eye and ear services to support an ageing population and expand community clinics.
- » Introduce and resource a new National Hearing Plan to support the 300,000 adults with significant hearing loss and the 20,000 on HSE waiting lists.
- » Invest in an allergy research programme and improve support for families.
- » Invest in LGBTQI+ healthcare as outlined in our manifesto.
- » Invest in improved palliative care and hospices, and in particular palliative care services for children with life limiting conditions.
- » Extend the asthma management programme to all people with asthma and add asthma to the long-term illness scheme.

- » Set up a taskforce to develop a ten-year National Diabetes Strategy and fund increased free access to continuous glucose monitors.
- » Improve multiple sclerosis services and resource a National Care Centre.
- » Ensure annual radon testing of 50,000 homes in at risk areas and provide remediation grants.
- » Provide improved funding for public eyecare schemes and standardise the provision of eyecare for children over eight by introducing a new national programme.

ORAL HEALTH AND DENTAL SERVICES

There is a real crisis in our dental health services with over 100,000 children on a waiting list for the school dental screening service. Labour will:

- » Publish a new National Oral Health Policy and rebuild the Public Dental Service, invest in preventative and specialist dentistry, and ensure children get their three school-based appointments.
- » Introduce a new Dental Bill to replace the 1985 Act and reform the regulatory framework and increase training capacity.
- » Resource the Dental Treatment Service Scheme to ensure medical card patients can be seen by their local dentist and increase the number of subsidised treatments available under the PRSI scheme.

Additional Labour Party proposals on Health and Social Care are outlined under A New Social Contract for Care, Mental Health, Disability Rights and Services, and Gender Equality and Women's Rights chapters in our manifesto.

5. COST OF LIVING ACTION PLAN

Our Mission is to protect and increase incomes, take on the root causes of high prices, ensure people get better value for their wages, reduce waste, and give regulators more power to tackle price gouging and unfair trading practices.

We are constantly told Ireland is a rich country but far too many people have never felt poorer - despite many earning good wages. Families and businesses are struggling with the permanently increased cost of living, and higher bills.

Labour has a plan to ensure your wages go further. Little has been done to tackle price gouging or high costs. We know there simply isn't enough competition in Ireland, and regulators don't have enough powers to take on unscrupulous businesses.

Labour will deliver a Cost of Living Action Plan to give people more control over their own money and propose long term changes to address the root causes of high prices. We will resource the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) and provide it with new statutory powers to investigate and fine, give people greater protection, and strengthen the Small Claims Court procedure.

Stronger competition and effective regulation are central to reducing prices but as a small island, choice for Irish consumers on where to buy goods and services is often far too limited. Labour will appoint a Minister of State for Consumer Affairs with a mandate to improve competition, protect consumers and implement new policies to make a real difference on the cost of living crisis. We will also take on waste in public spending, and once and for all address the high cost of insurance.

Labour's Cost of Living Action Plan will:

- » Protect incomes from inflation.
- » Increase low pay rates.
- » Reduce electricity prices to the European average.
- » Tackle the high cost of insurance.

- » Crackdown on the waste of public money.
- » Give the CCPC stronger powers to investigate price gouging.
- » Increase the Small Claims Procedure limit from €2,000 to €8,000.
- » End the penalty on instalment payments like Motor Tax.
- » Make lower prices available by ending the loyalty penalty.
- » Ban automatic annual price increases in service contracts.

PROTECT INCOMES FROM INFLATION

Inflation reduces the value of salaries, pensions, and social welfare payments while the government benefits from an increased tax take on rising wages and prices. There is no requirement in Ireland to increase the value of tax credits or social welfare payments in line with higher living costs, but most other European countries have automatic increases linked to some measure of inflation or wage growth. Instead in Ireland any changes are announced as new measures at Budget time and there is no guarantee these will cover increased costs.

Labour will reform the annual budget process and provide for the automatic increase of income tax credits and bands, and social welfare payments to at a minimum beat inflation. In government we will develop a basket measure of inflation and wage growth to underpin future automatic increases. We will introduce a legally binding commitment as part of the annual Budget process that the proposed automatic increases will be published in July and then confirmed in October. Further additional increases of social welfare payments to deliver an adequate income will then be negotiated as part of the final budget agreement.

INCREASE LOW PAY RATES

Ireland has a huge problem with low paid work, and Labour will ensure workers receive an adequate income to afford a decent standard of living.

Labour will reform the national minimum wage to deliver a living income tied to 66% of median hourly wages, abolish lower pay rates for young people, and extend the living wage to those in apprenticeships. We will address the prevalence of low pay in certain sectors of the economy through Fair Pay Agreements to be agreed in stronger Joint Labour Committees through the removal of the employer veto.

REDUCE ELECTRICITY PRICES TO THE EUROPEAN AVERAGE

The Household Energy Price Index shows that in September 2024 Ireland had the second highest electricity prices in the EU. If these prices fell to the EU average it would save the average Irish household nearly €500 a year. Any gains from falling prices this winter will also be wiped out from increased network charges and the return of the PSO levy.

Labour will implement an action plan to reduce electricity prices because right now Irish families and small businesses are shouldering substantially higher costs compared to other EU member states. We will:

- » Commission an independent review of electricity costs and the current market design to determine the cause of high prices here compared to other EU countries and publish an action plan to drive down costs.
- » Develop social tariffs for heat pumps and households in energy poverty.
- » Place a moratorium on new data centres and study how this massive energy demand is impacting on electricity prices.
- » Use the State to fast track the rollout of offshore wind and other renewable energy sources with increased resourcing for the planning system and ports.

TACKLE THE HIGH COST OF INSURANCE

Despite major reforms the cost of insurance remains well above European averages and is an excessive burden on business, the community and voluntary sector and households. The sector has been given the changes it wanted but has

not delivered lower prices. Injury awards have come down and a dedicated Garda insurance fraud unit was set up, but motor insurance premiums are now rising at 15 times the rate of inflation. Labour will:

- » Establish a new office dedicated to promoting competition in the insurance market and maintain the Cabinet subgroup on Insurance reform.
- » Establish an independent review of the insurance market in Ireland to get to the bottom of costs and profitability.
- » Commit to a levy on profits if savings are not passed on as reduced premiums.
- » Develop and promote Pooled Group insurance schemes to help negotiate lower premiums for specialised sectors and use the Irish Public Bodies insurance company to offer affordable cover to the community and voluntary sector.

CRACKDOWN ON THE WASTE OF PUBLIC MONEY

Wasteful government spending diverts public money that could go to important public services and drives higher prices in the economy. It's time to trim the fat that has gathered under Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil's watch. The outrageous cost of the Oireachtas bike shelter, security hut and Iveagh House toilets, and out of control spending on the National Children's Hospital should not have happened. Government Ministers are failing to manage projects under their watch.

Labour will reform and modernise the system of accountability and responsibility for Ministers and civil servants with a stronger system of delegated authority and legislate for a duty of candour across the public service to enhance transparency and promote public trust.

Labour will carry out a Comprehensive Spending Review and Waste Audit across each Department and public agency of the State to examine every area of public expenditure, identify wasteful spending and deliver value for money. This will include an independent review of procurement across the whole government sector.

GIVE THE CCPC STRONGER POWERS TO INVESTIGATE PRICE GOUGING

The CCPC will be strengthened to ensure people are not being ripped off. Labour will introduce new statutory powers, increased funding, and drive reform with a new Minister of State for Consumer Affairs. Labour has published an Excessive Pricing Bill to allow the CCPC to examine the profits and price setting policies of retailers and take enforcement action where prices are excessive. Labour will also:

- » Require grocery retailers operating in Ireland to publish their profits.
- » Give the CCPC the power to collect data and analyse the costs retailers incur, the profits taken, and the prices set, bringing transparency to the market while accounting for commercial sensitivities.

The CCPC will be given the power to impose larger fines including as a percentage of turnover for serious offences. The maximum level of fine that can be imposed ranges up to €5,000 which is not a real deterrent. Working with the government and other public bodies with oversight or regulatory roles, such as the Central Bank, the CCPC will also be mandated to improve competition and investigate the efficiency of markets including banking, insurance, legal services, the used car market, and the process of buying a home.

INCREASE THE SMALL CLAIMS PROCEDURE LIMIT TO €8,000

The Small Claims Procedure limit of €2,000 has remained unchanged since 2006 and the fee of €25 isn't refunded if successful, acting as a barrier for claimants seeking small amounts. The European Small Claims Procedure has a limit of €5,000 so Irish consumers have better rights if buying from businesses in other EU countries compared to purchases made here.

Labour will increase the small claims procedure limit to €8,000, examine ways to waive or lower the application fee for cases involving a smaller amount, and resource the Courts Service to handle increased cases, collect data and publish reports on the outcome of cases.

END THE PENALTY ON INSTALMENT PAYMENTS LIKE MOTOR TAX

Labour will remove the payment penalty for quarterly and half year motor tax payments and identify any other instalment payment penalties across the public sector and phase these out. The CCPC will also be asked to investigate the use of instalment fees for private services and calculate the cost burden that extra charges place on households.

MAKE LOWER PRICES AVAILABLE BY ENDING THE LOYALTY PENALTY

Labour will ban loyalty penalties where lower prices are only made available to new customers. This will mean you can access the lowest available price when renewing your insurance policy or subscription service and cannot be charged a higher fee than a new customer. Companies will have to compete on price, not gimmicks or complex offers.

BAN AUTOMATIC ANNUAL PRICE INCREASES IN SERVICE CONTRACTS

Labour will ban the inclusion of 'automatic price increases plus inflation' in mobile phone and broadband service contracts, as has already happened in the UK. People entering a contract should be explicitly told what future charges they will face rather than be subject to stealth price increases like these that allow companies to extract increased amounts from customers who are locked into contracts.

6. A CHARTER FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Our Mission is to resolve the ongoing failure to vindicate the rights of children with a charter to deliver better public services, adequate income, protection, and care through a rights-based approach to guarantee a fair start for every child.

Labour will ensure that by investing in housing, health, education, social care, and income supports that we end waiting lists, reduce costs, and slash child poverty.

Underpinning this, the State will follow the example of Scotland and Labour will fully incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into our laws and adopt a child-rights-based approach to budgeting. The Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office in the Department of An Taoiseach will be retained and expanded to drive this task. We will provide the necessary resources and political direction to achieve these ambitious goals to ensure a fair start for every child and address the ongoing failure to vindicate the rights of children and end child poverty.

Labour's Charter to deliver on Children's Rights will:

- » Target payments to end Child Poverty.
- » Stop Child Homelessness.
- » Tackle the scandal of waiting lists for disability services and therapies.
- » Guarantee an early year's place for every child through a public childcare scheme.
- » Introduce a new DEIS Plus model.
- » Deliver an Autism Guarantee for special education places.
- » Safeguard Children in Care.
- » Resource and regulate the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.
- » Make Education truly free.
- » Protect Children Online.

TARGET PAYMENTS TO END CHILD POVERTY

Children and young people in Ireland continue to have the highest poverty rates so Labour will target social protection payments to end that. The 2023 Survey on Income and Living Standards showed nearly 60,000 children living in consistent poverty and over 260,000 children experienced deprivation. A further 175,000 children were at risk of poverty last year.

Labour will introduce a new targeted second rate of child benefit to drastically reduce child poverty as recommended by the ESRI and the Commission on Taxation and Welfare. This will require significant design work to avoid unintended consequences from interactions with other payments.

Labour will also deliver increases in child benefit and the child support payment with targeted improvements for lone parents who are most at risk of poverty, and we will introduce a Poverty Act to make targets legally binding, ensure all policy is poverty proofed and restore the Combat Poverty Agency.

STOP CHILD HOMELESSNESS

Child homelessness is preventable and there are interventions Labour will take to stop it happening. 4,419 children were without a home in August, a more than 70% increase since Housing for All was launched in September 2021. The State is still not targeting, or directly building enough new homes. The direct experience of homelessness for each child or adult is deeply distressing and has lasting impacts. Labour will change this because urgent change is needed to stop children falling into homelessness. We will:

- » End no fault evictions to protect renters and invest in prevention of homelessness.
- » Build more social and affordable homes to reach a national target of over 50,000 homes a year.
- » Expand the Tenant in Situ scheme so that families facing eviction can remain in their home.

- » Pass Labour's Housing Homeless Families bill to ensure the best interests of the child are at the centre of decision making by local authorities.

TACKLE THE SCANDAL OF WAITING LISTS FOR DISABILITY SERVICES AND THERAPIES

Over the last five years despite many promises children and their parents still must resort to Dáil protests and media interviews to get access to the therapies and assessments they need. Ireland has ratified the optional protocol of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but Children's Disability Network Teams remain underfunded and understaffed. The government's own Disability Services Action Plan said that 180 new CDNT posts and 300 Therapy assistants in 2025 were essential to the Progressing Disability Services programme to meet the commitments in the roadmap for disability service improvements for children and young people.

Labour is acutely aware that over 10,000 children are waiting on an Assessment of Need and tens of thousands are waiting for essential therapies. There is no quick fix, but we will train more therapists and specialists, and ringfence the funding needed to hire future staff. As a bridging measure Labour will invest in a waiting list initiative to provide outsourced diagnostic assessments for children waiting longest and put in place a process for reimbursing parents who must resort to private therapies and assessments.

GUARANTEE AN EARLY YEAR'S PLACE FOR EVERY CHILD THROUGH A PUBLIC CHILDCARE SCHEME

Parents need affordable, accessible childcare while early years educators deserve decent pay and conditions. Most of all, children deserve an equal start. The State is now spending over €1.3bn subsidising a mostly private for-profit childcare system, yet costs are still expensive and so many parents struggle to secure a suitable place.

Labour will introduce a guaranteed, publicly provided early years place for every child, as we

have for primary school children. This will be delivered through the provision of 6,000 new childcare places a year, every year under our plans for a public childcare system, rolled out through Education and Training Boards across the country. We will cap costs for parents at €50 per week and ensure children with disabilities have access to places through an expanded Access and Inclusion model.

INTRODUCE A NEW DEIS+ MODEL

For the schools providing an education in our most disadvantaged communities the current DEIS model simply isn't working to address deep rooted problems. Labour will fund a new DEIS+ model. It will be a focused stream of investment to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and trauma in areas with long term socio-economic and education disadvantage.

It will provide for clusters of multidisciplinary teams modelled on the City Connects programme so that each child can access the services, therapies, or resources they need to succeed, thrive, and achieve their full potential complemented by staffed nurture rooms and an expanded teacher support service. Schools will also receive increased capitation, and a further lowering of the pupil teacher ratio.

AN AUTISM GUARANTEE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PLACES

It is unacceptable that every school year hundreds of children with additional needs cannot access a suitable school place near where they live or must travel for long distances every morning.

Labour will introduce an Autism Guarantee to secure an appropriate school place for every child and develop a fully inclusive model of education that vindicates the right to education for all children across the range of disabilities and complies with the UNCRPD and UNCRC. That means better long-term planning, multi-annual funding, an overhaul of the EPSEN Act, and the use of Ministerial power to open classes when necessary.

SAFEGUARD CHILDREN IN CARE

Tusla was responsible for over 5,600 children in care during 2023, with 90% placed with foster carers. Labour is committed to supporting foster carers with better pension entitlements and we will increase resources to support foster families and encourage new entrants with a start-up allowance.

Labour will ensure children are not placed in unregulated care settings, and we will resource Tusla with the capital spending and staffing budget necessary so that there are enough appropriate care placements for children at risk. It is unsustainable for the State to continue to rely on private providers. Too many vulnerable children are at risk of being criminally or sexually exploited. The reliance on special emergency arrangements must be phased out. Over five years Labour will deliver at least 250 new public residential care places, and resource Special Care provision and step-down placements.

RESOURCE AND REGULATE CAMHS

The Inspector of Mental Health Services has said she cannot assure parents that services for children are safe and effective. With over 3,600 children waiting on their first CAMHS appointment and nearly 20,000 waiting for their first psychology session, too many children are being failed by the current model of care.

Labour will pass the Mental Health Bill to ensure community CAMHS are regulated after recent scandals. We will commit and ringfence the additional resources needed to tackle the lack of services in many parts of the country and put in place the workforce planning needed to double the number of staff in the service over the next five years.

MAKE EDUCATION TRULY FREE

Education is our greatest tool for creating a more equal and prosperous Ireland and cost should not be a barrier for any child to reach their potential. Labour will make education truly free to remove stress and worry from parents. The introduction of free schoolbooks is just the first of many costs that need to be addressed.

Labour will implement the following measures over the next five years:

- » Ban voluntary contributions and increase capitation grants to ensure these meet the real operating costs of schools.
- » Introduce a universal back to school clothing and footwear allowance.
- » Expand hot school meals to all schools and improve the nutritional quality of the food to ensure it is healthy and wholesome.
- » Make school transport free for all children, including on public transport, and provide enough 'concessionary places' to meet demand.
- » Permanently abolish State Exam fees.
- » Ensure every child has access to the assistive technology they need.
- » Provide material grants to cover additional costs for practical courses like Home Economics and Art.
- » Take the steps needed to digitally resource learning in schools by providing enough tablets and IT equipment for all children.

PROTECT CHILDREN ONLINE

It is vital that children are protected in digital environments and social media platforms by stopping recommender system algorithms targeting and manipulating them. Labour will introduce new effective regulation, and legislation to achieve this if necessary. We will ensure Coimisiún na Meán takes a proactive approach to the regulation of online safety and update the digital safety code.

Labour will make our primary and secondary schools smartphone free, resource online safety educational programmes and ensure digital literacy is a key pillar of the education system. We will support parents and schools and invest in public awareness campaigns and wellbeing training. Resources will be committed to a public health study research programme on the impact of devices and online platforms on children.

Additional Labour Party proposals to support children are outlined through our manifesto.

PART 2

**OUR AMBITION
FOR TRANSFORMING
THE STATE**

7. OUR ECONOMIC AND BUDGET PLAN

Our Mission is to pursue an economic agenda for social progress that works for all and builds better together, to reduce inequality and deliver good jobs and economic development in all parts of the country.

THE NEXT 50 YEARS

Labour has identified eight major fundamental challenges facing Irish society and our economy over the next fifty years. These are climate change, ageing, population growth, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, security, global trade, and the potential of an all-island economy. Addressing these will be central to our economic plans. Labour will task the National Economic and Social Council with developing a research programme and public forums to address these challenges.

Labour believes in the power of the state to manage and steer the economy to deliver the public good. A well-regulated economy provides a stable environment for investment and growth. Labour's economic policy can be summarised through three principles:

- » **Fostering economic development.**
- » **Providing infrastructure and services.**
- » **Ensuring sustainability and security.**

Our manifesto outlines our comprehensive approach to implementing these principles.

KEY LABOUR ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES

- » Manage the economy to generate surpluses and provide increased revenue for social infrastructure and the provision of public services.
- » Develop a new economic model to generate sustainable jobs, embed community wealth building and grow indigenous enterprise.
- » Reduce income inequality and eliminate child poverty.

- » Prepare our public services for a country of over 6 million people by 2040 and build the homes and infrastructure necessary to meet their needs.
- » Transform the model of delivering housing and reform our land system.
- » Make the investments essential to meet our 2030 emission reductions targets of 51% and net zero by 2050.
- » Secure our energy independence, strengthen, and protect our water supplies, and improve our food security.
- » Target three million people in work by the end of the decade with a participation rate of 80% and unemployment of 4% or less.
- » Increase collective bargaining coverage to 80% of the workforce, improve job security and stronger rights to more flexible work.
- » Invest in our education system and upskilling of workers with strategic workforce planning to deliver on our strategic objectives.
- » Digitalise our economy and the delivery of public services and harness the benefits of artificial intelligence.
- » Integrate climate adaptation and natural capital accounting into the annual budgetary process.

FISCAL PRIORITIES

Labour will negotiate an ambitious but prudent medium term fiscal plan (MTP) under the revised EU fiscal framework to support and improve public services over the next five years and make the critical capital investment our country needs. Ireland will not be subject to the deficit or debt sustainability rules but will be bound by the net expenditure limit which the next government will have to agree and submit on taking office. When agreeing the five-year MTP we will seek to introduce the following economic reforms:

- » Index tax credits and bands, and social welfare rates to a basket measure of inflation and wage growth to protect against increases in the cost of living.

- » Review the National Development Plan and profile increased capital investment up to 2030 in particular on housing, retrofitting, health, and public transport.
- » Provide for an Annual Resourcing Statement to outline the allocations required to maintain existing services and meet demographic needs.
- » Transform the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) and Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) into an active Strategic Investment and Development Bank.
- » Broaden the tax base with increased taxes on wealth, not income. We will design and introduce a net wealth tax like the Spanish model.
- » Establish a standing independent Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare to make annual recommendations on the cost of tax expenditures, examine the sustainability of tax base, and identify tax loopholes.
- » Return the USC to a Health Contribution ringfenced for future health spending and avoid narrowing of the tax base.
- » Implement radical local government reform based on the subsidiarity principle with increased powers to raise revenue and make local spending decisions.
- » Support indigenous SMEs to foster the next generation of global winners and ensure access to sufficient finance and capital.

BUDGET STRATEGY

Labour will apply budget rules based on addressing our long-term challenges and towards delivering better public services, a reduction in poverty, and a stronger social wage. We will transform the budget process with increased transparency and reforms to remove the showmanship and deliver better value for money.

The recurring annual requirement for multiple supplementary estimates is a failure of the budget process. Labour will bring increased

openness and transparency to the Budget process through the publication of draft policy measures in July to replace the Summer Economic Statement. This will include the annual cost of indexation, rather than just outlining the available financial resources for spending or tax cuts.

Budgets are about choices, but far too often the relevant information to inform those decisions is missing from the public debate. Much more detailed information is needed through an Annual Resourcing Statement as to what resources are necessary to fund the impact of demographics and the cost of maintaining existing levels of service. Therefore, detailed Departmental breakdowns will be published outlining these at the same time as proposed new policy measures, and the cost of indexation.

Labour projects that flexibility for average net expenditure increases of just over 5.1% in line with the draft MTP will be required over the term of the next government, and we will seek to incorporate the following conditions:

- » Increases in day-to-day public spending must be fully funded, and account taken of indexation in advance of the budget.
- » The Exchequer must transition to a process of multi-year budgeting to provide security to public service providers.
- » Sustainable future public pay increases will be negotiated in line with projected wage growth in exchange for service efficiencies and reforms including the greater deployment of digitalisation.
- » Comprehensive and robust projections must be provided annually of the impact of demographics and the cost of maintaining existing levels of service in health, education, childcare, social protection.

An outline of a draft MTP inclusive of Labour budgetary proposals and assumptions is outlined in the Appendix.

CRACKING DOWN ON WASTE

Labour will carry out a Comprehensive Spending Review and Waste Audit across each Department and public agency of the State to examine every area of public expenditure, identify wasteful spending and deliver value for money. This will include an independent review of procurement across the whole government sector. It's time to trim the fat that has gathered over recent years.

Labour will reform the system of accountability for Ministers and civil servants with a stronger system of delegated authority and legislate for a duty of candour across the public service.

NATIONAL FUNDS

Labour will continue to build up the new Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund (ICNF), but we will ensure that both funds can invest in Ireland and are generating broader economic, social, and environmental returns, taking into account inflationary risks within the sectors where it invests.

There is a funding deficit for the energy transition and private housing development in Ireland that can be addressed through the Future Ireland Fund working with Labour's proposed Strategic Investment and Development Bank.

Labour will create a new national Research and Development Fund from future windfall gains that will ensure a long-term stable source of funding for both basic and applied research and support the further and higher education sector.

INVESTING THE APPLE WINDFALL

The resources available to the State can help transform Ireland and allow us to plan with confidence and invest in a better, fairer, cleaner, secure future. The strategic investment pillars published by the outgoing government do not include the direct building of housing, investment in retrofitting or improvements in our healthcare system which suffers from a massive infrastructural deficit. We believe this is a mistake.

Over the next five years Labour will seek to direct the windfall funds from the CJEU ruling as follows:

€7bn for housing deployed as follows:

- » €6bn to seed a State Construction Company developed through the LDA.
- » €1bn to support water infrastructure and servicing of land.

€6bn for climate measures deployed as follows:

- » €2.5bn for a National Retrofitting Plan to support street by street upgrades, and energy efficiency upgrades in the public and community sector, SMEs, apartments, and Approved Housing Bodies.
- » €2.5bn for major public transport projects and balanced regional development.
- » €1bn for the state to take direct equity stakes in offshore wind developments.

€1bn for Health to create a Sláintecare Transition Fund.

- » €500m to be dedicated to support the rollout of digital health records in the new Regional Health areas.

EMPLOYMENT

Ireland is deemed to be at full employment, with a constrained labour market. However, the employment rate is 74.4% and below that of other high achieving European countries like the Netherlands (82%), while unemployment is consistently between 4 and 5%. Over the next five years, Labour will seek to have 3 million people at work in Ireland by 2030, up from the 2.75m now, and we will:

- » Seek to increase the employment rate above 75% and target 80% over the course of next decade.
- » Put in place greater supports for women and people with disabilities who wish to participate in the workplace.
- » Seek to reduce the unemployment rate to 4% or below and develop new supportive, people centred programmes to support the long-term unemployed back into the workforce.
- » Proactively recruit Irish people home from abroad to bring back new skills and experience.

TAXATION

Labour will establish an independent Standing Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare to provide annual reports on the cost of tax expenditures, review the efficacy of tax breaks, and identify potential loopholes in the tax code. It will be given powers to review data from the Revenue Commissioners. As part of the budget process, it will make recommendations on indexation rates for the income tax system and social welfare payments.

A key challenge over the next five years will be the policies of the new US administration and ongoing reforms to the international rules governing corporation tax through the implementation of Pillar 1 and 2 of the OECD BEPS2.0. Labour supports this process and will maintain the domestic 12.5% rate and 15% minimum effective corporation tax rate on large corporate groups. The Standing Commission will be tasked with publishing a comprehensive assessment of the impact these changes will have on Irish corporation tax receipts and how global trends will impact on future windfall receipts.

Labour will return the Universal Social Charge to a health contribution and ringfence the revenue raised for the health service. It is dangerous to continue narrowing our tax base when it has become overly concentrated due to record corporation and income tax receipts driven by the multinational sector, and new international risks.

Labour will develop proposals for a site value tax as a replacement for the outdated system of commercial rates. This will require detailed consultation and design, and modelling of the interaction with the local property tax and residential zoned land tax.

Labour will seek the introduction of the following taxation measures to fund discretionary spending increases of up to €400m a year above the limits of the medium-term plan, including:

- » A doubling in the rate of the Banking Levy and the inclusion of digital banks within its scope.
- » The design and delivery of a net wealth tax modelled on the Spanish example.

- » An increase in stamp duty on non-residential property and the bulk buying of houses and apartments to incentivise the delivery of new homes.
- » An increase in the tax rate that applies on wealth transactions.
- » The withdrawal of tax credits on incomes over €100,000 and the introduction of refundable income tax credits for low earners.

Labour will deploy environmental levies and charges to help meet our ambitious climate targets, and influence behaviour. We will review the profits of energy companies in Ireland to identify any windfall gains. Measures we will introduce include:

- » A weight-based criteria for VRT and motor tax on fossil fuel car systems to incentivise smaller and more efficient vehicles and the move to electrification.
- » A levy on the electricity use of data centres starting at €10/MwH.
- » Pursue at an EU level the zero rating of VAT on bicycles, heat pumps and sunscreen.
- » An increase in the Waste Recovery Levy to support the circular economy.
- » Increases in the Carbon Tax offset by a refundable Carbon Tax levy for low- and middle-income households.

Labour will seek to introduce the following tax incentives in support of collective bargaining, a healthier Ireland, and the National Retrofitting Plan:

- » Tax relief at the standard rate on trade union subscriptions and membership of sports clubs and gyms.
- » A Home Retrofit Tax incentive modelled on the Home Renovation Incentive.

NATIONAL DEBT

Labour will continue to manage the national debt and interest payments by rolling over bonds as they mature and will seek to lower the overall burden by growing the domestic economy.

8. A NEW INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Our Mission is an entrepreneurial, regulated market economy where enterprise is supported, hard work is rewarded and the interests of working people – the real wealth creators – are secure, and where the focus is the creation of a good life through a good job.

Labour believes that only the development of a sustainable economy will ensure Ireland's economic competitiveness into the future and rejects the notion that economic policy and our climate strategy are in competition with each other.

AN ACTIVE STATE

Labour will develop a new industrial strategy for Ireland building on the recent Enterprise White Paper. This will be driven by the State in cooperation with entrepreneurs and innovators to tackle the biggest economic and policy challenge in our global and domestic history. We will only achieve a decent quality of life for all if we look fundamentally at how wealth and economic activity are generated.

The entire Strategic vision for Enterprise Ireland, Research Ireland, the NTMA and the IDA needs to be refocused with sustainable development at its core. Developing and implementing a new strategy for sustainable prosperity by incentivising solutions to Ireland's climate emissions reduction and adaptation challenges must become the overriding priority for these organisations.

Our approach will be informed by addressing three key risks:

- » Retaining the strengths of the FDI sector in a more challenging tax and trading environment and building a dynamic indigenous sector capable of complementing the role of FDI in our economy.
- » Addressing the cost and availability of housing which is a chronic danger to our competitiveness and all aspects of the functioning of our economic model with a new model of development.

- » Focusing on the eight fundamental challenges we have identified as facing Irish society over the next fifty years.

A mature and healthy cooperative attitude between enterprises, trade unions and governments will be vital in the delivery of decent outcomes, and we will also develop a new structure for social dialogue inclusive of other groups. Labour outlines below our approach to key issues impacting business, and we will deliver on these commitments through an outcomes focused Action Plan for Future Jobs.

COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION

The costs of doing business in Ireland is a real risk to our competitiveness and Labour has comprehensive plans across a number of key areas to address this. We will:

- » Invest in talent and skills, and resource our education and training system.
- » Build more affordable housing and improve security for renters.
- » Resource the planning and regulatory system to improve the delivery of infrastructure.
- » Drive down the cost of energy.
- » Provide scale up financing through a new Strategic Investment and Development Bank and develop a community banking model for SME lending.
- » Ensure lower insurance prices are delivered after recent reforms.

Three new supports Labour will provide for small and medium business are:

- » Empowering SMEs to decarbonise with a dedicated programme under the National Retrofitting Plan and supports for more sustainable supply chains.
- » Changes to the R&D tax credit and a promotional plan to encourage SME take up, with an enhanced rate for small and micro companies.
- » Provide countercyclical support to business through a short-term work subsidy scheme.

Labour will also establish a dedicated Research Ireland fund to make Ireland a world leader in innovative solutions to our climate challenges in key sectors such as sustainable innovation.

We will place the Competitiveness and Productivity Council on a statutory footing to protect its independence and invest in skills and digitalisation to boost productivity.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Addressing our infrastructure deficits and delivering projects in the National Development Plan is critical to our future prosperity and the continued growth of Irish enterprise. We will address delays in planning and regulation and review the public works contract to ensure it is delivering projects on time and on budget. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform had NDP Delivery added to its title but no substantial changes to the underlying structure.

Labour will strengthen the delivery of projects through a dedicated Infrastructure Unit. This will ensure individual Departments and Agencies retain expertise in the delivery of projects but that systemic blockages can be addressed quickly and effectively.

PUBLIC ENTERPRISES

Labour believes in a mixed economy model. Publicly-owned enterprises play an essential role in Ireland's economy—whether in the provision of water, electricity, or transport. As part of an active industrial strategy, we will develop a new generation of public enterprises including a State Construction Company, and review the role of existing semi-state companies, and refresh their mandates with an explicit goal of sustainability and protection of nature.

New opportunities exist in decarbonisation where the scale and resources of the State can deliver on offshore wind, green hydrogen, energy storage and carbon capture. In the circular economy Labour will seek to develop a National Repair and Recycling company and begin the remunicipalisation of waste collection.

FUTURE JOBS

Building on the National Clustering Programme Labour will develop a Future Jobs strategy, prioritise the growth and scaling of indigenous small and medium enterprises and focus on balanced regional development.

We will prioritise renewable energy and the climate transition, biopharma and medical technology, ICT (AI and digitalisation), and modern manufacturing. Harnessing the power of offshore wind will open up significant new industrial opportunities for Ireland that we must be prepared for.

SECTORAL JOB STRATEGIES

Labour will develop new sectoral job strategies consistent with our climate objectives to support the long-established Irish exporting successes like the agri-food sector and the local trading sectors such as tourism and the experience economy, retail and hospitality, which have been impacted hard by cost pressures. We will establish a new agency to support the hospitality sector modelled on Teagasc to boost productivity and provide research, advisory and training services.

REGULATION

Labour believes in smart regulation, not heavy regulation, as it is a key lever to foster productivity and innovation. Investors need certainty, and they need to know that regulations will be enforced so that those who make investments will not be undercut by others who try to cheat the rules. Good regulation will promote development and we will reinvigorate the Better Regulation agenda and set up a Regulatory Innovation Office to improve accountability and promote innovation.

We will simplify the grant application process through Enterprise Ireland, support digitalisation and ensure a more efficient and responsive state machinery.

As members of the EU single market there are enormous opportunities for growth for Irish enterprises who we will equip to scale up, trade and operate in the 26 other member states.

Labour will reform, resource and empower the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission to more aggressively investigate and enforce competition law as outlined in our Cost of Living proposals.

CO-OPERATIVES AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Labour will promote community wealth building as a central component of our economic policy. We will support the development of more co-operatives particularly in the care sector, re-establish a Co-operative Development Unit in the Department of Enterprise, and pass a new Co-operatives Act to update and consolidate the law covering the sector. The model should be promoted as an option to save businesses or for succession planning through conversion to employee-owned co-operatives.

Labour will develop a new national ecosystem to support social enterprises and expand in key areas like renewable energy and the circular economy, caring and social digital innovation, and we will:

- » Create a Social Enterprise Empowerment Fund to develop more regional jobs.
- » Provide consistent access to Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland supports.
- » Increase the audit threshold for charities to €500,000 and develop a national body for the sector.

DEMOCRATIC WORKPLACES

Labour has outlined an ambitious programme to improve workers' rights and increase collective bargaining coverage in Ireland in our Work proposals. We want more democratic workplaces and will seek to introduce the appointment of worker directors in large companies.

We will promote the expansion of Employee Ownership Trusts, most famously popularised by the retailer John Lewis, and introduce incentives like those available in Britain to incentivise the sale of a controlling interest to staff.

ETHICAL TRADING

Labour will ensure robust monitoring of obligations on companies for corporate sustainability reporting, and we will implement

further measures to ensure the disclosure in a transparent manner each year of the risk of labour exploitation and human trafficking occurring in supply chains or in any part of a business and what action they have taken to ensure such activities do not occur.

Labour will require transparency about the beneficial ownership of businesses and ensure Irish trading companies, like in the retail sector, will have to publish Ireland-specific statements of profits.

EMPLOYMENT PERMITS

Labour will review the criteria for issuing employment permits on an annual basis to ensure it is serving the needs of the labour market and not undermining existing terms and conditions. Sectors seeking permits must demonstrate a commitment to engaging with the industrial relations machinery of the state and to collective bargaining. Labour would abolish seasonal permits and reduce the cost of renewing permits in line with other public identity cards. We will protect vulnerable migrant workers by providing for full mobility to change employers after 12 months.

SKILLS AND TALENT

Population growth has put immense pressure on the State which has struggled to secure the qualified staff necessary to provide public services and deliver investment projects and priorities. A comprehensive whole of government approach is now needed on strategic workforce planning to ensure sufficient skilled workers are trained in areas like health and social care, construction and planning, digitalisation, and the climate transition.

Labour will establish a new unit in the Department of Taoiseach to drive the policy changes needed to deliver future talent and skills for the public and private sectors.

ACCESS TO FINANCE

A major barrier to the scaling up of indigenous companies—and the development of more high value jobs in those companies—is the lack of a mature private capital market in Ireland. The state already does a lot, but we can do more.

Labour supports the introduction of a community bank for business lending. Based on the German Sparkassen model, a single national community bank will be established initially, working in partnership with the credit union movement. It is proposed that the bank will rent counter space and office space from individual credit unions and provide business banking services aimed at small and medium enterprises. Initially a trial of this banking model will be rolled out across a number of counties.

Labour will review the work of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) and Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and develop proposals to merge these into an active Strategic Investment and Development Bank that will also support the work of a community public banking model. The SIDB will be directed to proactively support housing development and climate action, take equity stakes in offshore wind projects and other strategic sectors critical to meeting our emission targets. Critically it will provide financing to support Irish companies to scale up into the EU and global markets.

Labour will continue to use the tax system to support the indigenous start-up and scaling sector in line with the recommendations of the Commission in Tax and Welfare. The current suite of schemes are not delivering adequately. Labour will review the operation of these schemes with a view to securing additional private sector investment. We will also engage with the Revenue Commissioners to see what additional compliance support can be afforded to start-up companies that do not necessarily have access to professional advice.

BANKING

Labour will seek increased competition in the Irish banking market and introduce a community banking model, while working to ensure lending and deposit rates are similar to other European countries, to ensure businesses and homeowners are offered comparable rates. With Irish banks recording high profit rates,

Labour will:

- » Increase the banking levy to ensure an ongoing contribution to the legacy costs of the bailout and introduce minimum deposit rates tied to the ECB rate.
- » Retain the current strategic shareholdings in AIB and reduce the PTSB shareholding to no less than 30% over the period of the next government.
- » Ensure communities retain access to ATMs, and cash services.
- » Seek industry support for financial literacy measures and develop a National Fraud Database.
- » Ensure that a household's ability to pay rent is counted as part of their credit rating and assessment for mortgage loan calculations.
- » Maintain the cap on bankers' bonuses.

CREDIT UNIONS

Labour supports the continued growth of the credit union co-operative movement in Ireland. We will examine the establishment of an independent regulator for the sector outside of the Central Bank for quicker decision making and simplify the legislative and regulatory framework governing the sector. We will remove barriers to mortgage and business lending and bring certainty on levies by pausing contributions to the Resolution Fund and Stabilisation Fund. We will work to develop and grow socially inclusive investment vehicles in housing and climate.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Labour will position Ireland to become a global leader in sustainable climate finance, and fintech with measures to promote growth and sustain employment. We will commission an in-depth study of the potential risks to Ireland from the large non-bank financial sector, and the over €4.5 trillion in assets under management in our country. We will consider the recommendations of the Funds Review and the proposals to support medium to long term individual saving accounts that are revenue neutral.

9. REFORM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Our Mission is to ensure strong accountability and public ethics as cornerstones of our democracy, delivering effective government where those who hold public office and positions of responsibility are accountable for decisions they make.

Labour will pursue a radical programme of reform of central and local government to put in place modernised structures and systems of accountability, place more powers in local communities and devolve responsibility to local authorities.

STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

Labour is proud of our pioneering role in introducing and improving the framework of ethics in public life, enforcing principles of integrity, accountability, openness, and transparency. But there has been no progress since we published the Public Sector Standards Bill in 2015.

Labour will act on the outstanding recommendations of the Standards in Public Office Commission, various tribunals and other inquiries and other reports including:

- » The power to conduct a preliminary inquiry without waiting for a complaint.
- » Ensuring accountability of former public officials, including those not currently covered by the Ethics Acts.
- » A code of conduct for public servants and members of state boards in the wider public service.
- » A requirement that liabilities be disclosed as 'registrable interests'.
- » Provision to allow complaints against members of the Oireachtas where matters come to light after someone has left office.

A new Public Sector Standards Commissioner will provide for a robust and effective framework for oversight, investigation, and enforcement – and cut down on unnecessary bureaucracy.

Labour will:

- » Establish a clear and meaningful separation of the roles of the Electoral Commission, the media regulator, and the new Public Sector Standards Commissioner, with a requirement for these bodies to co-operate on matters of common concern.
- » Address the powers available to investigate and enforce decisions of the regulators.
- » Ensure that a 'cooling-off' period for former ministers who move to private sector employment is clear cut and enforced.
- » Address the gaps in the laws about party finance and standards in public life laws on our island, which are open to abuse by parties registered in both jurisdictions.
- » Introduce a reformed regulatory framework and reporting mechanisms for public officials and elected representatives that is modernised and digitalised, to provide for easier compliance.
- » Consolidate and align local and central government ethics requirements.
- » Enshrine in law a high-level statement of ethical principles for all those in public life covering selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Real and effective accountability is central to public service management. Without clear lines of accountability, decision-making is poor and goes unchallenged. The system of accountability for Ministers and civil servants must be overhauled, to reflect modern requirements.

We will reform the legal structures of accountability to make it clear who is accountable for what, and in particular, to define the responsibilities of Ministers. Ministers will be clearly responsible both for their own actions and for the supervision of their departments.

We will repeal the "Carltona Doctrine", a rule of law which states that statutory powers may be exercised on behalf of a Minister by civil servants without his or her knowledge or permission,

and we will replace it with a proper system of delegation of authority where decision makers are identifiable and accountable.

Legislation will clarify the responsibilities of Secretaries General. We will assign to them authority, responsibility, and accountability for ensuring:

- » That departmental officials perform their functions in a non-political and impartial manner, in accordance with law and with the highest ethical standards of conduct and integrity and in accordance with any prescribed code of conduct.
- » That there are risk management and other internal controls in place to ensure that public funds are safeguarded, functions are performed effectively, efficiently and economically, laws, regulations and approved policies are complied with and records and reports are adequate, reliable and accurate.
- » That any legal advice casting substantial doubt on the constitutionality or validity of an enactment, scheme, practice, or course of action is brought to the personal attention of the Minister.

The responsibilities of all civil servants will extend to ensuring that officials and office holders perform their functions in a way that avoids the unlawful, corrupt, or irregular use of public funds or public resources and avoids any act, omission, or course of conduct –

- » done or taken without proper authority or on improper or irrelevant grounds,
- » contrary to established procedures, rules, or guidelines,
- » that is oppressive or improperly discriminatory,
- » that gives rise to a serious risk to public health, public safety or the environment;
- » that gives rise to a serious risk to the maintenance of law;
- » that gives rise to an offence or a failure to comply with a legal obligation; or

- » that constitutes gross mismanagement or gross negligence or is otherwise contrary to fair or sound administration.

Executive decisions taken by local authority chief executives are by way of written minute. Labour will introduce this practice at national level, for Ministers, so that there are proper records of Ministerial engagement in decision-taking.

Access to and compliance with legal advice must be a central aspect of the internal audit function. Failure to comply with the law is not just a legal issue. It also has budgetary implications since it can give rise to massive liabilities. And the secretary general of a department, as its accounting officer, has duties in relation to the integrity of the department's accounts, the safeguarding of public monies, contingent liabilities, risk assessment and internal audit. The legal adviser, whether in-house or in the Attorney General's Office, must be at the heart of the internal audit function.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

The relationship of the Attorney General to the Government is often that of lawyer to client. The relationship is shrouded in high levels of secrecy, and little or no accountability to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

But the Attorney General also has a public interest role, acting on behalf of the State and its citizens and not just the Government. The public interest role may sometimes conflict with obligations when acting for the Government, particularly in litigation. Labour will legislate to provide a mechanism for both acknowledging and accommodating public interest concerns in State litigation, with the Attorney General having statutory responsibility for ensuring that litigation is conducted in accordance with the public interest as well as the interests of a Minister or public body.

Labour will ensure that claims of legal professional privilege cannot be made over advice of the Attorney General if the advice is referred to and relied upon by the Government in explaining its policy approach to Bills and resolutions in the Oireachtas, and we will

introduce the Attorney General into the regime of codes of conduct for office holders under the Standards in Public Office Act 2001.

A PUBLIC SERVICE DUTY OF CANDOUR

Civil and public servants sometimes make mistakes, and it is not discreditable for anyone to get it wrong, but a reluctance to explain what has occurred and why is discreditable. A public body's objective cannot be to defend itself and its reputation at all costs. When it comes to litigation, a public body's duty must be to assist the court in reaching a correct and fair result.

There is already a duty of candour in our health service. Labour will extend this duty of candour across the public service, so that organisations and individuals are obliged to deal with the public openly and with integrity. We will also legislate for the duty to assist a court with full and accurate explanations of all relevant facts, in order to resolve issues fairly and justly.

The Offices of the Chief State Solicitor and of the Attorney General, and private law firms conducting litigation for public bodies, will be made subject to a duty to make sure that their client is fully aware of their obligations of candour and to ensure that proper disclosure of all relevant information is given.

REFORM AND TRANSPARENCY

Labour is proud to have pioneered the groundbreaking package of legislative reforms that introduced Freedom of Information, a Register of Lobbying, and protections for whistleblowers and we will strengthen these further. Labour will:

- » Consider the recommendations of the review of the Freedom of Information legislation when it is finally published, resource the Information Commissioner to reduce appeal delays, and improve transparency with independent FOI officers in all public bodies with stronger powers to retrieve and release records.
- » Review the legislation underpinning the Register of Lobbying, and protections for whistleblowers in order to strengthen their operation.

- » Introduce a Public Sector Plain Language Bill to require all communications to be plainly written, in other words direct and to the point.

Labour will invest in evidence-based policy making and develop a 'What Works' network to improve the design and delivery of public services, and we will invest in an all-island knowledge brokerage service to connect policy makers north and south through a new strand of Shared Island funding.

THE OMBUDSMAN

The Labour Party will extend the role of the Ombudsman, now over 40 years in existence, to include complaints about the Prison Service and the process covering applications for International Protection. We will examine a further potential role in relation to clinical decisions in the health service.

ELECTORAL REFORM

With the Electoral Commission now established, Labour will propose a further series of reforms to strengthen our democracy including:

- » The publication of draft constituencies for future consultation before their formal adoption, and the introduction of six seat Dáil constituencies, with the phasing down of three seaters.
- » A review of local authority electoral areas, and the distribution of seats following the next Census in 2027.

In support of a stronger participatory democracy, Labour will:

- » Introduce automatic voter registration and expand the availability of postal voting.
- » Introduce a 40% gender quota for the next local elections and end the full disclosure of a candidate's home address on a ballot paper.
- » Lower the voting age to 16, starting with the 2029 local and European elections.
- » Direct the Electoral Commission to research the extension of voting rights for Dáil elections to all long-term residents, living in Ireland for over five years, and

seek complimentary voting rights for Irish citizens living in other EU countries.

- » Extend voting rights to Irish citizens who move abroad, for a period of time.

POLITICAL REFORM

Despite some reforms to how the Dáil and Seanad operate, the last four years has seen a majority government fall back into bad habits, with no coherent operating hours, and legislation that is regularly rushed through with little scrutiny. Labour will:

- » Restore family friendly Dáil reforms with a designated voting block on a Thursday afternoon and improve oversight of the Houses of Oireachtas service.
- » Strengthen the role of the Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach to limit government guillotines of legislation so that it is used only in rare and exceptional circumstances.
- » Pursue Seanad Reform by extending universal suffrage to the five vocational panels.
- » Develop proposals for a fixed term parliament.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

During the period of the next government Labour will seek the permission of the people to make changes to Bunreacht na hÉireann. We will introduce a new rule to provide for a minimum of three months of Oireachtas scrutiny on any proposed Constitutional amendment, and seek referendums on the following issues during the term of the next government:

- » A Right to Housing.
- » Protection of our natural environment.
- » Protecting the public ownership of our water, gas and electricity networks.
- » Protection of our neutrality.

We will consider holding a number of referendums alongside the Presidential Election in 2025.

Labour will establish a Joint Committee on Constitutional Change to address a further range of issues, and consider proposed wording for amendments on:

- » Economic, Cultural and Social rights.
- » The place of faith in the Constitution including the Preamble and religious oaths for office holders.
- » Allowing for positive discrimination to combat inequality for those with disabilities.
- » Improved accountability from public officials and office holders.

The Committee will also carry out extensive study of the required changes necessary in the event of a unity referendum.

10. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Our mission is the devolution of stronger powers, reserved functions, and resources to local authorities so that the decisions that affect you locally are made there while introducing more directly elected Mayors and restoring Town Councils.

Labour believes in a strong local government system that gives real power to communities and local representatives. Ireland has one of the most centralised systems in Europe and the ever-increasing concentration of powers in departments and national agencies has stripped local authorities of functions, slowed down decision making and made public administration more distant from communities. The direct provision of services by councils has also been run down, reducing capacity, and leaving councils reliant on contractors and outsourcing for basic services.

Labour will convene a Local Democracy Taskforce within three months of entering government with sufficient expertise to drive implementation of our ambitious proposals for reform and the strengthening of local government.

STRUCTURAL REFORMS

Labour will introduce a series of structural reforms to transform local government, provide for more directly elected Mayors, the restoration of Town Councils and increased powers for local Councillors. We will:

- » Introduce more directly elected Mayors starting with Dublin, Cork, Galway, and Waterford, by building on the Limerick model with increased devolved powers.
- » Review and restructure regional assemblies as part of proposals to establish a directly elected Mayor for Dublin.
- » Provide a statutory basis for designating large towns as cities and develop a model for rolling out Directly Elected Mayors in larger towns.

- » Restore Town Councils for all defined urban areas with a population greater than 5,000, and over 1,000 dwellings to strengthen local democracy.
- » Place Area Committees in Dublin, Cork, and Galway on the same statutory footing as Municipal Districts
- » Change the imbalance of power between the Executive, and elected Councillors to address the democratic deficit in decision making.
- » Increase transparency by live streaming all council meetings.

INCREASED POWERS FOR COUNCILS

Labour will reverse the trend of centralisation and the transfer of local powers to national agencies. We will embed the principle of subsidiarity into national policy making, to ensure decisions are made at the right level. Increased powers will mean local Councillors make the key decisions that impact their communities. We will:

- » Devolve control and delivery of investment projects to Councillors in areas such as housing, climate adaptation and transport to reduce bureaucracy.
- » Provide Councillors with stronger powers to initiate and deliver housing and urban renewal projects, CPO vacant and derelict sites, and improve transport services.
- » Rebuild direct capacity in areas such as road and housing maintenance by employing more general operatives and skilled craft workers.
- » Designate Local Authorities as Energy Authorities with increased responsibility for addressing energy poverty, retrofitting, and district heating.
- » Embed the principles of Community Wealth Building into local economic development, through progressive procurement, insourcing, the use of land and property, and more inclusive and democratic ownership of local economies.

- » Make Community Development a core function of local authorities, with increased responsibility to allocate budgets, coordinate activity, and pursue new initiatives, working with the community and voluntary sector.
- » Develop proposals to ringfence a portion of the national policing, community health and social care budgets for allocation by local Councillors who would also be given responsibility for approval of local service plans.
- » Give oversight of local community policing to Councillors through reformed Community Safety Partnerships, including approval of local policing plans.
- » Begin the process to remunicipalise waste collection as a public service by amending the Waste Management Act to allow local authorities carry out a single tender for waste collection in designated areas.
- » Review the system of commercial rates and taxation of business properties and develop proposals for a site value tax as a potential replacement.
- » Ensure grants from central government are distributed on fair, evidence-based criteria with clear explanations for how allocations are made.
- » Devolve the allocation and awarding of local sport capital and community grants to local authorities rather than controlled by central Departments.
- » Require government Departments and agencies to pay commercial rates for properties they control as was previously the case.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCING

Labour will ensure the financial independence of local councils in Ireland is strengthened. A key principle of local government reform must be that Councils have greater control of their finances and more discretion for local priorities, alongside the power to raise revenue. We will:

- » Introduce a legal guarantee that all of the Local Property Tax raised in a local authority is retained there independent of other revenue streams from central government and ensure decisions on LPT are made at the same time as the annual council budget.
- » Provide more revenue raising powers such as tourist levies, vacant and derelict site taxes, and increase the discretionary level of the LPT.
- » Allocate the revenue raised from the national Vacant Homes Tax and Residential Zoned Land Tax to the council it is collected from.

11. UNITING IRELAND FOR ALL

Our Mission is to remain steadfast in support of the Good Friday Agreement, seek its full implementation to embed peace, recognise that the institutions must evolve and put in place a framework for the Irish government to plan for the potential of a future united Ireland.

THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

Labour recognises that the institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement must evolve. The Irish Government as co-guarantor has an important role to play in working with all parties to bring forward careful reforms, while embedding the recent progress made through the re-establishment of the Executive.

OUR SHARED ISLAND

Labour will continue to develop the all-island economy, and work with parties in Northern Ireland to achieve closer cooperation and integration. We will:

- » Work to introduce a UK-Ireland secondment programme in the public service.
- » Collaborate on an all-island and east-west basis on common renewable energy goals to realise the potential of offshore wind with a bilateral version of the North Seas Energy Cooperation group of nations and develop an all-island energy policy.
- » Deepen collaboration between the healthcare services on our island, deliver bespoke specialist services on an all-Ireland basis, and explore the potential of a joint procurement strategy between the HSE and the NHS in Northern Ireland.
- » Establish a joint Invest NI-IDA Ireland working group to maximise the benefits of dual market access, create a North/South trade taskforce, and improve the process of payroll tax collection for cross-border workers.
- » Continue to deepen cooperation on skills, further and higher education and establish an all-island skills forum, with a focus on

planning and infrastructure development and the green and digital transitions.

- » Advance a shared island public transport policy, deliver on the all-island strategic rail review report, and develop an all-island ports strategy.
- » Develop an all-island plan to improve water quality across the island and to fund the restoration of nature.
- » Explore new tourism opportunities such as linking the Wild Atlantic Way with the Causeway Coastal Route and promoting Derry as a destination city linking the two jurisdictions while integrating Armagh and Down in Ireland's Ancient East.

PLANNING FOR A UNITED IRELAND

Labour will seek to implement a framework to prepare for change across the island of Ireland and to advance in a structured way, planning for the future of our island and the conduct of a unity referendum.

The Irish government must recognise that a unity referendum could be held on our island within the next decade, as provided for under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, and that a task of this magnitude requires careful planning. Labour will approach this through the following framework:

- » Acknowledge that only the Irish State can lead on the political and administrative processes leading towards a unity referendum, so this task will have to be taken up by the next Government to ensure adequate preparation.
- » Substantial civic dialogue must be facilitated well in advance of a poll to prepare for this, through Citizens' Assemblies or similar type models like a New Ireland Forum, informed by recent practice, with as broad a range of voices and political actors as possible from across the island.
- » A new Department of Unification responsible for reconciliation, harmonisation, integration, and unity planning should be established under

the remit of the Taoiseach during the next government term, moving towards a standalone senior Ministry in advance of a future referendum at a later date.

- » A new, cross party Joint Oireachtas Committee should be established to oversee, assist, and advise on the preparatory work of the Government, and to also work on transitional and political issues.
- » The next Taoiseach should appoint a cross community group of Senators from Northern Ireland to join such a committee, with a standing invitee status also for MLAs and MPs from Northern Ireland similar to the approach taken by the Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.
- » An academic advisory council would be established to provide the Irish state with the best available domestic and international research.
- » The Government would initiate a wide ranging consultative and technical process leading to a Green Paper and subsequent White Paper on all the issues.
- » A Green Paper will set out the issues whilst the White Paper will seek to draw conclusions. The Government will commission specific pieces of research or advice to support this process.
- » Citizens' Assemblies will be held following the publication of a Green paper. Democratic consent from both the Dáil and the Assembly for these deliberative forums would be preferable but should not be limiting.
- » Consultative forums will also be used on a case-by-case basis to examine options contained in the Green Paper to determine a preferred approach and address sectoral and thematic issues.

- » Consultation will include individual citizens, the economic and social community including social partners, and international friends of Ireland. Detailed consideration will be given to the treatment of cultural issues.
- » Significant planning in advance of any poll will be needed in conjunction with the European Union on proposals for reintegrating Northern Ireland.
- » The government will liaise with the broader diaspora during the planning and consultative process.
- » A mechanism for engaging with the government of the United Kingdom on planning issues that arise from a unity referendum will need to be formalised, preferably through the established British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

A significant portion of the new Future Ireland Fund would be put aside to support the process and implementation of unification. The fund is estimated to reach around €100bn by 2035.

12. SOCIAL PROTECTION AND POVERTY

Our Mission is developing the social protection system as the bedrock of our social safety net with payments that protect not just against poverty but provide a decent standard of living and adequate income for older people, people with disabilities and carers, and that people are supported into appropriate work.

Labour will create a new Department of Work and Social Protection with the incorporation of the Employment Affairs brief.

SOCIAL WELFARE AND INSURANCE

As part of reforms to the annual budget process, Labour will introduce annual indexation of social welfare payments and benefits to reflect increases in the cost of living. The automatic increases will be independently determined and based on a basket measure of wage growth and inflation. Any further annual increases above these automatic changes will then be decided as part of the annual budget in October in line with our objective of achieving adequate incomes to secure a minimum essential standard of living.

Labour will protect the Social Insurance Fund and its long-term sustainability with a review of the PRSI Roadmap and the status of the Fund to ensure Ireland is in line with European norms.

OLDER PEOPLE AND PENSIONS

Labour will maintain the State Pension age of 66 and protect its value by implementing a pension promise linking it to 34% of average earnings. We will also:

- » Review the impact of the current qualifying criteria for the State Contributory Pension on women and carers to ensure their lifelong contribution to society is fully recognised.
- » Provide for increases in the Living Alone Allowance and protect the free travel scheme.

- » Introduce the auto-enrolment pension scheme but ensure existing good occupational schemes are protected and not diluted or displaced.
- » Ensure cohorts of retired semi-state workers from CIE and An Post are not blocked from receiving pension increases, and that the pension rights of people in defined benefit schemes are protected.
- » Assess the prevalence of mandatory retirement clauses and ensure the removal of barriers to remaining in the workforce after 65 for those who wish to work beyond that age.

TACKLING POVERTY

Over half a million people in Ireland live in poverty, nearly 180,000 are children. Labour is committed to ending poverty through a range of measures.

Poverty Act and restore Combat Poverty Agency

Labour will introduce a Poverty Act to make targets legally binding, ensure all policy is poverty proofed and restore the Combat Poverty Agency. The remodelled agency will have a strong focus on research and the development of economic and social policies to reduce poverty and economic inequality. Ireland's income inequality is the highest in the OECD before taxes and social welfare placing the welfare system under significant strain to correct market inequality.

Access to Social Welfare Payments

Labour will introduce a Principles of Social Welfare Act to adopt a rights-based approach to social protection. This would require officials to maximise the income of recipients and to simplify the range of forms used to apply for social protection payments. It would provide for a Social Welfare Charter and impose a duty to promote the take-up of social welfare entitlements. As part of these reforms, Labour will put the Community Welfare Service on a statutory basis with a guaranteed right to in-person access.

A targeted rate of Child Benefit

Labour is committed to increases in child benefit and the child support payment and will introduce a new targeted second rate of child benefit to drastically reduce child poverty. This will require significant design work to avoid unintended consequences from interactions with other payments like fuel allowance, Working Family payment and student support grants, and non-cash benefits such as medical cards, the National Childcare Scheme and HAP. During the development of the new child income support payment, we will conduct a comprehensive review of the system of means testing and income disregards for social protection payments, and those related to other benefits and payments under the responsibility of other Departments, towards developing a standardised model for the assessment of means across the public service.

Support Lone Parents

Labour will support lone parents by ensuring incomes are adequate to protect against poverty by reforming and streamlining social welfare payments for one parent families. As interim measures we will increase the income disregard in line with minimum wage increases, extend eligibility to the Working Family Payment when in receipt of the Jobseekers Transition Payment and ensure OPFP, JST and child maintenance are excluded as means for medical card assessments to remove barriers to employment.

Labour will also improve, and reform family law supports, and develop an independent state system to assess, manage and enforce child maintenance payments.

Reduce Energy Poverty

Labour will introduce a strategy to combat energy poverty, extend eligibility for support payments and increase base payments. We will:

- » Set ambitious energy poverty reduction targets by legislating for a binding strategy with annual progress reports.
- » Provide for increases in the Fuel Allowance and Household Benefits Package.

- » Extend eligibility for the Fuel Allowance and adapt the scheme to ensure it meets the needs of vulnerable households including those on the Working Family Payment to support children at risk of energy poverty.

SUPPORTING WORKERS

Labour will ensure parents are able to take at least a year of combined paid leave by extending parent's leave benefit by a further three weeks, and then seek to extend it further in line with European norms and provide additional paid leave for lone parents.

Labour will develop as a permanent feature of our employment and social protection safety net a short-term wage subsidy scheme to support workers and businesses when a downturn or unexpected disruption imperils jobs. Similar to the EWSS introduced during the pandemic, it would protect employees from redundancy with state subsidies and shorter working hours when companies encounter difficulties. Importantly, like the German 'Kurzarbeit' scheme, it would guarantee that each worker has access to a training or upskilling plan to both improve productivity and prepare workers for potential new opportunities. It also means companies can retain critical staff and skills. This Obairghearr scheme would be funded from the Social Insurance Fund and National Training Fund, act as an automatic stabiliser in the event of future recessions and be developed through social dialogue and collective bargaining.

Following the introduction of pay related jobseeker's benefits, Labour will develop a roadmap of proposals to extend the principle to other social insurance benefits, starting with maternity benefit. We will also develop proposals to provide a rent supplement payment as a social insurance benefit for workers when they lose their jobs, restore eligibility for under 25s to the full rate of jobseeker's allowance, and ensure cohabiting couples have access to the same benefits as married couples.

DISABILITY PAYMENTS

Labour will adopt a new approach to the failed government proposals outlined in the Green Paper on Disability Reform. Working with disabled person's organisations and in line with the UNCRPD we will seek to develop a new integrated single taxable benefit to replace existing schemes and the income disregard system, and phase in a permanent Cost of Disability payment.

Ireland has very low rates of employment for people with disabilities and we will improve the Wage Subsidy Scheme and provide increased funding for assistive technology. Labour will complete the overhaul of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and Disability Awareness Support Scheme.

Additional Labour proposals to support people with disabilities are outlined under Disability Rights and Services.

COMMUNITY AND EMPLOYMENT

Labour recognises the crucial role of Local Employment Services, and the social benefits from Community Employment (CE) Schemes, Tús and the Rural Social Scheme alongside the traditional labour activation role. We will expand eligibility for CE and Tús, ensure projects are properly resourced, increase the additional payments for participating, and open a new stream for those not in receipt of payments to participate in schemes.

Labour will undertake a comprehensive review of labour activation programmes to fulfil our objective to lower unemployment to below 4% and increase the participation rate. Our focus is to ensure supportive employment services for people who are unemployed in order to help them access decent work, reduce barriers like the cost of travel, recognise the importance of part time work as a route into employment, and invest in upskilling and training while acknowledging the cost of participation.

Labour proposals to support Carers are outlined under A New Social Contract for Care.

13. BIODIVERSITY AND NATURE RESTORATION

Our Mission is to reverse biodiversity loss and restore nature to create a sustainable and resilient natural environment so that species and habitats can thrive with clean waterways, rich forestry, and healthy land.

Our biodiversity is in a critical state with 85% of habitats in an unfavourable condition and 15% of protected species in decline. The State must take a leading role in restoring and enhancing Ireland's biodiversity to protect the future of our island and planet. Labour is committed to acting.

The Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss and the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss made more than 200 recommendations to halt ecological destruction and restore our natural environment. Labour will put these calls into action and work closely with all stakeholders, including farmers and fishers, environmental groups, and semi-state bodies, to achieve those recommendations.

THE ROLE OF SEMI-STATE BODIES AND AGENCIES

Semi-State bodies like Coillte and Bord na Móna control significant tracts of land in Ireland. However, their mandates are defined largely in commercial terms. These organisations have a key role in achieving our nature and climate commitments.

Labour will reform the legal mandates, governance, and operations of Coillte and Bord na Móna by amending the Forestry Act 1988 and the Turf Development Act 1946 to ensure that they align with our climate, biodiversity, and nature restoration ambitions.

Similar changes will be made to state agencies like the OPW, Bord Bia and Teagasc as well as Gas Networks Ireland and the ESB. We will:

- » Reconstitute Teagasc as a food security and sustainability agency tasked with working with stakeholders to improve our food security and growing more of what we eat.

- » Make the Department of the Environment responsible for all nature conservation functions, including Coillte and Bord na Móna.
- » Strengthen the EPA and ensure it is adequately resourced to carry out its mandate.
- » Reform the OPW and give it a stronger role in climate mitigation and flood prevention work, including protection works, and upstream land management in catchment areas.

As increasing numbers of households and businesses are denied flood insurance even when the OPW has installed defences, Labour will introduce a FloodRe scheme, like the model in the UK, to close the flood protection gap.

BIODIVERSITY AND NATURE RESTORATION

Labour will take the necessary steps to enhance our biodiversity and restore nature to good health. We will design and implement an ambitious Nature Restoration Plan in consultation with key stakeholders including environmental organisations, farmers and public bodies which will set nature on the path to recovery and ensure it is properly funded. We will also:

- » Invest in the National Parks and Wildlife Services to support commitments under the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the restoration of land and waterways and increase staffing to ensure that it can meet current obligations and those arising out of the Nature Restoration Law.
- » Ringfence funding in the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund, and allocate a portion of future windfall tax gains for biodiversity and nature restoration.
- » Invest in nature by funding ecological expertise in all public bodies, local authorities, and planning agencies, and introduce an annual reporting framework on Ireland's biodiversity and the status of habitats and species.

- » Implement the recommendations of the ongoing land-use review as regards rewetting of cutaway bogs, the restoration of degraded peatlands and the rewetting of organic agricultural soils, particularly in upland areas.
- » Outlaw the use of chemicals that impact on pollinators.
- » Seek to bring more land into public ownership for designation as national parks and require and fund comprehensive management plans for all national parks, SACs, SPAs and MPAs.
- » Develop proposals for the introduction of the concept of Biodiversity Net Gain as a planning decision tool.
- » Advance the inclusion of a Right to a Clean Environment in our constitution.

FARMING AND FOOD SECURITY

Farmers are the stewards of our land and provide us with world-renowned quality food, but they need support to help us reach our nature restoration commitments. We will ensure farmers are engaged with and supported to help us prevent biodiversity loss, ensure food security, and implement more sustainable farming practices. Our policies on agriculture and food security are outlined separately, but on biodiversity and nature restoration, we will:

- » Expand the Farm Plan Scheme and review the ACRES programme to ensure farmers are supported with agri-environmental schemes that are long-term, adequately funded, locally led and results based.
- » Reform food policy and remove barriers for local food producers by ensuring institutional recognition and financial, structural, and strategic support, including a local food policy framework.
- » Strengthen the position of farmers in the food supply chain, protect producers against below-cost selling and competition from free trade agreements, and support the EU Just Transition fund for farmers.

CLEAN AIR

Labour will introduce a new Clean Air Act, implement a nationwide clean air strategy and increase the number of air quality monitoring stations in all urban areas, particularly near schools and heavily trafficked residential areas. We will phase out fossil fuel vehicles, introduce low or zero emission zones where required in polluted urban areas, and fast-track the reallocation of road space to zero emission public transport and active travel infrastructure. Engine idling will be prohibited near schools and childcare facilities.

Labour will ensure that public health services are fully engaged and cooperating with air, water, and sustainable diet strategies.

CLEAN WATER

Labour will work to reverse the decline in Ireland's rivers, lakes and coastal waters through enhanced inspections, investment, and enforcement, and achieving the objective of good water quality in all catchments by 2030. We will review Inland Fisheries Ireland and ensure rigorous investigation and prosecution of fish kills and environmental pollution in our rivers and lakes. We will establish a Boyne Valley Task Force as a pilot body for protecting the environment and habitats of river catchments. We will reverse the decline in water quality due to excessive nutrients and ensure that Teagasc advice on stocking rates is consistent with catchment-based water quality improvements. Labour will support the retention of the Nitrates Derogation only if it is supported by EPA water quality data showing measurable improvements in water quality status. We will mandate the EPA to work with Irish Water to prevent pollution from water treatment plants and increase the capital funding available for water treatment and inspections of septic tanks.

THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

Labour will ensure the protection of our marine habitats while supporting our struggling inshore fishing fleet. We will enact long-overdue legislation to designate 30% of our coastal waters as Marine Protected Areas with a plan

to reach 50% over time. At least 10% will be strictly protected to safeguard and ensure the long-term health of our marine habitats. We will work closely with fisheries and environmental organisations to achieve this alongside the rollout of offshore wind energy infrastructure.

Labour will establish a Dublin Bay Authority as a model for protecting our coastal environment and public amenities. We will also:

- » Engage with coastal communities and stakeholders to identify, manage, and monitor the marine environment.
- » Produce an action plan for a Just Transition for low impact fisheries, prioritising small-scale coastal fisheries and considering diversification of activities and income models.
- » Ban trawlers of 18 metres or longer from fishing within 6 nautical miles of Ireland's coast and bottom trawling in MPAs, as well as phasing out all destructive fishing practices from our waters.
- » Review aquaculture policy and licensing to ensure they align with climate, water, and biodiversity policy.

FORESTRY

Ireland has the lowest forest coverage in the EU. Despite the forestry plan being in place for over a year, targets are nowhere near being met. This leaves Ireland with a large shortfall to meet on top of future targets.

Labour will review the Forestry programme to ensure a more active role for the State in the development and restoration of Irish forests with increased planting of native trees. We will increase planting grants and premia to renew our efforts to meet targets and promote cooperation between Coillte and farmers to plant on their land to encourage the most sustainable and biodiverse forestry and provide farmers with a new source of income. We will ensure that state-owned woodlands are recognised and managed as strategic long-term national assets for the benefit of the common good.

We will also:

- » Put in place an achievable plan to reach afforestation targets.
- » Protect public ownership of our forests and seek changes to EU State Aid rules to ensure Coillte can invest in new planting of native species.
- » Promote agroforestry practices and develop land-use planning strategies to optimise the utilisation of available land while preserving biodiversity and natural habitats.
- » Introduce a scheme to grow and promote the Irish tree fruit sector and protect heritage breeds adapted to our natural environment as only 5% of our eating apples are home grown.
- » Increase urban tree planting, and pocket forests.
- » Address Ash Dieback concerns by reviewing the action plan with proper compensation for clearance and restoration along with the protection of the 15% of trees that have developed natural resistance to aid repopulation.

Labour will instruct the Department, along with Coillte and COFORD to develop and implement an ambitious national strategy for forestry and the “bio-economy” of new products made from wood pulp with an aim of further increasing the amount of land under forest cover, and striking the right balance between continuous cover, native species and commercial Sitka Spruce growing with the aim of maximising carbon capture, biodiversity and sustainable jobs.

WEATHER PREPAREDNESS

Labour will overhaul Emergency Preparedness resources to build resilience to systematic and climate hazards. We will implement a national flood warning system, replace the outdated “Winter Ready” site with one that has best practice resources in emergency preparedness, and actively review and implement lessons learned from other countries.

14. A DIGITAL FUTURE

Our mission is the inclusive transformation of our public services and economy through the benefits of digitalisation and AI, the removal of the digital divide, and the embedding of ICT skills and innovation to position Ireland as a global leader.

Ireland is a hub for global technology giants with a strong and growing domestic ecosystem that can and should foster future unicorns. We have a long record of advanced manufacturing of hardware and semiconductors and as an exporter of software and services. We are at the nexus of digital transformation and sit between the mass markets of the EU and US, well placed to reap the benefits that will accrue over the next decade. That is why now is the time for Ireland to transform our approach to technology, digitalisation, and AI.

A DEPARTMENT OF DIGITAL

Labour will create a standalone Department of Digital and Communications, initially paired with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science under one Minister. It will have responsibility for the National Digital Strategy, digital inclusion, cyber security, data protection, and work closely with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and the Department of Enterprise. The new Department will be matched with an Oireachtas Digital Committee. We want to position Ireland as a leader on all aspects of the digital transformation from skills to chips, cloud computing to AI. In order to do this, we must first secure our energy independence and deliver infrastructure to be ready for new opportunities like quantum computing or to host more data centres.

DATA CENTRES

Digitalisation and the development and deployment of AI are two key challenges over the next decade with the potential to transform our society and economy, but require large capital investment, and are energy intensive. Ireland is home to 30% of all data held in the

EU while AI queries use ten times the energy of traditional internet search.

Data centres in Ireland now consume more electricity than domestic households. This is not sustainable and forecasts by the International Energy Agency project global data centre energy use could double by 2025 equal to the amount of electricity used by Japan. While these facilities are an important part of our industrial strategy it is costing the Irish public and creates reputational risks if expansion continues without sufficient or reliable electricity supplies. Labour will introduce a moratorium on new data centres until electricity prices come down and more renewable sources enter the grid. Data centres would be allowed to proceed if the developer invested in enough new renewable energy sources to power it and contributed a portion of energy back to the national grid, ensuring net decarbonisation. We are not against data centres, but development must be balanced. Stronger research on the energy demands of data centres driven by cryptocurrency and AI is needed.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Oversight of AI will be integrated in the new Department, and a new AI office will be established to manage Ireland's AI strategy, ensure compliance with the EU AI Act and oversee policy implementation. This office will align Ireland's economic and societal goals while managing ethical AI deployment across sectors. It is essential that regulators are well resourced to handle compliance efficiently and avoid bottlenecks to establish Ireland as a leader in AI governance.

Ireland will embrace the use of machine learning and other AI applications, but it must be carefully regulated, and we see it as a tool to improve people's working lives, not replace them. Labour will adopt a human centric, rights-based approach to AI where people are the beneficiaries. Consultation in workplaces is vital and the positive benefits will include liberation from mundane or unpleasant tasks. Labour will ensure strong controls on workplace surveillance, algorithmic management, and recruitment.

Regular updates of the National AI strategy will be essential as the technology evolves to ensure both public and private sectors benefit from technological advancement while adhering to a rights-based AI model.

Labour will support Ireland's indigenous tech ecosystem by investing in AI development in academia and SMEs through partnerships, equity investment and grants, and encourage multinationals to invest in AI innovations in Ireland.

Labour will commit extra resources to help SMEs digitise and adopt AI. Grants for training and expert advisory services will de-risk AI investments, helping Irish companies to be globally competitive and create the jobs of the future.

The State should proactively invest in artificial intelligence applications through the Strategic Investment and Development Bank.

Labour will prioritise the introduction of regulatory sandboxes in specific areas like legal services that will allow for the development and streamlining of administration.

The rights of creators and copyright must be respected as provided for in the EU AI Act, and controls placed on the creation and use of deepfakes, and we will protect the democratic process from the misuse of AI in elections.

CYBER SECURITY

Maintaining online trust in digital processes is essential to our economic future, and to deliver public services more efficiently. Labour will ensure Ireland invests more in our cyber security. This will include developing a national eco-system, investing in R&D, building up our resilience to attacks, and protecting our offshore connectivity. Private enterprise will be supported to protect our national economic interests. As AI increases cybersecurity risks, there will be close coordination between AI and cybersecurity functions of the new Department.

Safeguarding our information is a vital concern, and Labour will carry out an independent review of the Data Protection Commission on measures needed to strengthen and reform its functions,

ensure it is adequately resourced and proactive in enforcing EU rules and standing up to big tech. We will make the DPC fully subject to Freedom of Information.

Strengthening these areas will also underpin future growth in areas like financial services and intellectual property management which rely on a strong technological framework and secure networks.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Labour will increase the ICT grant for schools and ensure all children have access to modern learning methods such as tablets, not just those who can afford it. We will deliver digital health records and introduce modern technologies like tap and go on public transport. The new Department will lead on the deployment of the EU digital identity wallet for Ireland, and we will complete delivery of the government data centre.

COMMUNICATIONS

The status of our telecommunications networks is vital for economic and security purposes, and we will explore using the Strategic Infrastructure and Development Bank to bring these critical assets into public control or ownership.

Labour will introduce a right to access the internet, and the delivery of strong communication networks. We will audit the cost and delivery to date of the National Broadband Plan, and ensure all households and businesses have access to a gigabit network.

We will reduce mobile data coverage blackspots by funding open access infrastructure and oblige all mobile phone operators to guarantee a greater level of 5G coverage in rural areas as part of their licences, including Internet/data access via phones. We will deliver an SMS based public warning system for use in emergencies.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Labour will develop a new standalone national Digital Inclusion Strategy. We will ensure people still have access to public services in person, but the transition to digital activity means we must improve digital skills by investing in literacy

and inclusion. The use of video conferencing technologies for interacting with a person online would provide greater confidence to many people when they want to engage with public service front line staff remotely. This is especially relevant for complex or urgent needs that cannot be addressed by email.

Digital literacy means more than just an ability to use an app, and we will develop programmes to give people greater understanding and awareness of the benefits and risks of online activity. Ireland needs to collect better data, develop a digital divide index, and a comprehensive framework to support digital skills. Digital inclusion can be best supported at community level using existing infrastructure such as libraries, ETBs and community centres. Labour will look to introduce a digital allowance as part of the existing social welfare Telephone Support Allowance to support older people access online services.

Labour will develop proposals to introduce digital skills as a core subject in our schools with a defined syllabus and implement the DigComp framework from early childhood to adult education.

PART 3

OUR AMBITION FOR BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES

15. EDUCATION

Our Mission is the provision of an inclusive and genuinely free of charge system of State run education, rooted in our communities, where every child is treated equally, where we invest in tackling disadvantage and provide the support every child needs to meet their full potential in world class schools where staff are resourced, respected, and valued.

Ireland now has the resources and Labour has the political will necessary to transform our model of education at primary and secondary level to ensure it represents the modern diversity of our country. Our comprehensive plan to build better together will invest in the future, guarantee equality of access, and ensure every child can thrive and succeed.

INCLUSIVE AND REFORMED EDUCATION

Labour will hold a new National Convention on Education, inclusive of young people and children, stakeholders, and an assembly of citizens to plan for a modern, secular, and equality-based model of education. Our objective is to secure a State run school system with religious instruction separated from the school day and the Convention must assess the constitutional underpinning of education.

We will implement an ambitious programme of patronage divestment to multi-denominational patronage bodies like Educate Together and Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to provide more parental choice and recognise the growing diversity of our population.

Under Labour the process will recognise the local pride and importance of primary schools developed historically through the parish system. We will seek to develop a renewed option of divestment to Community National Schools with reforms to ensure much stronger local control, democratic participation, and independence for the school board through the overall patronage of ETBs.

Every child should be treated equally when applying for a school place, and Labour will end the archaic policy of up to a quarter of

school places being reserved for children and grandchildren of past pupils, while retaining the sibling rule. Labour will also:

- » Provide financial incentives to support schools that divest to multi-denominational patronage, and that end gender segregation, acting to phase out state supported single sex schools within a decade.
- » Move religious instruction outside of daily teaching hours while respecting the beliefs of parents and children.
- » Phase out state subsidies for private fee paying second level schools.
- » Implement and resource the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy.
- » Address the use of reduced timetables, and the impact on vulnerable and disadvantaged students, with more tailored supports.

The Leaving Certificate

The Leaving Certificate, even with continuous assessment and project work, is still an outdated system bound by rote learning and terminal exams that cause mental stress for students. In a digital age it is time to fundamentally review and replace our current system. The National Convention on Education will address this and ensure the voices of young people are heard.

Curriculum

An Gaeilge will remain central to our schools and Labour will trial the teaching of a full year at primary level in Irish and additional subjects at second level as Gaeilge. We will ensure education on sex and relationships is objective and inclusive. Primary schools will be resourced for the new foreign languages' initiative, and technology and digital skills will continue to be integrated in the school day. We will review existing subjects and the provision of new additions for the second level curriculum including Irish Sign Language.

Digital Literacy

Labour will introduce a curriculum on digital media literacy, make schools smartphone free, ensure a robust legislative and regulatory framework is in place to protect children, and provide increased funding and resources for awareness campaigns, wellbeing training and support services.

TACKLE DISADVANTAGE

Labour will introduce a new DEIS+ cluster model as a focused stream of investment to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and trauma in areas with long term socio-economic and education disadvantage. It will provide for clusters of multidisciplinary teams building on the City Connects programme so that each child can access the services or resources they need to succeed, thrive, and achieve their full potential complemented by staffed nurture rooms and an expanded teacher support service.

Labour will commission a full review of the DEIS scheme with input from all stakeholders, and we will introduce lower pupil teacher ratios for all DEIS schools including a benchmark of 15:1 in urban band 1, and increased capitation grants to address historic underfunding. We will ensure that specialist emotional counsellors and/or therapists are available to each DEIS primary and secondary school.

We will also continue to invest in literacy and extend the JCSP Library Demonstration Project to more DEIS schools, progressively increase funding for the School Completion Programme and appoint more Home School Community Liaison Coordinators.

Labour will expand the Hot School Meals programme to every school, completing rollout at primary level followed next by DEIS secondary schools, and we will:

- » Introduce a programme during school holidays to provide students with meals.
- » Improve the nutritional content and quality of meals and phase out disposable/single-use containers by investing in kitchen facilities.

- » Transfer responsibility and oversight for School Meals to the Department of Education and encourage the involvement of local social enterprises in the provision of meals.

MAKE EDUCATION TRULY FREE

Education is our greatest tool for creating a more equal and prosperous Ireland and cost should not be a barrier for any child to reach their potential. Labour will ensure a fair start for every child and cut costs for parents by making education genuinely free, starting with a ban on voluntary contributions and increased annual capitation funding in line with the real costs of running a school.

The progress made with free schoolbooks must now be extended to the other costs of going to school. Labour will seek to introduce a universal Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance with provision of free uniforms where those are used. We will provide free school transport and invest in enough bus places, abolish State exam fees, ensure every child has access to the assistive technology they need, and provide funding to cover the cost of Home Economics materials and ingredients, as is done with subjects like Wood technology and metalwork.

REALISE THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

It is unacceptable that every school year hundreds of children with additional needs cannot access a school place near where they live or must travel for long distances every morning.

Labour will introduce an Autism Guarantee to secure an appropriate school place for every child and develop a fully inclusive model of education that vindicates the right to education for all children across the range of disabilities and complies with the UNCRPD and UNCRC. That means better long-term planning, multi-annual funding, and the use of Ministerial power to open classes when necessary. The system must better anticipate the future needs of children through improved data collection, and

clear information on what resources and staffing are needed, and how budgets are allocated. We will:

- » Update the EPSEN Act and introduce a right to assessment of educational needs and individual education plans.
- » Provide sufficient current and capital funding to meet demand for special school places and classes integrated in mainstream schools and ensure school designs are fully accessible and take sensory processing into account.
- » Change the resource allocation model for special education teachers to ensure greater information on complex needs is taken into account. Schools should not be losing out, and disability advocacy organisations and DPOs must be part of the process when developing new policy initiatives.
- » Expand the Educational Therapy Support Service through the NCSE for more in-school therapists and provide better training for teachers during their degrees.
- » Invest in child-centred SNA provision, and value SNAs by removing the 72-hour obligation and provide training to a QQI Level 6 equivalent.
- » Undertake an Autism Audit of all schools and provide Autism CPD training to school staff to ensure that mainstream schools can facilitate the inclusion of children with Autism to the greatest extent possible.
- » Increase funding for the Summer Programme so that no child with additional needs is left without a place.
- » Provide additional time and supports in State exams for young people with dyslexia and other learning challenges.
- » Invest in pathways to further and higher education, apprenticeships, and bridging services for school leavers with additional needs.

WORLD CLASS SCHOOLS

Ireland has some of the largest class sizes in the EU and spends less than other developed nations. At second level demand for scarce school places will continue to grow in the years ahead and we will put in place enough new classrooms and introduce a centralised admissions process. Labour will build a world class education system that educates our children to the highest standard and we will:

- » Reduce class sizes to the European average and ensure the capital programme is accurately profiled to our growing population to provide classrooms and school where they are needed, when they are needed.
- » Resource schools to adequately support children who are homeless or refugees.
- » Equalise the primary school day with the same hours for all classes.
- » Set continuously higher school standards for literacy and numeracy, assess the progress of Cineáltas: the Action Plan on Bullying, and continue to review curriculums at all levels.
- » Ensure tuition at higher level is available in every core subject in every school in the country, using remote learning and technology where necessary.
- » Review the complex school grants system to ensure it is fit for purpose and meeting the modern needs of schools at both primary and second level and increase the level of the Minor Works grant to cover increased maintenance costs.
- » Expand the NEPS service by hiring more educational psychologists, extend the pilot counselling support to all primary schools, and increase guidance and counselling posts in secondary schools.
- » Provide recurring annual funding for school libraries and develop a new national school library policy strategy incorporating the value of reading for joy.

- » Invest in modern PE halls, science labs and equipment.
- » Develop a comprehensive plan to upgrade the energy efficiency of all schools.
- » Increase grants for digital technology and develop a new Digital Strategy for schools.

ADDRESS THE STAFFING CRISIS

The growing teacher recruitment and retention crisis is damaging the education of children, disrupting schools, putting huge pressure on principals and school management, and must be addressed. Labour will establish a teacher staffing taskforce to consider a broad range of issues including casualisation, pay scales, incremental credit for those working as teachers abroad, and shortening the PME to one year, and then act on its recommendations. We will also:

- » Restore school leadership and middle management posts and invest in continuous professional development.
- » Put in place additional financial and support systems for educational staff when they are assaulted at work and develop proposals with educational stakeholders to extend assault leave for the duration of medically certified leave.
- » Support a more diverse teaching workforce with supports like the outreach learning hubs for improving Irish, and other pathfinder projects to encourage new entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- » Value all educational and support staff with decent pay and conditions for school secretaries and caretakers.
- » Develop key worker housing to support the provision of public services in our cities and towns.

16. LIFELONG LEARNING

Our Mission is to invest in lifelong learning and literacy, further and higher education so that everyone can meet their potential without cost as a barrier, so that Ireland is equipped with the skills and future talent to secure new economic opportunities and deliver the public services we need.

The ability to meet the needs of our people - with a good job, a strong health service, a quick planning decision or renewable energy - will be determined by ensuring our further and higher education system can support people to learn the right skills. Labour will deliver a skills revolution, support students with the increased cost of living and resource our colleges and universities to meet our future challenges.

Labour will retain the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, and integrate it under one Minister with a new Department of Digital and Communications.

Labour will introduce a Freedom to Learn programme for employees who want to upskill or change careers after many years of contributions. We will fund from the NTF free part time diplomas, degree, and master's courses as well as skills vouchers to give you the personal choice and freedom to pursue new careers or skills.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND LITERACY

We need to do much more to improve literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy skills so that people can make sense of the world while also securing the skills needed for challenges like digitalisation, climate change and a changing economy. Labour will appoint a dedicated Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and Literacy and we will:

- » Use the surplus in the National Training Fund to invest in lifelong learning and reopen the NTF to fund training from Levels 1 to 4.

- » Properly resource the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy, invest in financial literacy to tackle online scams, and improve data collection.
- » Ensure public bodies use the ISO Plain Language standard in communications.
- » Implement an English for Speakers of Other Languages strategy and improve the recognition of qualifications from outside the EU.
- » Rollout an agreed digital skills curriculum and adopt and implement the EU's DigiComp Framework.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Despite commitments under Funding the Future and new funding from the NTF, the higher education sector has not been properly funded for the cost of public sector pay agreements and rising student numbers. Labour will allocate the proposed €150m a year from the NTF by 2030 earlier than planned. We will close the overall funding gap while ensuring that the costs of public service pay agreements are provided separately in annual funding and do not fall on HEIs as at present. We will also:

- » Bring spending per student up to the average of peer countries and align staffing ratios to best international practice, including the removal of the employment control framework to provide more local flexibility.
- » Introduce a sectoral engagement forum and stronger dialogue between trade unions and HEIs to address terms and conditions including precarious employment and workforce planning.
- » Address the scourge of precarious employment and casualisation, which threatens to undermine the quality and stability of the sector, support pathways to permanent contracts, ensure fair and equitable working conditions and address gender inequalities within the academic workforce.
- » Allow Technological Universities to borrow to fund student accommodation.

- » Create a new capital programme to invest in research infrastructure and laboratory equipment to replace PRTL and increase funding for Research Ireland including grant allocations for the humanities and applied sciences.
- » Increase funding for blue sky research and seek to establish a long-term research endowment fund with any future unexpected windfall tax receipts.

FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Community based vocational education, training and adult education courses are vital parts of our education system for securing a well-skilled workforce, and providing new opportunities for people when other routes aren't accessible or appropriate. The FET sector provides valuable and distinctive pathways for school leavers, workers seeking to upskill, lifelong learners, those marginalised and looking to re-engage in education, and local employers and community groups and schemes. Labour will:

- » Expand enrolment in the FET sector to over 200,000 learners a year and ensure it is properly funded.
- » Improve conditions and professional development for teaching staff and adult educators to boost recruitment and retention.
- » Increase the budget for the Strategic Infrastructure Fund to improve the ageing FET capital estate and upgrade buildings to be more energy efficient and in compliance with building regulations.
- » Deliver an ambitious FET Colleges of the Future programme.

APPRENTICESHIPS

College isn't the only route to skills and qualifications. Labour will continue to develop new apprenticeships including in the climate, digital and healthcare sectors, review progress on the Action Plan and introduce the long awaited national single apprenticeship pathway to aid promotion of this career path.

We will:

- » Remove apprenticeship fees and ensure apprentices are paid at least the national minimum wage to boost recruitment and retention.
- » Increase investment in craft apprenticeships and launch a national promotional campaign to encourage people into trades.
- » Ensure public sector bodies take on more apprentices and increase participation by women and people with disabilities.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Students are under severe financial pressure due to the increased cost of living and student accommodation crisis. It limits their choice of courses and impacts on their education as they must take more part time work. Labour is committed to achieving free third-level education and will over time permanently abolish undergraduate fees. Despite the purported removal of PLC fees, students still face individual levies in different ETBs, and we will phase these out along with removing apprenticeship fees.

The SUSI grant system must be made available to more students from lower income households. It also needs significant reform to reflect the lived reality of students today by recognising estranged students, those in international protection, and part time students. Labour will:

- » Progressively reduce student contribution fees year by year towards abolition and increase student grants above the rise in the cost of living.
- » Increase SUSI grant income limits at least to wage growth, double the holiday earnings exemption, and expand support to part-time students.
- » Introduce a payment or stipend for work done by students on mandatory placements.
- » Provide new financial supports and grants to those from low income, disadvantaged and minority backgrounds

to pursue professional opportunities that require a postgraduate qualification including teaching, health and social care qualifications.

- » Deliver a dedicated programme of capital investment to deliver publicly owned affordable and subsidised student accommodation and introduce new protections for students living in digs-style accommodation.
- » Increase resources for the Fund for Students with Disabilities and Student Assistance Fund and widen eligibility.
- » Establish a materials fund and provide access to specialist software for students taking creative courses.
- » Increase mental health funding in HEIs and recruit more counsellors.
- » Extend the duration of visas for international students for the length of their course or programme instead of annual renewal.
- » Increase the proportion of Irish-language courses in higher education to 5% over the next five years.

POSTGRADUATE WORKERS

Labour will put in place a framework to ensure PhD researchers are recognised as employees with a guarantee of at least a living wage, equitable treatment, fair working conditions and an employment contract stating the terms of their employment. This will include access to sick leave, parental leave, health cover and PAYE contributions, and equitable treatment for non-EU researchers. We will achieve this by engaging with trade unions and representatives of postgraduate researchers on the challenges they face and allocating the funding needed to increase stipends to living wages in HEIs.

17. A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR CARE

Our Mission is the realisation of a new social contract for care, that values family carers and care workers, reverses the creeping privatisation of social care services, and delivers a new fair deal for older people.

We believe in a society that values care, and invests from cradle to grave, so that people have access to the services they need when they need them. Labour will reverse the over-reliance on for-profit care services and the outsourcing of essential public services. Through our manifesto Labour outlines detailed policies including our plan for a public system of childcare, and comprehensive supports for people with disabilities. Here we outline our proposals for a new social contract to support family carers, care workers and a new fair deal for older people.

For many years Labour has campaigned for family carers and care workers with motions passing in the Dáil and Seanad in 2023, but government parties have ignored those proposals. Real change is needed over the next five years.

Labour will consider the future recommendations of the Commission on Care however in the meantime we will establish a National Planning Unit for Care to oversee all aspects of care planning and implementation, and the de-privatisation of care services. A priority will be the mapping of existing services and infrastructure, demographic modelling of future demand, and geographic and economic barriers to access.

SUPPORT FAMILY CARERS

There are over 500,000 family carers in Ireland, and their unpaid work saves the State over €20 billion a year. The 2022 Census shows the number of unpaid carers increased by 53% to over 299,000.

Labour has proposed long needed policy changes to support family carers such as removing the restrictive means test, and the low rate of payment which is not sufficient to meet the financial needs of those caring for dependents. We will carry out an evaluation of Carers' Allowance and other supports as part of a full Cost of Care review. Parents have consistently told us that the application and appeals process for Domiciliary Care Allowance is simply not fit for purpose and Labour will reform it.

Labour is committed to implementing the Carer's Guarantee, and we have long supported the removal of the means test for Carer's Allowance. We will:

- » Phase out the Carer's Allowance income disregard as part of the development of a new Family Carer Payment.
- » Progressively increase the half rate Carer's Allowance in recognition of the value of care work and as part of the systemic change to a participation income.
- » Increase the number of hours a Carer can work or study per week to provide for more flexibility.
- » Increase the Carer's Support Grant up to €2,500 and ensure all those in receipt of it are entitled to Carer's Allowance.
- » Implement a Respite Strategy to guarantee access for all family carers with a comprehensive system to map demand, and the range of capacity available.
- » Reform the application and appeals process for Domiciliary Care Allowance to make it fit for purpose and provide for payment increases.
- » Fully fund the Carer's Guarantee and review the long-term carers contribution scheme to identify cohorts that have been excluded.
- » Ensure Kinship Care and Foster Carers are properly supported.

Labour will replace the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant with a Transport Support Scheme.

We will also:

- » Support family carers to enter or remain in employment or education.
- » Address anomalies with Carer's Benefit such as the €450 earnings limit and introduce a pay-related Carer's Benefit.
- » Review the Home Carer and Dependent Relative tax credits to address impacts on single people and those caring for a non-child relative.

A NEW FAIR DEAL FOR CARE

Labour will deliver a new fair deal for care and a key objective is investing in public services to reverse the privatisation of home care and the provision of more publicly run nursing care homes, a living wage and improved terms and conditions for care workers. The current system incentivises residential care settings over home care and Labour will change this after years of delay.

Labour will establish the long overdue statutory home support scheme that is adequately resourced, rights-based and person centred. To achieve this Labour will also address the shortage of home care staff with improved pay and working conditions. We will:

- » Legislate for a statutory home support service and strong regulatory framework.
- » Reorientate policy to public provision of home support and publish annual targets to progressively increase the proportion of home support hours provided directly by the HSE.
- » Ensure enough funding is in place to meet demand for home support and directly hire more health care support assistants in the HSE.
- » Put in place a long-term plan to increase the provision of public long term residential care by investing in new community nursing homes.
- » Support the expansion of alternative models of long-term care such as the Housing with Supports scheme.

Currently support under the Fair Deal scheme is only available when an older person enters long-term nursing care. However, there are many older people, often supported by the family and neighbours, who – with some additional assistance – can remain in their home instead. Some families are facing a significant financial burden in meeting these home care costs.

Labour will:

- » Reform the Fair Deal scheme to give people the option of remaining in their home, with the State contributing to their care costs.
- » Provide ongoing funding to the Fair Deal scheme to meet demographic needs while also expanding public provision.
- » Fund the work of the Commission on Care and appoint a Commissioner for Older People and Ageing.

VALUING CARE WORKERS

Labour will value care workers in the home support and nursing home sectors and initiate a plan to in-source these services with more direct recruitment by the HSE, and provision of publicly run community long-term residential care.

The HSE will fund 24 million hours of home support in 2025, but only about 40% of that is delivered directly by the HSE with over 5,000 home support healthcare assistants. The recruitment embargo has limited further public expansion resulting in more outsourcing to private for-profit providers and some not-for-profit services.

Labour will implement the report of the Strategic Workforce Advisory group on Home Carers and Nursing Home health care assistants, and we will:

- » Ensure health care support assistants are paid a living wage, mileage expenses and travel time between care locations along with guaranteed hours and continuity of income.
- » Introduce a commitment in outsourced contracts under the HSE Authorisation Scheme for home support and the Fair Deal scheme that providers engage in collective bargaining.

- » Establish Joint Labour Committees to negotiate Fair Pay Agreements with binding minimum rates of pay to address recruitment and retention challenges and ring-fenced state funding for both home care (HCSAs) and nursing home HCAs.

18. CHILDCARE AND CHILD PROTECTION

Our mission is the delivery of a universal, publicly provided system of early childhood education and care with a guaranteed place for every child that needs one, where costs are capped for parents and professional staff are valued and paid properly, while ensuring all children are protected and cared for.

Labour will develop a roadmap for the full incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Irish law, learning from the Scottish model, and work through a collaborative process with children and civic society to achieve this. We will retain the Department of Children with a child-rights-based approach to budgeting, a commitment to multi-annual funding, and a root and branch review of child protection services. We will place the Child Law Project on a permanent, funded footing.

PUBLIC EARLY YEARS EDUCATION AND CARE

Public funding for childcare in Ireland remains a fraction of what other European countries invest. Labour has long called for a guaranteed, publicly provided childcare place to be available to every child, as is in place for primary school children. Parents need affordable, accessible, and quality early childhood education and care, and school age care. Early years educators deserve decent pay and conditions and most of all, children deserve an equal start.

Over the next decade, Labour will change focus away from subsidising private providers and towards the development of a universal public system. The impact goes far beyond the time spent in a childcare setting as it will transform society, reduce inequality, and increase participation in the workforce. To deliver this new system Labour will:

- » Begin the multiannual rollout of a public system of early years education and care by delivering 6,000 new places a year across an average of 100 services.

- » Guarantee equal access and prioritise the opening of new services in areas with a shortage of childcare places.
- » Develop a 'childcare in situ' scheme for existing services to join the public system.
- » Cap costs for parents at €50 per week, to bring the cost of childcare closer to average European levels.
- » Achieve professional wages for early year educators with a minimum rate of €15 per hour and recognise qualifications and experience.

A Public Childcare System

Over five years we will provide at least 30,000 places in a public childcare system and:

- » Open new services first in areas with a shortage of places and prioritise enough places for children under the age of two.
- » Identify locations through existing publicly owned sites and buildings in the education sector and local authorities, then build out bespoke new facilities.
- » Additional capital funding will be allocated to build bespoke new buildings for the public system and the school building programme will be adapted to provide for co-location of public childcare settings and after school facilities.
- » Administration such as payroll and corporate services would be initially built out through existing systems in Education and Training Boards bringing early childhood education and care into the education system.
- » Over time overall responsibility for the public system would transfer to a new state agency for early learning childcare and school age childcare with a stronger role for local authorities in the delivery of services.
- » There will be a complaint mechanism through the national agency, with a second independent tier through the Children's Ombudsman.

- » Support will continue to be provided for new community and not for profit co-operative services.

'Childcare in situ' for existing providers

In parallel, Labour will develop a 'childcare in situ' scheme for existing services to join the public scheme, and endeavour to take over services when an operator decides to close their service. Priority will be given to existing smaller, pre-school services that wish to move to the public model.

Labour will provide a statutory right to a guaranteed early years education and care place, beginning with the ECCE programme.

Cap Costs for Parents

Monthly childcare bills for parents still run into hundreds of euros, if they can secure a place. Labour will cap costs for parents at €50 per week, to bring the cost of childcare closer to average European levels.

Professional Pay

Annual staff turnover in the ECEC sector is at 25% and this is undermining early education and care, the viability of services, and creating additional stress on managers as they struggle to maintain staffing ratios.

Labour is committed to a professional wage for early years educators, and we will use the allocation of ringfenced core funding to guarantee a minimum €15 per hour rate, with additional increases across other grades, and recognition of experience and qualifications. For the public system, staff employment will initially be through ETBs, with responsibility eventually resting with the new national agency. Once the service is fully established, negotiated pay scales will then be agreed for a new category of public employee.

Inclusion and Equality

Labour will expand the Access and Inclusion Model beyond pre-school so that children with disabilities are supported at both early years and in school age care. We will also seek to integrate the existing early intervention classes for children with autism into the new model.

Co-locating new childcare facilities with schools will provide for significant planning efficiencies and improve access for children with additional needs.

Labour will expand the rollout of the Equal Start programme supporting children experiencing disadvantage to participate fully in early learning and childcare and review the staffing ratios in place at pre-school level.

A CHILDREN'S BUDGET TO END POVERTY

In our Charter on Children's Rights Labour outlines our commitment to end child poverty and introduce a new targeted second rate of child benefit. Under Labour, every Budget will be developed to reduce child poverty and vindicate the rights of children through the delivery of improved public services.

PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Labour will support and expand evidence-based prevention and early intervention measures. The Tusla Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, set up by Labour, is an area-based funding measure intended to address multidimensional child poverty and we will continue to fund the current 12 locations, and extend it to at least five new locations.

Labour will recognise the importance of Home Visiting schemes and agree on a national approach, building on the First 5 action with a centralised national office within the Parenting Support Policy Unit. We will adequately fund the programme with increased resources, expand it to new areas and professionalise the sector.

PROTECTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN

There are major deficits in the level of care provided to vulnerable children and the country has been shocked at recent developments and revelations. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is under significant pressure to deliver in an under-resourced system with nearly 100,000 referrals a year and almost 6,000 children in care. There is a shortage of social workers and social care workers that must be addressed, through workforce planning, and better terms and working conditions.

Labour will carry out a root and branch review of child protection services and map out a strategy to address deficits in care. This will include a detailed five-year funding programme underpinned with a statutory guarantee to ensure the level of resources required is committed to child protection.

Foster Care and Kinship Care

As part of a national strategy on alternative care, Labour will invest more in foster care and kinship care to support children in family settings. We will:

- » Extend eligibility for the State Pension to Foster Carer's by awarding credits for time spent caring.
- » Ensure increases in the foster carer allowance is indexed to the cost of living.
- » Introduce a €500 setting up allowance and increase reimbursement for travel costs.

Kinship care from a relative, often grandparents, provides a vital support to a child when a parent can't. We will increase the level of the Guardian payment, improve processing times, and ensure access to appropriate therapeutic and social supports including respite and medical cards.

Family Resource Centres and Staffing

Labour will increase the minimum core funding for Family Resource Centres, support them in securing their own premises, and enhance the counselling and therapeutic supports they provide. There is an urgent need to fill vacant posts in the Child and Family Support Network and Labour will develop a workforce plan to train, recruit and retain more social workers and social care workers.

Residential Care Places

The historic lack of investment in residential places has left Tusla reliant on private providers, special emergency arrangements and struggling to deal with unaccompanied minors. 63% of children needing care are placed with private providers. Tusla has about 140 residential care places and has struggled to staff and deliver new public capacity despite a 50:50 target by 2025.

Labour will commit increased investment over our five-year plan to deliver more public places and reduce reliance on private accommodation. These must be inspected independently by HIQA, rather than Tusla, which has a conflict as the procurer of private places. Our long-term objective is the end of private provision, and a publicly provided system of residential care.

Tusla has struggled to provide additional special care provision because of a difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified staff for a challenging work environment. There is capacity to provide a further 11 such placements if staff can be hired. Labour will put in place the resources to staff these places and develop a high support 'step down' placement facility as an additional support.

Care Leavers and Homelessness

Labour will fund the development of more bespoke housing to support young people exiting care through the CAS for Care Leavers Scheme to reduce the high levels of homelessness they face. We will also increase funding to support more independent advocacy for care-experienced children and young people.

19. MENTAL HEALTH

Our mission is the development of a health service and community network that promotes the well-being of our people and invests in better mental health so that the necessary supports and services are available when they are needed.

Labour will adopt a person-centred early intervention and prevention-based approach to mental health, properly resourcing statutory and community and voluntary sector mental health service providers and respecting and upholding the human rights of people in crisis.

Over 40% of people in Ireland experience mental health difficulties, and the number of people seeking mental healthcare has increased dramatically in recent years. Despite this, many services receive unstable and insufficient funding, and although there have been budget increases, it still only amounts to less than 6% of the overall health budget. Labour will:

- » Resource and implement the national mental health strategy *Sharing the Vision*.
- » Invest in the provision of inpatient mental health units and facilities.
- » Meet the Sláintecare commitment to increase funding to 10% of the health budget and move towards a preventative approach.

An immediate priority is perinatal mental health and the opening of the in-patient Mother and Baby unit.

Labour will seek a Minister of State for Mental Health and Wellbeing within the Department of Health and put in place a HSE National Lead for Mental Health and Regional Mental Health Leads for each of the health regions.

EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION

The best way of addressing Ireland's mental health crisis is through early intervention and prevention. Too much of government policy is based on reactionary responses when issues arise rather than prioritising prevention in the

first instance, which accounts for only about 1% of our overall health budget. Labour will:

- » Invest in early intervention and prevention services through the community and voluntary sector, with the provision of multi-annual and sustainable funding to allow for better service planning.
- » Increase funding for early intervention programmes to ensure the availability of timely support, evidence-based interventions, and patient-centred care.
- » Promote close collaboration between statutory services and the community and voluntary sector.
- » Fund and implement a national data management system that amalgamates data on the impact and reach of voluntary and community mental health services.

MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

The Mental Health Bill 2024 represents a step in the right direction, but Labour will strengthen it further. We will:

- » Address issues with the legal frameworks within the Bill which allow for three legal processes to be occurring simultaneously by streamlining them into a single process.
- » Introduce a statutory right to independent advocacy alongside the new provisions for a “nominated person” to support individuals receiving care.
- » Establish an independent complaints mechanism separate from the existing HSE process that is available to both adults and children.
- » Include an explicit prohibition against admitting children to adult inpatient psychiatric units.
- » Introduce safeguards around the role of Gardaí in mental healthcare and ensure that the exercise of Garda powers in relation to assisted admissions are carried out to ensure the least amount of distress to the individual concerned.
- » Further strengthen family involvement in the provision of care.

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Recent reports from the Mental Health Commission and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlight the serious inadequacies in our system of mental health services for children. The *Families for Reform of CAMHS* report presents a harrowing picture from those with lived experience of engaging with or trying to access youth mental health care for their loved ones.

Labour will prioritise filling vacant CAMHS posts and putting additional training posts in place. We will work to implement the recommendations made in the independent Review of the Provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in the State. This will:

- » Give independent regulatory oversight of CAMHS to the Mental Health Commission.
- » Integrate services so that children and young people can move seamlessly between services in a timely manner and according to their needs.
- » Ensure that every child can access a mental health assessment in a time of crisis by properly trained and supported staff in a safe and suitable environment.

Labour will expand access to Jigsaw and prioritise and recognise non-statutory community-based youth mental health services and resource them with multi-annual funding. It is essential that the voices of young people are heard when decisions that affect them are being made. We will ensure they are included in policymaking, and we will increase grants for school-based mental health support for pupils.

COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

Labour will significantly expand access to talk-therapies, with a focus on direct provision through the HSE. We will protect high standards of training for psychotherapists to ensure the best possible care for patients and remove VAT on psychotherapy services in line with other health and social care services.

We will also restore pay parity for Section 56 workers to address the ongoing recruitment and retention crisis in community therapy services and provide multi-annual funding through Tusla to ensure the continuity of services and allow for effective planning and stability.

SUICIDE AND SELF-HARM PREVENTION

Suicide remains the leading cause of death for people under the age of 25 in Ireland and has a deep and lasting impact on families and communities. Labour will invest to provide secure, sustainable, and multi-annual funding to suicide and self-harm prevention services and to ensure timely access to care for people experiencing a mental health crisis. We will promote the coordination of services to support those currently in crisis and to work with families and communities that are bereaved.

EATING DISORDERS

Ireland only has three public eating disorder beds, despite commitments to increase that by twenty as far back as 2018, forcing many suffering from eating disorders into costly private care or general psychiatric units where they do not receive specialised care. Labour will significantly expand the number of eating disorder beds and ensure that those suffering receive the care they need.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

The current staffing levels of mental health professionals in higher education institutions is unsafe. Labour will work towards achieving a counsellor to student ratio of 1:1000, which is recognised as international best practice, with multi-annual funding so that students can receive reliable and adequate support when they need it.

20. TRANSPORT

Our mission is to decarbonise our transport system, invest in reliable public transport and active travel, radically expand the uptake of cycling, and provide sustainable, fossil fuel free travel options to all communities.

Ireland's transport system relies heavily on motorised vehicles and fossil fuels, and it is responsible for nearly a fifth of national emissions. The vast bulk of freight is moved in Ireland by road, and our railways have suffered from underinvestment for decades.

Recent policy changes and investments in public transport and active travel infrastructure are a good start, but much more ambition is needed from the government and state agencies if we are to transition towards more healthy, active, and sustainable modes of transport and to cater for Ireland's growing population.

OUR VISION FOR TRANSPORT

The following commitments are central to the Labour Party's vision for transport in Ireland:

- » Require the NTA and TII to advance LUAS designs for all 5 Irish cities with a view to completion of at least 15 new lines by 2040.
- » Commence a programme of investment in new rail infrastructure to implement the National Rail Strategy.
- » Prioritise active travel in all urban areas over private vehicle use with safe segregated cycleways and properly maintained footpaths and public lighting.
- » Continue to progressively reduce the cost of public transport, with the introduction of a six-month trial €9 climate ticket, provide free travel for children and young people under 26 over the next five years, and focus on improving the reliability of timetabled services. The additional funding to cover the cost of the climate ticket will come from the national exchequer not existing public transport or active travel budgets.
- » Investment in additional new road infrastructure shall be prioritised for road

safety reasons rather than to increase capacity, with a ratio of up to 5:1 of expenditure in favour of public transport over roads in the next NDP period. Bypasses shall be approved subject to matching investments by local authorities to enhance the public realm and prioritise active travel in the bypassed towns and villages.

- » Ensure the replacement agency for the Road Safety Authority has the remit, governance, and structure so that road safety promotional campaigns focus on driver behaviour, the needs of vulnerable road users and review the operation of the Road Traffic Acts to ensure that the Garda Síochána and the courts have sufficient legal powers to enforce and penalise dangerous driving behaviours.

The Labour Party will also:

- » Prioritise the accelerated delivery of public transport projects by providing additional resources to An Coimisiún Pleanála, review how recent projects have performed, and ensure the Cycle Design Manual is regularly updated and adhered to as part of the introduction of mandatory accessibility standards.
- » Continue to support, and speed up the rollout of Bus Connects in all major cities.
- » Ensure all towns, villages and rural areas have effective and timely public transport links that are adequately promoted locally and integrated where possible with school transport services.
- » Increase funding for Public Service Obligation services to achieve improvements to existing routes, expand capacity and improve reliability.
- » Review current fare structures, while seeking to progressively reduce the cost of public transport services, and facilitate integrated, next-generation ticketing and universal adoption of the Leap card/phone app.

- » Introduce a Transport Charter to tackle abuse and anti-social behaviour directed at public transport workers and passengers.
- » Reverse the privatisation of public transport and ensure there is a requirement to recognise trade unions and engage in collective bargaining for any licensed service provider in the sector.
- » Properly resource visible road traffic policing that enforces parking restrictions, bus lanes and clearways, and protects cyclists and pedestrians,
- » Build out a national network of climate appropriate bus shelters along all national, rural, and urban bus routes, that will also function as local information points and have appropriate and secure bicycle parking where possible.
- » Develop a network of mobility hubs in all major towns with bus/ rail connectivity, EV charging, pay as you go bike and car hire to facilitate multi-modal journeys.
- » Recognise that the future delivery of public transport requires strong spatial planning under a National Planning Framework that has sustainability as its core principle and strategic delivery of transport-oriented development.

CYCLING

The Labour Party supports strong policy measures and investment to promote cycling and e-cycling that will dramatically increase the use of bicycles and rebuild a cycling culture in Ireland. To do this we must ensure people have easy access to bicycles, that they have safe infrastructure that all ages can use, that they have role models and public promoters, and a system that protects, encourages, and supports.

Labour will provide dedicated funding of at least 10% of the transport budget for cycling and ensure the delivery of high quality, integrated cycleways. Similarly, 10% will be committed for pedestrian infrastructure, and these infrastructure works should be coordinated when developing cycleways.

We will:

- » Provide for an independent review of the quality and design of cycling infrastructure delivered over the last five years to identify how to deliver new infrastructure as quickly as possible, best practice designs, and examples of poor delivery.
- » Introduce a Cyclist bill of rights and legislate for the application of the Cycle Design Manual and for all bikes to be sold with permanently installed dynamo operated lights.
- » Ensure the NTA Cycle Design Manual is regularly updated and adhered to by placing it on a statutory footing.
- » Provide for contra-flow cycling on one-way streets and allow cyclists turn left when traffic lights are red with right of way for pedestrians walking on a green man.
- » Remove any remaining charges for carrying bicycles on any licensed bus or train service.
- » Ensure An Garda Síochána prioritise road traffic enforcement to protect cyclists and pedestrians, introduce a video upload portal for reporting dangerous driving, and update cyclist safety on all classes of the driving test.
- » Introduce a national bike register, develop new anti-theft measures and a dedicated Garda unit to deter theft.

Cycling Budget Package

Labour will deliver a cycling package in our first Budget that would:

- » Reduce VAT on bicycles, e-bikes and safety equipment, and pursue zero rating at an EU level.
- » Introduce a cargo/e-bike grant through a car scrappage scheme.
- » Develop an enhanced Bike to Work scheme with a cycle to school option.
- » Introduce a bike grant scheme for those without employment income as part of a Bike for Life scheme.

- » Provide seed funding for Community Cargo Bike clubs.

Expanding City Bike Schemes

Labour will provide new capital funding for the expansion of the TFI City Bikes scheme in existing locations and in particular across the four Dublin local authorities and develop a unified national network. As part of this expansion, we will ensure:

- » The rollout of publicly provided rental bikes in towns across the country, starting with 10 pilot locations.
- » In each new town chosen, the locations of bikes should link key transport hubs like bus and train stations with other local destinations such as shopping centres, industrial estates, libraries, colleges, venues, and tourist attractions.
- » Introduce e-bikes as part of the national bike hire network.

We will regulate the increase in private dockless share bikes and e-bikes and consider proposals to integrate multiple operators under one portal and with the Leap card.

Labour will develop a new policy framework for personal electric vehicles like e-scooters, including access to a subsidy scheme like Bike to Work, review the public transport ban and how best to integrate these in planned active travel infrastructure.

Infrastructure and Promotion

- » Ensure safe routes to school with safe footpaths and segregated cycle lanes provided in the vicinity of every school, college and crèche or other educational facility. Ensure public buildings also provide storage areas for children's scooters.
- » Accelerate Cycle Connects and the implementation of metropolitan and town cycle networks.
- » Upgrade bicycle storage facilities at all public transport hubs and other major destinations to ensure secure, supervised, and covered areas are provided as close to entrances as possible.

- » Provide additional resources to the National Cycling Office, and local authorities for the delivery of cycling infrastructure.
- » Resource a national communications campaign promoting cycling, and supporting local cycling clubs, along with a mentoring and advice scheme.
- » Fully integrate Cycle Right in the national school curriculum to ensure that every school offers cycling training.
- » Deliver the 30km/hr speed limit in urban centres and residential areas, and ensure it is enforced.
- » Continue to invest in Greenways and rural cycle networks, while ensuring the upgrading of any primary and secondary road routes include segregated cycleways.
- » Conduct a feasibility study for MetroLink in the southwest of Dublin city and bring forward the design and planning for the DART underground tunnel.
- » Commit funding for the development of the 4km LUAS extension to Finglas.
- » Fasttrack design work for the Lucan and Poolbeg LUAS lines and identify a route for the Green Line extension to Bray.
- » Progress the design work ongoing for the Cork light rail system with a view to starting construction before 2030, and improvements to commuter rail in Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Waterford.
- » Pursue the completion of the Navan rail line by beginning planning and design work with the aim of opening services in the early 2030's.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT PROJECTS

The development of the Dublin Metrolink is Ireland's flagship public transport project, and essential to addressing gridlock in our capital city, connecting our airport to the city centre, and unlocking future housing development in north county Dublin. Labour will prioritise the delivery of Metrolink and begin planning for new spurs. This will maintain expertise in Ireland and ensure the many false starts of Metro North are not repeated.

Labour has a proven track record for the delivery of public transport initiatives such as the City Bikes Scheme, the DART, and Luas Cross City, and we will support continued investment in rail and LUAS projects including the following:

- » Ensure that the purchase of new and replacement train, tram and bus stock is well planned for, and accounts for demographic growth and new housing and commercial developments.
- » Fund the extension of DART Coastal North to Drogheda and DART+ West to Maynooth.
- » Continue funding for the remainder of the current DART+ programme and support the extension of the DART to Sallins and Naas on the DART+ South-West line, Wicklow Town on the DART+ Coastal South line, and Kilcock on the Dart+ West line.
- » Develop a long-term plan to implement the All-island Strategic Rail Review with an initial focus on the Atlantic rail corridor from Rosslare to Ballina.
- » Explore options for expanding rail capacity on the northern line either with quad-tracking or a new alignment with the M1 motorway.

Modal Integration

- » Fast track the introduction of mobility hubs with park and ride facilities starting with the major cities, with an initial focus on arterial routes.
- » Ensure bike storage facilities at transport hubs are improved, and that it is as easy as possible to use, and free to bring bikes onto trains and ferries.
- » Pilot new measures to support carpooling and mixed workplace starting times.
- » Ensure that train and bus services to ports are aligned to ferry arrival and departure times.
- » Improve rail and bus connectivity to our ports including Rosslare, Shannon Foynes, Dublin, and Cork ports.
- » Promote the increased use of rail freight particularly into our ports, and with key

distributors like bulk food and household goods, construction materials and other heavy freight.

IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY

Labour will ensure our system of public transport is accessible to all and modernised. We will work to improve rural and urban connectivity and provide greater access to services that operate at the times when they are needed. We will:

- » Expand the Dublin Bus Travel Assistance Scheme nationally to support people learning to travel independently.
- » Ensure all public transport services are wheelchair accessible with a multi-annual capital investment plan to address shortcomings in train and bus stations and introduce mandatory accessibility design standards for transport infrastructure.
- » Review the stringent regulations governing the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers tax relief scheme and introduce a new Transport Support Scheme.
- » Maintain the free travel scheme, and ensure it is available on all licensed bus services.
- » Ensure our cities have increased night-time public transport services that support people working unsociable hours to get to and from their workplace.
- » Support increased pedestrianisation of urban centres to create living streets, more compact urban growth to promote increased active travel, and regular car free days. This would include a mandatory target for local authorities to achieve pedestrianisation of a certain proportion of urban centre streets for towns with a population of over 10,000.

School Transport, Rural Transport and Taxis

Labour will ensure safe routes to school, expand rural transport, and explore new ways to connect communities. We will:

- » Prioritise the connection of all education centres, from creches up to colleges to local housing, with safe footpaths and cycle lanes.

- » Reform the School Transport system, have the Department of Transport take over responsibility for the operation of the scheme with a plan to electrify the fleet and ensure every child that needs a place can access one, for free.
- » Integrate the reformed school transport system with Local Link and rural bus services to achieve new local connectivity using existing infrastructure.
- » Evaluate the pilot Local Hackney Scheme and rollout to more locations to ensure rural communities have access to a taxi/private hire transport service.
- » Review the commissioning of taxis by public agencies, such as the school transport system and use by the HSE, to make sure that commissioning processes are open and competitive and support an accessible fleet through a larger weighting in contract tenders.

Ticket and LEAP Card reform

- » Introduce next generation ticketing with a new LEAP system that allows for contactless payment using debit/credit and virtual cards on smart devices.
- » Review TaxSaver tickets system to make it more flexible to reflect modern work practices.

ROAD TRANSPORT AND ELECTRIC VEHICLES

The previous target of nearly 1 million electric vehicles on Irish roads by 2030 has not been taken seriously by the outgoing Government so there is a need for targeted measures to support adoption. Labour will:

- » Provide grants and incentives linked to household income for the purchase of new electric vehicles.
- » Develop measures to increase the supply of second-hand electric vehicles from neighbouring markets like the UK, disincentivise the importation of second-hand fossil fuel cars, and regulate the advertising of fossil fuel cars.

- » Make the history of used cars available to purchasers through NCT and vehicle accident databases.
- » Develop a car scrappage scheme linked to the provision of e-bikes and cargo bikes.
- » Ensure local authorities and ESB Networks increase the provision of on-street electric chargers especially for communities without front gardens or off-street parking.
- » Review how freight systems can be electrified and introduce a plan to ensure all new vans are electric by 2030.

Labour will also:

- » Maintain and increase the road maintenance budget with a priority on road safety interventions alongside a new dedicated fund for maintaining active travel infrastructure.
- » Ensure that funds for road improvement projects are targeted first at tackling road safety improvements and junction tightening, followed by relieving towns and villages of congestion through bypasses, and then addressing regional connectivity. All new road projects should provide segregated cycleways and pathways and strive to achieve carbon neutrality.

Congestion and Car Bloat

- » Develop a model for a low emission zone congestion charge to incentivise public transport in Dublin when BusConnects is substantially delivered.
- » Tackle car and SUV bloat by introducing a weight surcharge to motor tax and VRT rates to encourage more appropriately sized cars in urban areas and incentivise car manufacturers to provide smaller, lighter vehicles.
- » Recognise workplace parking as a benefit in kind where it is assessed by the NTA that there are appropriate active or public transport facilities in place.

PUBLIC AND ROAD SAFETY

Labour will adopt a new approach to improve public transport and road safety for all users, and we will:

- » Address anti-social behaviour on trains, trams and buses with a dedicated public transport policing division within An Garda Síochána and staffed presence in DART and commuter stations to also support accessibility.
- » Replace the RSA with a new road safety body and a strategy focused on reversing the recent increase in road deaths and a focus on protecting pedestrians and cyclists. Testing and licensing will be the responsibility of a separate agency.
- » Review the Road Traffic Acts, introduce a consolidated Road Traffic Act with an anti-avoidance, road safety responsibility clause to stop the constant search by rule breakers and their legal representatives for loopholes in the law to avoid the consequences of their actions.
- » Introduce more average speed cameras for the detection and enforcement of speed limits and graduated speeding penalties.
- » Introduce cameras and automatic number recognition for the enforcement of bus lanes.

Driving Licences

- » Improve the Transferability of international driving licences.
- » Address the number of provisional driving licences in use and restrict renewal unless a full driving test has been completed.

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

As an island, Labour recognises that Ireland needs strong air and sea connections to maintain our strong position in the global economy, but that the emissions from commercial aviation and sea travel must be reduced and accounted for.

Aviation

- » Transfer the Aircraft Noise Competent Authority from Fingal County Council to the Environmental Protection Agency and address the impact of noise on local residents from new flight paths since the opening of the North runway including better sound insulation.
- » Prioritise the sustainable development of regional airports, over further concentration in Dublin and reroute air traffic from Dublin airport to Shannon and Cork airports as a matter of priority.
- » Support the development of an indigenous sustainable aviation fuel sector.
- » Limit the use of private jets in Irish airspace for non-diplomatic purposes.
- » Ensure that the carbon cost of aviation is recognised on aviation fuel and flight prices through coordinated action at an EU level.

Maritime

- » Support investment in our ports and harbours to maintain and increase ferry links and aid the offshore wind sector with an €80m Strategic Ports Infrastructure Fund.
- » Engage with the British government on proposals for improving the service and user experience of Sailrail from Dublin to London such as price incentives, better timings for direct trains, onboard wifi and seat reservations, with improved public transport links to Dublin Port.

21. CRIME AND POLICING

Our Mission is to resource An Garda Síochána to build a force of up to 18,000 members and increase the visibility of policing in our communities to protect public safety, prevent and reduce crime, support victims and bring those engaged in criminality to justice.

We need more Gardaí in our communities, but at present not enough new Gardaí are being trained. Labour will put in place a long-term plan to grow the force to 18,000 members to rebuild our model of community policing with strong local relationships. This will take time and resources as there is no quick fix. Recruitment is challenging across all sections of the public service, but Labour will invest in key worker housing to address one of the central obstacles - access to affordable housing.

POLICING REFORM

Significant reforms have been made to the architecture of policing in Ireland over the last decade. Labour has expressed concerns with some of these changes, but we will:

- » Complete the work of the Commission on the Future of Policing and pass a revised Garda (Powers) Bill to codify powers of search, arrest and detention, and the protection of rights.
- » Carefully monitor the ongoing implementation of the Policing and Community Safety Authority, and how it will interact with the new Garda Board.
- » Ensure Fiosrú, the new Office of the Police Ombudsman, is properly resourced to carry out its expanded role.
- » Seek to reform Local Community Safety Partnerships to provide for stronger local democratic oversight for Councillors and the election of Chairs.

MORE GARDAÍ

Labour will incentivise the training of more gardaí and recruit more civilian staff to free active members from administration and bureaucracy. With Templemore at capacity, we

will consider temporary measures to increase numbers using Garda HQ in the Phoenix Park and training modules in HEIs. The training allowance of €354 a week is simply not enough to incentivise older recruits if they have families and financial commitments. To grow our police force and protect our communities, Labour will:

- » Put in place a plan to ensure at least 1,000 new Gardaí are trained every year to reach 16,000 by 2029 and the long-term goal of an 18,000 strong force.
- » Increase the Garda training allowance to the equivalent of a starting salary and review pay and pension issues for serving staff.
- » Recruit more civilian staff to free up gardaí from non-core duties and develop incentives to recruit back former Gardaí.
- » Invest in high visibility policing, grow the size of Community Policing Teams, and secure a more visible presence in our urban and rural communities.
- » Replace Gardaí as prosecutors at District Court level with state solicitors to free up Gardaí for frontline policing.
- » Invest in ICT to improve efficiency, HR processes and evidence management.
- » Continue to upgrade the Garda vehicle fleet and invest in garda equipment.
- » Ensure An Garda Síochána represents the diversity of our population and strongly promote policing as a career for those from minority backgrounds.

TACKLING CRIME

Labour will take a number of targeted measures to tackle specific crimes and ensure more efficient policing. We are concerned at the rise of digital crime, and the need to adapt quickly to technological change. Labour will:

- » Double the size of the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau, review how it works with the Corporate Enforcement Authority, and hire more forensic accountants to take on money laundering, financial fraud, corruption, and other white-collar crime.

- » Strengthen the role of the Criminal Assets Bureau to ensure more effective and speedy seizure of criminal assets within two years and increase Garda resources to bring those engaged in violent and organised crime to justice.
- » Implement the Youth Justice Strategy and resource youth diversion projects.
- » Create a new forensic Unidentified Remains Unit.

Labour supports the rollout of body worn cameras but is against the widespread use of Facial Recognition Technology due to serious concerns about privacy, trust, and data protection from mass surveillance. Any use of FRT must be carefully considered with extensive public consultation to ensure clear safeguards to protect civil rights.

PENAL REFORM

Prisons are dangerously overcrowded at present, and this puts the safety of prison officers and inmates at risk, and damages rehabilitation. Labour will implement strong reforms including increased funding for the Probation Service to provide for greater use of Community Service Orders and the use of restorative justice. We will:

- » Reduce the use of short-term custodial sentences for non-violent minor offences and make greater use of community service and probation orders.
- » Invest in mental health care, addiction, and rehabilitation services.
- » Address the high number of people held on remand and introduce a pilot supported bail service for women.
- » Ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT).

Additional Labour commitments on Justice and Law reform are outlined in other Chapters.

PART 4

OUR AMBITION FOR REALISING RIGHTS

22. JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM

Our Mission is to protect human rights, strive for equality and enhance access to justice, pursue ambitious reform of criminal and civil law, and improve the administration of justice and the Courts Service.

The structures that underpin our justice system require ongoing review and reform. Labour will campaign for greater equality and protection against discrimination and hate crime. We will review and reform our body of civil legislation and promote improved access to the Courts and alternative methods of dispute resolution.

EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Discrimination based on a person's socio-economic status is a reality for many people and disadvantaged communities in Irish society. Labour will update the Equality Acts and add discrimination on the grounds of socio-economic status to the law.

Labour will legislate for incitement or hate speech while protecting freedom of expression. We will reform the 1989 Act, refine the recently passed Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act and launch a public awareness campaign on the nature and impact of hate crimes.

Labour will combat all forms of systemic inequalities and discrimination against Travellers and Roma, and fund and implement the strategies and plans that have been recently published.

Labour will ratify the outstanding human rights treaties and optional protocols that Ireland has signed up to, develop a national Human Rights Action Plan as recommended by the UN, and an equality and human rights impact assessment mechanism.

LAW REFORM

Labour will deliver the long-delayed reform of our defamation law and protect people from SLAPPs. We will retain juries for defamation

cases while ensuring robust safeguards against excessive awards of damages.

Labour will resource the establishment of the Gambling Authority of Ireland and monitor how well the new law addresses the harms caused by problem gambling.

DECRIMINALISATION OF DRUG USERS

Labour has campaigned for many years for a change in approach to addiction and drugs use. We will implement a health led approach instead of the current failed policies. We will repeal Section 3 of the Misuse of Drugs Act, introduce a new National Drugs Strategy and act on the other recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and interim committee report.

ASSISTED DYING

Labour will develop a legislative framework for assisted dying in restricted circumstances and with significant safeguards in line with the recommendations of the Joint Committee report.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Labour will support the development of alternative pathways to dispute resolution and establish a Mediation Council. We will ensure the Decision Support Service provides an online solicitor portal for Enduring Power of Attorney arrangements.

Labour will resource the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to ensure the efficient handling and prosecution of crimes, and we will:

- » Continue to invest in the criminal legal aid scheme and restore the link to public service pay agreements.
- » Expand the civil legal aid scheme to more areas and increase the financial eligibility criteria.
- » Review the impact of reforms in recent years to the legal services sector, widen access to legal education and consider proposals to safeguard small solicitor practices.

COURTS SERVICE

Labour will modernise the Courts system to address delays in the criminal, civil and family courts, and adequately resource the Courts Service. We will:

- » Invest in the delivery of modern infrastructure and the digitalisation of processes including the use of virtual hearings, a real time list of scheduled cases and begin rollout of a paperless Courts Service.
- » Support the Judicial Council to ensure that sentencing guidelines are adopted across the criminal justice system.
- » Review the recent increase in the number of Judges and what additional staffing will be required to reduce case backlogs.
- » Reopen public access to the Probate Office and complete the delivery of a fit for purpose Family Court complex.
- » Establish a Fines Collection Office.

We will also ensure there is a robust process in place for informing complainants and victims about sentencing guidelines, and how to pursue a complaint about a sentencing outcome.

Labour will reform the Special Criminal Court, and repeal and replace the Offences Against the State legislation in line with the majority Peart report. We will ensure non-jury trials are the exception and introduce measures to address concerns about jury tampering.

Labour will reform the Coroners Service and develop a Charter for the Bereaved. We will also amend parole legislation to ensure better protection for victims and victims' families within the process.

23. GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Our mission is to achieve gender equality because without it, our democracy remains unfinished.

Our society and political system still relegate women's issues, needs, aspirations, and lives to second place. Labour will introduce a whole of government action plan to achieve the outstanding recommendations of the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality, and the proposals developed by the Joint Oireachtas Committee.

GENDER EQUALITY

Labour will appoint a Minister of State for Gender Equality to drive our policy platform. From income linked maternity pay, to a fit for purpose early years system, to building a society where violence against women is never acceptable, a dedicated Minister will ensure the implementation of policies to transform Ireland into a truly gender equal society. We will:

- » Introduce a publicly provided universal model of early years education and care.
- » Improve the pay and conditions of care workers.
- » Reform Carer's Allowance, provide a carer's pension, and reimburse the costs associated with caring.
- » Provide paid leave for parents to cover the first year of a child's life and increase the level of payments.
- » Legislate for a statutory right to homecare and promote an equal division of paid work and care.
- » Address the specific needs of lone parents in accessing work or education, other public services, childcare and income supports.
- » Bring in new measures to support more women in public life.
- » Provide a right to flexible work.

Throughout our manifesto we outline proposals on gender equality in areas like work, education, sport, defence, and foreign affairs, and highlight specific policies below.

REPRODUCTIVE LEAVE

Labour will introduce reproductive health related leave to embed compassion in the workplace. This will provide up to 20 days paid time off work for all women who experience pregnancy loss and up to 10 days leave for those undergoing fertility treatments. We will also require employers to implement menopause and menstrual policies so that workplaces are inclusive and supportive for women and restore the delayed increases in statutory sick leave, to reach 10 days by 2026.

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

Labour will strengthen the gender pay gap legislation and implement the pay transparency directive to ensure equal pay for equal work including its provisions promoting collective bargaining on measures to tackle pay discrimination. Companies with 50 or more employees will be required to report from 2025 but the existing framework doesn't pick up on the number of women in part time work versus full time work. Labour will include organisations with more than 25 employees, set up a centralised database of the pay gap, and require employers to agree a plan of action and targets with trade unions to reduce the gap.

GENDER PENSION GAP

Women live longer than men and are more likely to take time out of paid work for caring responsibilities. This results in lower pension savings, and there is a reported gender pension gap of 36% in Ireland. Labour will establish an expert group to develop proposals to address this such as provision for a partner to make pension contributions on behalf of a mother, or workplace policies such as an employer making increased contributions after a return from maternity leave.

The Citizens' Assembly recommended a universal pension system, and we will commission

research and modelling to investigate options for developing this model.

DOMESTIC, SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Labour will strengthen the Zero Tolerance Strategy, ensure Cuan, the new agency for Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence is fully resourced, with multiannual funding for rape crisis centres and other service providers, and double domestic violence leave to ten days.

We will introduce a Commissioner to act as an independent advocate and voice for victims and survivors in the criminal justice system, provide effective training for legal professionals working in the area, and finally ensure the rollout of a comprehensive database of sentencing decisions. Victims must be properly informed on how to make complaints about sentencing. We will also develop proposals for an Irish Daisy's law.

Labour will ensure victims and survivors, including victims of trafficking have access to housing and supports. To meet the Istanbul Convention recommendation of one family refuge place for every 10,000 of population, Ireland would need at least 512 places. The current strategy is to double provision to 282 places and based on 1 unit per 10,000 women rather than one place per 10,000 population. Labour will put in place a more ambitious five-year plan to provide sufficient places.

With the revised National Referral Mechanism for victims of human trafficking now on a statutory footing, Labour will ensure funding is in place to identify and support victims.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Labour will end the paternalistic attitude towards women in medicine especially for women experiencing pain and uncommon illnesses, and that age and ethnicity are properly taken into account during medical diagnosis and treatment.

We will:

- » Invest in women focused medicine and training, ensure clinical trials are gender balanced and that the concerns of women are listened to.
- » Provide for lifelong cervical cancer screening, a further HPV vaccine catch up programme, and develop ovarian and uterine cancer screening services.
- » Invest in the National Maternity Strategy and perinatal healthcare, including the training and hiring of additional midwives.
- » Address the chronic understaffing in the public health nurse system and increase resources to provide postnatal support to postpartum women.
- » Support breastfeeding campaigns and employ more hospital and community lactation consultants.
- » Develop a comprehensive menopausal health policy with an increased level of services, provide free contraception up to the age of 50, and free HRT.
- » Develop proper services for those suffering from myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), endometriosis, vulvodynia, and fund research into autoimmune disorders that disproportionately impact women.
- » End period poverty and require public bodies to provide free period products in public buildings.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Labour will ensure universal free access to contraception, extend the provision of publicly funded fertility treatments, and regulate rogue crisis pregnancy agencies. We will introduce reforms to the Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy Act 2019 to end the three-day waiting period and extend the 12-week limit in line with medical advice, remove the criminalisation of abortion, and amend the definition of fatal foetal abnormalities and the restrictive time period for diagnoses.

WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

Labour will ensure more public places are named after women, introduce gender quotas of 40% for the local elections and seek to raise general election party quotas to 45%. We will introduce media licensing conditions for gender balancing on programming and ensure boards of Irish companies, charities and voluntary organisations are required to have at least 40% female membership.

24. LGBTQI+ RIGHTS

Our mission is to make Ireland the best place in Europe to be a member of the LGBTQI+ community and build on Labour's proud track record of supporting and advancing the rights of LGBTQI+ people.

Labour will enhance the legal rights and protections in place for LGBTQI+ people, invest in dedicated health services, improve access to trans healthcare, implement inclusive education, tackle hate crime and expand community supports.

IMPROVING RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS

Labour will implement a number of legislative changes including a hate speech law as already outlined and introduce reforms to improve rights and protections for members of the LGBTQI+ community. We will:

- » Pass legislation to disregard pre-1993 historical convictions for consensual same sex activity building on the historic State apology to members of the LGBTQI+ community that was secured by Labour in 2018.
- » Ban conversion therapy and sign the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy.
- » Ensure equality for children of LGBTQI+ people and legal recognition of trans parents by amending the Assisted Human Reproduction Act and reforming the Children and Family Relationships Act.
- » Reform the legal gender recognition system for young trans people based on the recommendations of the Review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015.
- » Provide legal gender recognition for non-binary people and legislate for the rights of intersex people.
- » Provide explicit protections for LGBTQI+ people when updating the Equality Acts.

- » Support initiatives promoting LGBTQI+ rights internationally and protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees.

HEALTHCARE

Ireland consistently ranks last in the EU for the provision of, and access to, trans healthcare and Labour will change this. We will make sure that all members of the LGBTQI+ community can access the healthcare that they need and expand and improve on existing services. We will:

- » Provide a model of gender-affirming care in primary care settings based on informed consent and international best practice.
- » Increase funding to end new HIV transmissions with resources focused on improved accessibility to PrEP, free condoms, and rapid HIV testing.
- » Increase access to sexual health services for men who have sex with men by supporting community based and delivered services as well as enhanced HSE services and provide dedicated supports for lesbian and bi women.
- » Ensure mental health, early intervention and residential care and homecare services have dedicated LGBTQI+ supports in place, and that training for health and social care professionals includes community perspectives.

EDUCATION, COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

While Ireland has made great strides in becoming a more accepting society, being LGBTQI+ remains a difficult experience for many people. Labour will:

- » Continue to tackle anti-LGBTQI+ bullying to make schools safer and more inclusive places and build on the positive trend of third-level institutions becoming more LGBTQI+ friendly.
- » Improve LGBTQI+ community support services and initiatives, and expand the support provided to Pride festivals and new events in rural Ireland.
- » Boost visibility in the media and make funding available for LGBTQI+ programming.

- » Ensure LGBTQI+ inclusion in sport in line with international best practice.
- » Use the community sector including partnership companies and family resource centres to provide localised LGBTQI+ inclusion and support.
- » Promote inclusive LGBTQI+ education curriculums, support local authorities in promoting LGBTQI+ friendly libraries and protect library staff.
- » Utilise new proposed census questions to identify LGBTQI+ needs.

25. DISABILITY RIGHTS AND SERVICES

Our Mission is to remove barriers to equality and inclusion for people with disabilities, guarantee adequate incomes, address the extra cost of disability, and ensure the State provides the public services and supports necessary for people with disabilities to participate fully in our society and economy.

Next year will mark seven years since Ireland ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and having now signed up to the optional protocol, much work remains to be done to deliver inclusive communities.

The last census showed over one in five people with a disability, and they face significant barriers and additional costs. A key objective of the next government must be to adopt a coherent plan to address these. Through our manifesto Labour outlines our commitments in areas like transport, housing, education, and social protection to ensure Ireland complies with the UN CRPD through a social model of disability.

DRIVING POLITICAL CHANGE

The provision of support and services to people with disabilities is a function of multiple Departments and agencies. It would be impossible to centralise these all under one Department. Our aim is inclusion and equality embedded across public services. Labour will end the siloed approach to disability and provide for a whole of government response. We will locate disability oversight in the Department of the Taoiseach and appoint a Minister of State for Disability who attends Cabinet assigned to the Departments of Taoiseach and Disability, and assign statutory powers from Social Protection, Education and Transport where necessary. Labour will:

- » Deliver a new National Disability Strategy and strengthen the National Disability Authority.

- » Establish a new office of the Disability Ombudsman to provide an accessible method to bring complaints about rights violations.
- » Ensure all legislation and budgets are disability and equality proofed.
- » Strengthen and adequately fund the National Advocacy Service and place it on a statutory footing.
- » Resource the community and voluntary sector, bring the terms and conditions of staff in Section 39 bodies in line with the public service through pay parity, and ringfence multi-annual funding for Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) to build capacity and self-advocacy.

LEGISLATIVE REFORMS

Labour will reform the Disability Act through the lens of UN CRPD and ensure the review of the Equality Acts addresses disability discrimination. We will review the statutory regulation and oversight of disability services by HIQA and the scope for a new system to uphold standards and ensure a person-centred and outcomes-based approach inclusive of individual preferences. We will pass mental health reform, address the failure to commence parts of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act and provide legislative clarity and safeguards on the deprivation of liberty. The EPSEN Act will need to be amended and then finally commenced.

LIVING STANDARDS AND COSTS

As outlined in Social Protection, Labour will reform disability payments to provide for a single, taxable benefit removing the cumbersome income disregard system in line with a social model of disability. This will be developed in consultation with DPOs and people with disabilities.

Labour will introduce a cost of disability payment in our first budget, and a discretionary medical card for all people with disabilities who need it, based on medical need not income. We will address barriers to employment and tackle energy poverty.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

Our population is growing and ageing, and disability services in our health and social care system must be resourced and equipped to meet existing needs and respond to growing levels of acquired disability through the life cycle.

There is massive unmet demand for disability services as outlined under the Disability Capacity Review and the commitments in the Disability Services Action Plan. Labour will fund these plans, and in our annual Alternative Budgets have outlined in detail how we would do this. But service improvements are constantly delayed due to a failure of workforce planning and underfunding of Section 39 organisations. Labour will resolve these critical issues.

If elected to government, Labour will carry out an immediate review of the Action Plan funding in place for 2025 to ensure essential services covering residential care, day services, PA services and home support, neurorehabilitation, respite care, and therapy services including Children's Disability Network Teams are resourced as required. We will put in place a successor programme as part of the review. We will implement the Neurorehabilitation Strategy and fully staff community teams in each health region.

Labour will develop an adult neurodiversity diagnosis and support service pathway, develop new service models, and focus on integration with mainstream health services and community supports.

DISABILITY SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Labour is deeply concerned at the failure to adequately resource the Progressing Disability Services (PDS) programme and meet the commitments contained in the Roadmap for Service Improvement in relation to Disability Services for Children and Young People.

There will be around 10,000 applications for an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act in 2024, and by the end of the year there will be nearly 19,000 AONs due for completion, with 11,131 overdue at the end of June. Separately,

over 16,000 children were waiting for therapies under Children Disability Network Teams. We will fund a Waiting List Initiative to provide AONs for the children waiting longest while capacity is built up in the public service and put in place a system to reimburse parents who have had to resort to private therapies while waiting for public appointments.

To improve transparency and accountability Labour will provide for the monthly publication of waiting lists for assessment of needs, and therapies.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

Labour will invest to vindicate the right to independent living. We will review the outcome of the pilot personalised budget project with the objective of expanding the scheme with a dedicated budget office in each regional health area to support disabled people. We will provide a statutory right to home support and personal assistant services, and address barriers to recruitment to address unmet needs.

LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY AND HOUSING

Labour will invest in inclusive communities including transport and assistive technology and build appropriate housing for people with disabilities. We will establish the long-needed Transport Support Scheme, and as outlined in our proposals on Transport, expand local public transport and ensure it is accessible. On housing we will:

- » Fully implement and resource the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People, including funding for technical advisors in local authorities.
- » Ringfence at least 10% of social and affordable housing for people with disabilities with universal design standards and fully wheelchair accessible.
- » Reform Part M building regulations to require wheelchair liveable housing, and more universally designed homes (both UD+ and UD++).

- » Review and improve the Capital Assistance Scheme so that sufficient housing can be built by AHBs to meet the level of demand.
- » Invest in decongregation and ensure individuals under 65 are moved out of nursing homes.
- » Increase Housing Adaptation Grant limits up to €60,000 and index income thresholds.
- » Expand the role of local authority Disability Access and Equality Officers as full-time positions with appropriate powers and budget.
- » Continue the work of the Autism Innovation Strategy and implement the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Autism.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Labour will introduce new supports and access routes to education and employment for people with disabilities. As outlined in our Education proposals we are committed to commencing the EPSEN Act and reforming its provisions. We will provide an autism guarantee to deliver inclusive education and ensure an appropriate school place for every child with additional needs. We will commit additional resources to the Disability Access Route to Education and introduce a new bespoke adult learning programme to address embedded educational disadvantages.

ROUTES TO EMPLOYMENT

Ireland has the lowest employment rate for people with disabilities in the EU, and Labour will publish a new Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities and seek to raise the employment rate to the EU average. Labour will legislate for a real right to flexible work, and we will:

- » Improve data collection on rates of, and barriers to, employment for people with disabilities.
- » Strengthen the role of the National Disability Authority in monitoring and implementation of policy and provide it with enforcement powers.

- » Meet the public sector recruitment target of 6%, extend it to bodies in receipt of public funding, and set a long-term goal of raising it further.
- » Provide access to dedicated job coaches.
- » Reform the Wage Subsidy Scheme with automatic minimum wage increases.
- » Introduce a single, streamlined scheme to replace the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme.
- » Build on the Ability and WorkAbility programmes and put in place a permanent structured programme to support young people with disabilities into work, training, or further education.

26. RIGHTING HISTORICAL WRONGS

Our Mission is to put in place systems to more humanely deal with the legacies of past events, tragedies, and injustices, and ensure the State is responsive to how it addresses the righting of historical wrongs.

SECURING TRUTH AND JUSTICE

Too many people, families and communities in Ireland have endured long and often lonely journeys to justice. Labour will seek to address long standing campaigns and reform our process of inquiries.

Historical Sexual Abuse in Schools

Labour will establish a statutory inquiry into historical sexual and physical abuse in day and boarding schools. We will ensure that a redress scheme, that is accessible and non-discriminatory without arbitrary preconditions and equal access, is run in parallel with the Commission of Investigation so that survivors are not left waiting or excluded from justice and compensation.

For many years religious orders have been asked to pay their share of redress but experience shows that appeals to moral duty cannot be relied upon. Labour has drafted legislation to ensure religious orders are compelled to contribute in full to redress schemes and we will implement this to ensure assets are not dissipated or hidden in lay-run trusts.

Mother and Baby Homes Redress Scheme

Labour will review the operation of the existing redress scheme for survivors of Mother and Baby, and County homes. Far too many are fully excluded from the scheme, and we will extend redress to all those who spent time in the institutions due to the exclusionary six-month rule, ensure it includes those boarded out, and extend an enhanced medical card to all mothers affected. We will ensure the protection of all records and the sites of institutions, and that survivors get access to their personal information.

Justice for the Forgotten

Over fifty years on from the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, and despite motions passed in the last four Dáileanna, the families are yet to receive justice, accountability, or truth. Labour will prevail on the British government to provide open and complete disclosure, with the same commitment from the Irish state so that the full truth can be investigated.

Labour recognises that legacy issues remain one of the key pieces of unfinished business from the Good Friday Agreement and we will hold the British government responsible for its commitment to replace the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act.

Shine Inquiry

Labour will establish a Commission of Investigation into the actions and conduct of convicted paedophile Michael Shine.

Thalidomide

Labour will ensure a State Apology is provided to Thalidomide survivors with statutory supports and a fair compensation system to resolve the long running campaign of the Irish Thalidomide Association.

NEW APPROACHES AND OUTSTANDING INEQUITIES

The long campaign of the Stardust families was a reminder of the failure of our inquiry and inquest systems to provide adequate paths to truth, accountability, and justice. Labour will ensure the redress package is delivered swiftly to the Stardust families.

There are past tragedies and incidents that still demand attention. The Creeslough families and the family of Shane O'Farrell deserve truth and justice. Many other examples such as the Whitty Island disaster require attention.

Labour is concerned at how long inquiries now take. The IBRC Commission of Investigation was established in 2015 and was expected to report by the end of that year. After fifteen interim reports the final report was published in May 2023 with costs projected of over €19 million. The Farrelly Commission into the 'Grace' case

was established in 2016 and a final report on the first phase was submitted in July 2024.

Four years on from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, a tokenistic public inquiry has been finally set up while a new tribunal has been established into the complaints process in relation to bullying, discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct in the Defence Forces.

We must learn lessons from the Stardust process, and how we conduct inquiries in Ireland with costs and length of particular concern.

There is a need for a new model of inquiry, with full disclosure and candour carried out in a non-adversarial way, but there are no easy solutions. To address this Labour will:

- » Establish an expert group to consider the current processes we have, how to reform it, and ensure a quicker path to justice for relatives and survivors.
- » Develop legislation to allow for the appointment of a Parliamentary Inspector as an alternative to Tribunals and commissions of inquiry.
- » Request the Law Reform Commission to consider the legislative framework governing statutory inquiries and tribunals.
- » Provide for a proper inquiry into the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

LEARNING LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Labour is deeply conscious that over the last decade Ireland has come to terms with the disgraceful historic treatment of women and young children in religious run institutions and the legacy of failure by the State to provide appropriate care, education, and shelter. Failures today to vindicate the rights of children experiencing homelessness, those locked out of education or healthcare, those in residential care or direct provision will lead in decades to come to future cycles of inquiries. It is a core reason why Labour is campaigning to deliver a Charter on Children's Rights.

PART 5

**OUR AMBITION
FOR OUR PEOPLE**

27. YOUNG PEOPLE AND YOUTH SERVICES

Our mission is an Ireland that is the best country in the world to grow up in, where every young person can meet their full potential, express their passions and personalities, and access the services they need.

Labour is committed to giving young people a future in our country, by investing in affordable housing, providing good jobs and new opportunities. No young person should feel forced to emigrate because of the failure to build enough homes.

Through our Charter for Children's Rights Labour will address the key challenges impacting on children from poverty to homelessness, and we will continue to support young people as they grow up and transition to adulthood. Our manifesto outlines proposals to help young people secure a home, improve further and higher education and support the first digital generation to navigate an online world.

Labour will carry out a national youth audit in each county to establish how youth friendly our communities are to live, grow and thrive in. This will inform how we invest to improve youth and mental health services, social and recreational facilities, and other amenities for young people.

Labour will value youth work and improve the pay and conditions of young workers and recognise the invaluable contribution of voluntary workers. We know the unique challenges faced by some young people, such as those from minority backgrounds, those with a disability or members of the LGBTQI+ community. We will invest in mentoring and specialised services and build participation. Young people must have a voice in our politics and in the policy-making that affects them.

YOUTH WORK

Labour recognises the vital role of the youth work sector and every young person in Ireland should have access to youth work, especially

those from a disadvantaged background. Whether voluntary or paid, it empowers young people to realise their potential and promotes social cohesion.

Labour believes youth work is key to addressing issues of poverty, mental health, and engagement with education, in providing resources and recreational facilities for young adults and countering divisive and harmful online narratives.

Labour will value the role of youth workers and address volatile and unreliable funding streams that impacts on recruitment and retention and puts services at risk.

Labour will expand UBU Your Place Your Space projects across Ireland, build a national network of Universal Youth Work hubs, and increase funding to support both national and volunteer led youth groups. Labour will also:

- » Increase core funding for youth work and provide pay parity for youth workers, to deliver on the National Youth Work Strategy.
- » Provide multi-annual funding for youth service providers to allow for long-term programme planning.
- » Invest in the provision of new dedicated recreational spaces and facilities for young people and ensure existing infrastructure is maintained and upgraded by restoring annual capital grants.
- » Continue support for Youth Information Services so young people can access trusted information in a time of pervasive mis- and dis-information.
- » Consult with and listen to the voices of young people and youth workers when developing policy.
- » Increase recognition of Gaisce - The President's Award and remove barriers to participation among disadvantaged and marginalised groups including in DEIS schools.

We will also expand targeted programmes focused on integration, employment, youth

diversion and education for refugees and asylum seekers, Traveller and Roma young people, LGBTQI+ young people, and young disabled people.

CARE AND HOMELESSNESS

Labour will increase and introduce new targeted supports for young people aged 19-24 when transitioning to adult services to ensure a continuum of care. We will also expand aftercare services for young people exiting care, and ensure they have their immediate housing needs met to address the high levels of homelessness they face.

YOUNG PEOPLE AT WORK

Young workers are among the most exploited and our system of pay allows for some to earn as little as 70% of the national minimum wage for doing the same work as an older colleague.

Labour will end this discrimination, ban unpaid internships, and extend the principle of fair pay to apprentices to encourage young people to take up trades that are vital now and into the future if we are to tackle the housing crisis and give young people a chance at owning their own home.

FUTURE GENERATIONS COMMISSIONER

Labour will establish a Future Generations Commissioner, modelled on the Welsh example, to prioritise the interests of future generations in national policy making with the objective of addressing the growing generational divide on wealth distribution, housing, and political influence.

Many young people emigrate because they can no longer afford to live in Ireland and this brain drain is a profound loss for Ireland's future. It also adds to social isolation and loneliness among older generations as their children and grandchildren leave in search of better opportunities, weakening social ties and support networks.

The Commissioner will embed long-term thinking into national policy, and advocate for policies that promote sustainability, social equity, and intergenerational justice. It will also hold public

bodies accountable for considering the long-term impact of their actions in areas like housing, climate action and fiscal policy, and promote social cohesion.

28. OLDER PEOPLE AND AGEING WELL

Our mission is an Ireland that empowers older people to remain active in their communities, promotes their wellbeing, and guarantees high-quality care when required.

We are now living longer and healthier lives, and older people will make up a greater portion of our population in the years ahead. We will work longer and contribute to society well into retirement. This will change how we think about ageing, and how our society functions.

Inequalities persist and not everyone has the opportunity to age in comfort and security. Factors like income adequacy, access to healthcare services and supports, social inclusion, accessible transport, digital literacy, and secure and appropriate housing influence the ability of older people to participate in our society. Far too many are being let down. Ageism and infrastructural deficits are preventing too many from enjoying the independence that they might otherwise.

Labour will build a society that provides a reliable framework of care for older people. We will recognise their agency, empower fulfilling and meaningful lives, and ensure they can continue to make valuable contributions to our communities.

CELEBRATING THE THIRD AGE

Labour will promote the third age and positive ageing. All too often the needs of older people are framed from a health and income perspective, with little emphasis on other aspects that contribute to a positive, independent, and fulfilling life. There is no such thing as a 'typical' older person, and most remain active well into their 70s and 80s and further. Labour will adopt a more holistic, whole-of-government approach to the needs of older people that enables them to continue contributing to social, cultural, economic, community and family life.

We will:

- » Relaunch the National Positive Ageing Strategy with an implementation plan and new funding.
- » Establish an independent Commissioner for Ageing and Older People, like those in place in Northern Ireland and Wales, so that the needs of older people are not seen solely from a health perspective.
- » Support the introduction of a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons to address the gaps in the existing human rights system by clarifying the human rights obligations of states and responsibilities towards older people.

INCOME ADEQUACY

Those aged 65 and over comprise the second highest demographic living in poverty in Ireland and Labour is committed to ending poverty in our country. We will ensure that increases in the State pension and other social welfare payments are increased at least in line with the cost of living. We will transform the telephone support payment into a digital connection allowance.

Labour will implement the Pension Promise of indexing the state contributory pension to 34% of average earnings. We will also support older people to remain in employment should they wish to do so by phasing out the ageist practice of mandatory retirement so that people can remain in work, or re-enter employment beyond the age of 65 should they want or need to.

APPROPRIATE HOUSING AND HOMECARE

Labour will develop more age-appropriate housing, both through the delivery of new housing built on Universal Design principles and through measures to adapt and improve existing housing, so that everyone can age in their own home and community to the greatest extent possible. With growing numbers of older people in the private rental market we will introduce specific measures to ensure that older people are protected and secure in their homes.

We will also:

- » Develop and implement a national strategy for age-friendly villages, and bespoke housing for older people in larger towns and suburbs.
- » Expand the Housing with Supports model as a nursing home alternative, with onsite staff support to allow older people live with dignity and independence.
- » Increase funding and grant limits for Home Adaptation Grants.
- » Develop a voluntary national 'rightsizing' scheme to support people who want to move to more age-friendly housing within their own community.
- » Launch a National Reablement Scheme to support older people who have been hospitalised to return to living in their own homes and communities.
- » Ensure a 'Home First' approach is taken to the delivery of care so that people can stay in their homes for as long as they wish to and is possible.
- » Introduce specific supports and protections for older people in the rental sector recognising the unique challenges and insecurities they face, including increased provision of dedicated social housing.
- » Expand access to, and delivery of the SEAI Warmer Homes scheme, review the effectiveness of current energy poverty supports and explore the creation of an Energy Guarantee payment for older people.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND MENTAL HEALTH

Far too many older people suffer from loneliness with serious consequences for mental health and well-being. Labour will improve opportunities for social participation and:

- » Develop an action plan to combat isolation and loneliness among older people, resource the Loneliness Taskforce and invest more in social prescribing.
- » Combat ageism as part of the next Roadmap for Social Inclusion.

- » Ensure age-friendly, accessible, and frequent public transport options are available and protect the Free Travel Scheme.
- » Support community and voluntary organisations that enable older people to remain as active and contributing members of their communities such as Men's and Women's Sheds and repair cafés and provide annual grant funding.
- » Implement the Model of Care for Specialist Mental Health Services for Older People with sufficient acute mental health beds for people aged 65 and over.
- » Establish a specialist group to drive actions specific to older people under the Sharing the Vision programme, like the ones in place for youth and women's mental health initiatives.

PREVENTING DIGITAL AND FINANCIAL ABUSE

Digital transformation brings benefits and risks, especially for financial safety. Around two-thirds of people aged over 65 either do not use the internet or lack digital skills. Labour will introduce measures to improve digital literacy but also ensure that person-to-person financial services are maintained, and that financial services staff are equipped to recognise vulnerability and abuse. We will:

- » Develop and resource digital skills educational programmes for older people.
- » Prohibit 'digital only' publicly funded services and continue to provide alternatives such as desk and phone services.
- » Ensure the continued acceptance of cash as legal tender and institute a genuine right to access cash.

Labour will maintain in person access to Post Offices and Citizens Information Centres which provide important services, and access to information, for older people.

Regulators like the Central Bank have an important role to play in reducing the use of jargon and ensuring information and warning notices about financial products and services are readily available, objective, and legible to all

levels of financial literacy. We will require banks and other financial service providers to maintain in person services and impose a duty of care towards potentially vulnerable customers at risk of financial abuse.

29. GAEILGE AGUS AN GHAELTACHT

Teanga Bheo do gach saoránach in Éireann - An Ghaeilge sa Todhchaí.

Is é an misean atá againn ná an Ghaeilge a chosaint agus a fhorbairt mar theanga bheo, aitheantas a thabhairt don ról ríthábhachtach atá aici in ár bhfeiniúlacht náisiúnta agus cultúrtha agus tabhairt faoi shochaí atá dátheangach amach is amach a fhorbairt.

Is cuid lárnach de shaol agus cultúr na hÉireann í an Ghaeilge, agus tá sí tábhachtach ní hamháin ar leibhéal náisiúnta ach i gcomhthéacs níos leithne na hEorpa mar cheann de na teangacha labhartha agus liteartha is ársa ata fós á labhairt sa lá atá inniu ann.

Ta níos mó daoine óga ag labhairt na teanga agus tá an deis ann cur leis an bhforbairt sin. Ach tá údar imní ann freisin. Sa daonáireamh deireanach leirítear go bhfuil laghdú beag tagtha ar an líon daoine a labhraíonn Gaeilge ar bhonn laethúil nó seachtainiúil.

Ba mhian le Páirtí an Lucht Oibre an deis a thabhairt do gach saoránach an Ghaeilge a labhairt ar bhonn laethúil. Bíonn daoine báidhiúil don teanga ach bíonn sí ina hábhar conspóide freisin. I bhfianaise saol domhandaithe, ní mór a bheith san airdeall ar thodhchaí ár dteanga. Níl an méid atá déanta ná na seifeanna ar baineadh triall astu éifeachtach go leor chun cur le húsáid laethúil na teanga. Beidh cur chuige nua ag Páirtí an Lucht Oibre chun stop a chur le meath ár dteanga náisiúnta agus chun dlús a chur lena húsáid mar ghnáththeanga labhartha laethúil.

AN TEANGA A FHORBAIRT SNA POBAIL

Bunóidh Páirtí an Lucht Oibre saoráidí pobail agus lárionaid teanga inár gcathracha agus inár mbailte uile a fheidhmeoidh mar chroílár fáilteach ina dtabharfar deis do dhaoine an teanga a fhoghlaim agus a labhairt i gcomhthéacs sóisialta. Ba cheart go mbeadh saoráidí iontu ar nós caiféanna, siopaí leabhar, spásanna taibhealaíona, áiseanna do pháistí agus do leanaí, agus seomraí le haghaidh ranganna agus seimineáir. Sa bhreis air sin, déanfaidh Páirtí an Lucht Oibre:

- » Athbhreithniú ar an Straitéis 20-bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 agus cuirfidh siad tús le plean nua suas go dtí 2050.
- » Feachtas uailmhianach a lainseáil chun an Ghaeilge mar ghnáththeanga labhartha a chur chun cinn. An sprioc atá againn ná 80 000 a bheith á labhairt ar bhonn laethúil faoi thráth Dhaonáireamh 2027 agus 100 000 faoi thráth Dhaonáireamh 2032.
- » An dea-chleachtas sa Bhreatain Bheag agus áiteanna eile a úsáid mar eiseamláir le haghaidh feachtas nua chun an Ghaeilge mar ghnáththeanga labhartha laethúil a spreagadh.
- » Rochtain ar sheirbhísí uile an rialtais trí Ghaeilge a chinntú do na saoránaigh agus tacaíocht bhreise a sholáthar chun an teanga a fhorbairt ar bhonn oileán comhroinnte.
- » Plean earcaíochta a chur ar bun chun líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge a mhéadú sa tseirbhís phoiblí.
- » Scéim a thabhairt isteach a spreagfaidh lucht gnó chun seirbhís a chur ar fáil trí Ghaeilge.
- » Maoiniú agus acmhainní earcaíochta a mhéadú le haghaidh pleanáil teanga agus tacú le bunú Gaeltachtaí uirbeacha ina dtabharfar tosaíocht do labhairt na Gaeilge.
- » Seirbhís aistriúchain foirdheonaithe a chur ar fáil chun spreagadh a thabhairt do chomhlachtaí príobháideacha agus deonacha doiciméid agus cumarsáid dhátheangach a sholáthar.
- » Gealltanas a thabhairt An Plean Fáis a mhaoiniú: Plean Infheistíochta don Ghaeilge agus don Ghaeltacht, 2024-2029.
- » Moltaí a fhorbairt maidir le pacáistiú agus lipéadú dátheangach a spreagadh.

AN GHAeilGE SA CHÓRAS OIDEACHAIS A ATHCHÓIRIÚ

An Ghaeilge mar ghnáththeanga labhartha laethúil a spreagadh, ní foláir glúin nua cainteoirí Gaeilge a spreagadh tríd an gcóras oideachais. Cruthóidh Páirtí an Lucht Oibre beartas nua

Gaeilge sa chóras oideachais ón luath-óige go dtí an tríú leibhéal, agus beidh an bhéim ar an teanga mar ghnáththeanga labhartha a mhéadú agus ar athbhreithniú ar na curaclaim atá ann cheana. Ina theannta sin:

- » Tacóimid le forbairt Gaelscoileanna agus Gaelcholáistí nua chun freagairt ar an éileamh atá ann cheana agus chun dreasachtaí a sholáthar chun cuidiú le scoileanna trí mheán an Bhéarla díriú ar theagasc trí mheán na Gaeilge.
- » Scéim píolótach a bhunú ina múinfear trí mheán na Gaeilge ar feadh bliain iomlán i mbunscoileanna, agus iona múinfear an dara hábhar sa bhunscoil amhail ealaíon, ceol nó drámaíocht trí Ghaeilge, ábhair bhreise a mhuineadh trí Ghaeilge sna meánscoileanna agus cúrsaí sa tríú leibhéal as Gaeilge.
- » Áthchóiriú ar an nGaeilge san Ardteistiméireacht a chinntiú as a dtiocfaidh athrú bunúsach ar an gcur chuige i bhfoghlaim na teanga, agus aitheantas ar leith á thabhairt do chainteoirí ó dhúchas agus do chainteoirí líofa agus cur le foghlaim na teanga ar bhealach nua forásach a bheidh níos tarraingtí.
- » Foráil a dhéanamh do chomhairliúchan poiblí maidir leis an dréachtbheartas ar oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge.
- » Méadú ar an maoiniú don Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta and Gaelscolaíochta chun tacú le forbairt agus ceannach áiseanna teagaisc agus foghlama, lena n-áirítear téacsleabhair agus uirlisí digiteacha.
- » Bealaí nua traenála a chur ar fáil, deontais agus maoiniú le haghaidh cúrsaí breise chun tacú le múinteoirí a leibhéal Gaeilge a fheabhsú, agus an Teastas Eorpach sa Ghaeilge a iniúchadh mar uirlis a mhéadóidh an líofacht teanga.
- » Airgead síl a sholáthar do scéim maoiniúchain chun tacú le pop-up Gaeltachtaí i meánscoileanna agus in institiúidí tríú leibhéal.

- » Lárionad Náisiúnta um Fhoghlaim na Gaeilge a bhunú, bunaithe ar eiseamláir na Breataine Bige, agus cúrsaí Gaeilge saor in aisce a fhorbairt do dhaoine fásta, agus do shaoránaigh Eireannacha nua agus d'imircigh, mar aon le cúrsaí do dhaoine fásta trí mheán na Gaeilge.
- » Breis maoinithe a sholáthar le haghaidh scoláireachtaí do mhic léinn chun freastal ar chúrsaí sa Ghaeltacht, ag tosú le scoileanna DEIS.
- » Athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar bheartas na ndíolúintí ag an mbunleibhéal agus ag an meánleibhéal.

ÉALÁIÓN, CULTÚR AGUS CRAOLTÓIREACHT

Is den tabhacht é go mbeidh an Ghaeilge in úsáid go forleathan sna healaíona, sna meáin agus sa chultúr má tá borradh le teacht ar úsáid na Gaeilge ar bhonn laethúil. Déanfaidh Páirtí an Lucht Oibre an méid seo a leanas:

- » Beidh maoiniú TG4 inchomórtais leis an maoiniú a fhaigheann S4C sa Bhreatain Bheag agus tacóidh siad le seirbhís thiomnaithe nuachta agus cúrsaí reatha a bhunú.
- » An maoiniú do Raidió Rí-Rá and RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta a mhéadú, agus maoiniú ilbhliantúil a sholáthar don Taibhdhearc, the National Irish Language Theatre.
- » Lárionad Cultúrtha Náisiúnta a bhunú le haghaidh na Gaeilge agus tuilleadh infheistíochta a dhéanamh inár n-oidhreacht chultúrtha trí bhéaloideas agus amhráin a bhailiú agus a fhoilsiú, trí lámhscríbhinní oidhreachta sa tseanGhaeilge sa bhaile agus thar lear a dhigitiú agus a aistriú agus tríd an maoiniú a mhéadú do Ranna Ollscoile Gaeilge agus Staidéar Ceilteach, agus líonraíocht idirnáisiúnta á forbairt ag an am céanna.

GAELTACHTAÍ BEO A CHRUTHÚ

Is í an Ghaeltacht bunfhoinsé na Gaeilge agus ní mór na pobail traidisiúnta ina labhraítear Gaeilge a chosaint agus ligean dóibh borradh a fhad is atá Gaeltachtaí nua á gcothú.

Déanfaidh Páirtí an Lucht Oibre:

- » Méadú ar an maoiniú do Údarás na Gaeltachta le haghaidh forbairt eagnamaíoch agus pobail agus tabharfaidh siad ar ais na toghcháin ionas go mbeidh cead cainte ag gach Gaeltacht.
- » Cumhachtaí maidir le tithíocht a thabhairt do Údarás na Gaeltachta, agus an chéad diúltiú ar thithe príobháideacha a cuireadh ar díol sna Gaeltachtaí ionas go leanfaidh siad de bheith ar fáil don phobal teanga.
- » Beartas Náisiúnta um Pleanáil Tithíochta sa Ghaeltacht a thabhairt isteach agus a chinntiú go gcuirfidh an Stát tithíocht shóisialta inacmhainne thiomnaithe ar fáil sna Gaeltachtaí.
- » Mar chuid den bheartas tithíochta iomlán don Ghaeltacht, scéim thiomnaithe deontas a thabhairt isteach chun freastal ar riachtanais cainteoirí ó dhúchas.
- » Deiseanna breise a thabhairt isteach dóibh siúd a fhéachann le Gaeilge a fhoghlaim nó a fheabhsú trí thréimhse a chaitheamh sa Ghaeltacht agus sosanna deireadh seachtaine agus lárthearma a chur chun cinn, rud a thabharfadh foinse nua ioncaim do theaghlaigh.
- » Suirbhéanna rialta maidir le tithe i gceantair Ghaeltachta nach bhfuil cónaí iontu lena dheimhniú cad iad na haonaid tithíochta nach bhfuil in úsáid agus féachaint lena gceannach le go bhféadfadh cainteoirí áitiúla iad a úsáid.

29. GAEILGE AGUS AN GHAELTACHT

Teanga Bheo do gach saoránach in Éireann - An Ghaeilge sa Toghcháin.

Our Mission is to protect and grow Gaeilge as a living language, recognise its essential role in our national and cultural identity, and work to develop a truly bilingual society.

Gaeilge is a central part of Irish life and culture and has a wider significance not only in Ireland but across Europe as one of the oldest spoken and literary languages still in use. More young people are speaking the language and there is an opportunity to grow and develop it further. But there are worrying signs. The last Census shows the number of people speaking Irish daily or weekly slightly declined.

Labour wants to give every citizen the opportunity to speak Irish daily. There is great love for our language, but it also inspires strong opinions and debate. In a more globalised world, the future of our language requires attention. What is being done or has been tried isn't working well enough to grow daily use of the language. Labour will develop a new approach to arrest the decline of our national language and boost daily use.

GROW THE LANGUAGE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Labour will establish community facilities and language centres in all our cities and towns to act as a central welcoming and open place to give social opportunities to learn and speak the language. These should have facilities like cafes, bookshops, art performance spaces, amenities for children and young people, and rooms for classes and seminars. Labour will also:

- » Review the 20-year strategy for the Irish language 2010-2030 and begin the development of a new plan to take us to 2050.
- » Launch an ambitious campaign to promote the spoken use of the Irish language with the goal of growing daily use to 80,000 by Census 2027, and then 100,000 by Census 2032.

- » Learn from best practice in Wales and elsewhere to launch a new effort to promote everyday use of spoken Irish.
- » Ensure citizens can access all government services in Irish and provide increased support to grow the language on a shared island basis.
- » Put in place a recruitment plan to increase the number of Irish language speakers in the public service.
- » Introduce a scheme to encourage businesses to provide a service through Irish.
- » Increase funding and staffing resources for language planning and support the creation of urban Gaeltachtaí where speaking Irish is prioritised.
- » Provide a subsidised translation service to encourage more private and voluntary bodies to produce bilingual documents and communications.
- » Commit to fund An Plean Fáis: Plean Infheistíochta don Ghaeilge agus don Ghaeltacht, 2024-2029.
- » Develop proposals for encouraging bilingual packaging and labelling.

REINVIGORATE IRISH IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

To grow daily use of Irish, a new generation of speakers must be inspired through the education system. Labour will develop a new policy for Irish in the education system from early childhood education through to third level, with a focus on increasing spoken use and a review of existing curriculums. We will also:

- » Support the development of new Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí to meet existing demand and provide incentives for the transfer of English medium schools to teaching in Irish.
- » Pilot the teaching in Irish of a full year of primary school, a second subject in primary schools in Irish such as art, music or drama, additional subjects in secondary schools and third level courses in Irish.

- » Ensure reform of Leaving Certificate Irish leads to a radical change in the approach to the learning of the language, giving particular recognition to native and fluent speakers of the language and enhancing the attractiveness of studying the language in a new and progressive manner.
- » Provide for a public consultation on the draft policy on Irish-medium education.
- » Increase funding for An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltacht and Gaelscolaíochta to support development and purchase of teaching and learning aids, including textbooks and digital tools.
- » Provide new training routes, grants, and funding for extra courses to support teachers to gain stronger levels of Irish and explore using the Teastas Eorpach sa Ghaeilge to improve fluency.
- » Seed a funding pool to support pop up Gaeltachtaí in secondary schools and third level institutions.
- » Establish a National Centre for Learning Irish modelled on the Welsh example, and develop free Irish language courses for adults, and new Irish citizens and immigrants, alongside adult education courses delivered in Irish.
- » Provide increased funding for scholarships for students to attend the Gaeltacht, starting first with DEIS schools.
- » Review the exemptions policy for Irish at primary and second level.

ARTS, CULTURE AND BROADCASTING

The strong representation of Irish in our arts, media and culture is essential to growing daily use. Labour will:

- » Bring TG4 funding in line with that provided to S4C in Wales and support the creation of a dedicated news and current affairs service.
 - » Increase funding for Raidió Rí-Rá and RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, and provide multiannual funding for An Taibhdhearc, the National Irish Language Theatre.
- » Establish a National Cultural Centre for the Irish language and invest more in our cultural heritage through the collection and publication of folklore and song, the digitisation and translation of heritage manuscripts of old Irish at home and abroad and increase funding for university Departments of Irish and Celtic studies while developing a network internationally.

CREATE LIVING GAELTACHTAÍ

The Gaeltacht is the source of the language and traditional communities where Irish is spoken must be protected and allowed to prosper while fostering new Gaeltachtaí. Labour will:

- » Increase funding to Údarás na Gaeltachta for economic and community development and restore elections so each Gaeltacht has a voice.
- » Give Údarás na Gaeltachta housing powers, and first refusal on private homes put up for sale in Gaeltachtaí so that these stay available to the language community.
- » Introduce a National Policy for Housing Planning in the Gaeltacht and ensure the State provides dedicated social and affordable housing in Gaeltachtaí.
- » As part of an overall Gaeltacht housing policy, introduce a dedicated grants scheme to cater for native speakers.
- » Introduce more opportunities for those seeking to learn or improve their Irish to stay in Gaeltacht areas and promote weekend and midterm breaks for adults as a new income source for families.
- » Carry out regular housing vacancy surveys in Gaeltacht areas to determine what housing units are not being used and seek their purchase for re-use by local speakers.

30. ARTS, CULTURE, MEDIA, AND HERITAGE

Our Mission is a society that recognises the value of our artists and creators, their incalculable contribution to the cultural and social landscape, wellbeing, quality of life and our international reputation and we commit to funding their success as a thriving part of our society.

INVESTING IN THE ARTS

Funding from the Arts Council is vital to support our artists but too many still cannot access. Labour will increase funding to the Arts Council to €200 million per annum and ensure that the Arts represent a viable career, and our artists can continue to contribute to our cultural and social landscape. Building on this funding we will:

- » Provide a permanent Basic Income for the Arts scheme and expand it to increase access, starting with younger artists. The pilot has been successful by providing economic security and facilitating creative freedom.
- » Deliver reforms to the tax and welfare system to better support artists with a living income, recognising their status often as freelance independent contractors, and their production and service costs.
- » Address barriers for disabled, LGBTQIA+ and ethnically diverse artists and art workers as recommended by the Safe to Create Amplify report.
- » Seek to expand Arts Council support to a broader range of artists.
- » Ensure proper enforcement of copyright law so that artists, be they writers, musicians, painters, composers or designers, benefit from the revenue streams arising from their work, and protect their intellectual property from AI.

- » Publish a comprehensive and inclusive National Music Strategy to bring stakeholders together and promote the continued growth and success of the Irish music industry and seek increased airtime for Irish artists on licensed radio stations.
- » Support the development of digital arts in the fields of audiovisual content, gaming, and animation.
- » Develop a new National Cultural policy framework for the next decade and increase funding for Culture Ireland.

SPACES FOR ARTISTS

Our artists need more spaces. Culture can't compete with capitalism. Labour has published a comprehensive plan to ensure active state support for saving and growing artists' spaces. We will establish a new Cultural Infrastructure Company to work closely with local authorities to actively plan for and ensure the adequate provision of artists' spaces and music venues across the country. We will:

- » Undertake a major expansion of the Space to Create scheme to support local authorities secure spaces.
- » Provide low-cost State-backed cultural mortgages and loans for artist organisations to purchase or retrofit buildings.
- » Introduce Cultural Conservation Orders on buildings after 20 years of established cultural use.
- » Allocate specific funding for emerging artists to access short term leases when required to qualify for Arts Council programme funding.
- » Apply a Culture/Social Use First policy for vacant publicly owned buildings not suitable for residential use.

Labour will actively promote the creation of artists' cooperatives or other formal structures with targeted financial and administrative support and incentives to access leases and manage their own property over a sustained period.

NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Our national museums, galleries, libraries, and music halls are repositories of our cultural heritage, and provide a window to our past, present and future. Their work is complemented by the tremendous variety of other centres across the country.

Labour supports the development of a National Women's Museum to illustrate how women have been represented through history and tell their stories and looks forward to the recommendations of the advisory committee feasibility report. We will also develop the public facing part of the GPO as a cultural hub.

It is nearly three decades since the landmark National Cultural Institutions Act passed into law in 1997. Labour believes now is the time to explore the creation of new national cultural institutions and we will establish a project board to develop proposals for venues, located outside of Dublin to showcase the following themes of Irish culture:

- » Irish song, dance, and language.
- » Food history and the gastronomy of our island.
- » Industrial heritage and the trade union movement.
- » Irish science and exploration.
- » Our island's nature and biodiversity.
- » International and domestic sport.

This is not an exhaustive or final list of themes, and there are existing collections, museums, attractions, and bodies representing parts of these, but the purpose of the new institutions would be to curate a national representative collection and experience of each. These would be destination sites and provide for balanced regional cultural representation.

Labour will drive progress for an Irish National Design Centre, embed design principles into infrastructural development, and consider new measures to support the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland including placing it on a statutory footing.

OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

Labour will seek the repatriation of Irish historical artefacts and antiquities housed in international museums and institutions while developing programmes for exchange and loans. As part of our plans to protect our national cultural heritage we will:

- » Provide dedicated annual funding for the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and Historic Structures Fund to protect, restore and preserve properties representing our vernacular architecture and industrial heritage.
- » Continue to invest in the National Archives, storage facilities, and the digitisation of records.
- » Develop an inclusive programme of Commemorations for the next decade.

Labour will safeguard our cultural, built, and natural heritage. We will update the Heritage Act of 1995, ensure there are heritage teams in each local authority, preserve traditional skills, develop a national centre of excellence, and invest in research.

THE NIGHT ECONOMY

Labour will develop a thriving night economy and expand existing initiatives to bring vibrancy back into our towns and cities' nightlife. We will:

- » Give people greater choice in how they enjoy the nighttime and support cultural institutions to stay open later into the evening.
- » Reform licensing laws to allow for more flexibility in opening hours and the variety of places that can sell alcohol, create an annual nightclub licence, and transfer responsibility to the Department of Culture and Arts.
- » Review and update noise management regulations for a compatible and harmonious relationship between the night economy and urban residents.

MEDIA AND PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

Public Service broadcasting is a vital part of our democracy, and Labour will ensure a robust

funding system is maintained for RTÉ and TG4. We will review the current RTÉ settlement in its final year and the operation of the TV licence fee and introduce a reformed funding model in line with the recommendations of the Future of Media Commission.

Labour supports media plurality and will review the efficacy of recent journalism schemes for local radio and newspapers and ensure funding when provided supports reporting and coverage of local democracy and justice. We will review the Broadcasting Levy and protect digital access to free to air radio.

SCREEN PRODUCTION

In the 1990s, Labour's vision transformed the Irish film industry, and we will continue to build on that legacy. We will introduce an audio-visual media services directive content levy of at least 5% and ringfence the funding for domestic production including Irish language productions to showcase Irish cultural content and stories. We will continue the principle of using Sound and Vision funds to promote climate action, live music broadcasting and Irish language content and expand it to include collective bargaining and trade union recognition.

Labour will increase investment through Screen Ireland to ensure the continued production of high-quality indigenous films, TV shows and documentaries, alongside the development of Irish performers and Irish language programming,

Labour will further review Section 481 to ensure it remains internationally competitive to support national and regional production and the inclusion of Irish music creators. We will bring the pay and terms and conditions of performers and crew up to the standards in place in peer countries and make receipt of Section 481 relief conditional on offering quality employment in which workers' rights are upheld and respected.

31. SPORT AND RECREATION

Our mission is to provide the best possible facilities supporting grassroots sport and recreation, that serve all our communities and increase participation for all people, while investing to boost Ireland's international sporting performance.

Labour knows that properly funding sport and recreations pays off because it is good for our health and our communities. Ireland spends over €1.5bn treating obesity while investing just over €170m a year in sport. With a growing population there is an urgent need to invest more in sporting and recreational facilities.

Labour will introduce a 1% increase in the Betting Levy to fund new multi-sport facilities alongside a dedicated focus on grassroots and League of Ireland football while seeking increased participation for women and girls, disadvantaged communities, and people with disabilities.

FUNDING

Labour will increase funding for sport with a dedicated focus on supporting social inclusion, gender equality, anti-racism, and integration. Funding must be conditional on strong ethics and transparent governance. Labour will:

- » Commit to multi-annual funding to provide certainty for national sporting bodies and local sports partnerships, while requiring at least 40% representation of women in sports governing bodies.
- » Create a social inclusion fund to be distributed through NGBs to allow sports clubs provide free or reduced membership where necessary.
- » Provide dedicated increased funding for disability sporting organisations, Special Olympics Ireland, and the Paralympics, and ensure funding for autism friendly spaces in our public sporting and recreational facilities.
- » Put in place a plan to boost funding and support for high performance Olympic athletes and sports, and establish a Gradam

scheme, like Aosdána, to support elite amateur athletes who represent our island internationally.

- » Continue to support and fund the GAA and IRFU in recognition of the important all-island and social role they play in our communities.
- » Introduce targeted tax measures including VAT relief and changes to charitable donation relief to support clubs and NGBs, including strategic development funds.
- » Bring in tax relief on sporting membership fees to improve affordability, and reduced VAT on sport and exercise classes to encourage participation in sports and recreation.
- » Review the Sugar Tax and invest a portion of revenues into measures to tackle childhood obesity such as school sports clubs and the Active School Flag programme.
- » Address insurance concerns that can limit club activities.
- » Welcome proposals for hosting international sporting competitions in Ireland but not at the expense of grassroots funding.

FACILITIES AND RECREATION

Ireland simply doesn't have enough sporting facilities and Labour will introduce a new Community Sports Facility Guarantee for all towns with a population over 5,000. We will invest to deliver more community multisport pitches, swimming pools and specialist sporting halls and facilities. Labour will:

- » Introduce a Community Sports Facility Guarantee so that every town with a population greater than 5,000 has a dedicated multisports facility with suitable all-weather pitches.
- » Increase the Betting Levy by 1% and ring fence proceeds for investment in community sporting infrastructure.
- » Devolve responsibility for Sports Capital Funding to local authorities to better coordinate delivery of facilities and introduce a dedicated annual funding call

to provide certainty for club development plans and expand the scheme to support clubs who need to purchase land.

- » Ensure every town with a population greater than 5,000 has its own public swimming pool and develop Lidos in Dublin and Cork.
- » Deliver improved changing facilities for women and girls at all public sporting grounds and facilities, and ensure that combined toilet, shower and changing rooms are designed, and available for use by people with complex and multiple impairments or other disabilities.
- » Continue to develop Sports Campus Ireland, and support minority sports.
- » Develop and resource a PE Hall Development Plan to ensure every school has access to modern sporting facilities that can also be accessed by the local community.
- » Improve and fund more recreational facilities such as playgrounds, scooter, and skate parks, and ensure the OPW, Coillte and Waterways Ireland work with local authorities to further develop outdoor facilities.
- » Expand public walks, cycleway, and greenway schemes, provide improved changing facilities at public beaches, and improve access for hill walkers to upland areas.
- » Introduce holiday sports schemes for students and expand current after school sport programmes.

SUPPORTING IRISH FOOTBALL

Labour recognises that football is one of the greatest tools available to support integration of new communities, participation for those with disabilities, and gender equality in sport and we would implement an ambitious strategy to develop community grassroots football and the League of Ireland which have suffered from underfunding over many years.

We will:

- » Work with the FAI to roll out an ambitious facility investment vision and strategy, providing significant investment from the grassroots to international levels.
- » Develop our domestic league and implement an ambitious programme that ensures our football players can forge careers in Ireland, including centralised contracts for young women and men that would support them to stay in the game in Ireland for a minimum of three years, and education scholarships to build links between the League of Ireland and third-level educational institutes.
- » Expand football as a transition year subject countrywide and develop a football academy structure.
- » Provide a portion of broadcast revenues to League of Ireland clubs and undertake a programme of national promotion for the game.
- » Work with the Northern Irish Executive to consider the feasibility of an all-island football league.

Labour will continue to support and work with Gaelic games, rugby, and other sporting codes, but we believe that Irish football needs dedicated focus and support to address decades of poor governance and underinvestment.

32. AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND MARINE

Our mission - recalling the minority report of Tom Johnson on the 1924 Agricultural Commission - is achieving greater food security, ensuring everyone can access healthy, nutritious, and sustainable food at an affordable price, and the protection of our natural environment.

Labour believes farmers must be supported to diversify and produce food sustainably with a just transition. We support CAP reforms and agricultural policies that protect the family farm model and that reward small farmers. We will campaign to protect farm incomes with new Just Transition and Nature Restoration Funds. We will support policies that contribute to climate mitigation, and that enhance biodiversity and nature restoration.

Labour will support the development of sustainable farming, fishing, and forestry in Ireland to protect and create new jobs and opportunities in all regions of the country.

AGRICULTURE

Labour is committed to meeting our ambitious climate targets working with farmers, and we will:

- » Hold a stakeholder dialogue on the future of agriculture and food production.
- » Support CAP reforms that deliver a fairer distribution of income for small family and disadvantaged farmers, and rewards those who meet environmental and biodiversity criteria.
- » Protect Irish farmers and agricultural workers from unfair competition and price speculation and ensure fair prices in the value chain.
- » Support an EU-UK sanitary and phytosanitary deal to reduce red tape on agri-food exports.

- » Encourage young, women and small-scale farmers with measures such as an Early Retirement Scheme.
- » Create a Farm Income Diversification Scheme to help boost farm family incomes and to promote alternative, sustainable uses of farmland, and the cultivation of a wider range of crops for human consumption to enhance food security. Support farmers who wish to exit dairy or beef for alternatives.
- » Review ACRES and ANC funding schemes towards rewarding farmers more for restoring nature on their lands and expand the Farm Plan scheme.
- » Support proposals to establish two new funding mechanisms: a Just Transition Fund for Agriculture and a Nature Restoration Fund to support farmers restore and rewet land.
- » Support farmers and co-operatives to develop anaerobic digestion facilities as part of a revised National Biomethane Strategy that delivers on greenhouse gas abatement.
- » Commission Teagasc to carry out a study on the security of fodder supplies in response to our changing climate.
- » Prioritise greater investment in farm safety and modernisation.
- » To address nitrates, devise catchment-based strategies to reverse the decline in water quality attributable to excessive nutrient losses from livestock farming including for example lower stocking rates, changes to grassland management practices, mandatory use of protected urea, LESS and multi-species swards.
- » Implement a standardised and simplified Hedge Cutting Grant Scheme in line with best practice as well as a roadside ash dieback scheme.

ANIMAL WELFARE

The reporting of animal welfare abuses in the horse and calf live export sectors shows the need for much stronger regulation and control.

Labour will:

- » Increase animal welfare spending, and ensure appropriate facilities are in place for abandoned animals.
- » Carry out an independent review of the Horse and Greyhound Fund and reform the funding model.
- » Ban dangerous breeds of dogs, enforce existing rules, and introduce new laws to protect the public, with robust penalties for bad actors.
- » Review animal welfare standards in the intensive poultry and pork sectors, and ensure live exports are rigorously regulated and inspected both in Ireland and abroad.
- » After the horsemeat and recent abuse scandals, increase traceability in the equine sector to bovine standards.
- » Develop a framework and provide adequate funding for improving animal health, which will reduce antibiotic use in livestock and decrease costs for farmers.
- » Introduce new criminal offences for pet abduction and farm animal theft.

FOOD SECURITY

Labour will prioritise the development of a new national food strategy focused on food security and ensuring that everyone is able to afford a healthy, nutritious diet. We will:

- » Reconstitute Teagasc into a food security and sustainability agency that also takes the voice of consumers and health experts into account along with a stronger focus on horticulture and plant-based farming.
- » Introduce a new strategy to expand organic farming to 20% of all farmed land and explore consumer subsidies to grow the domestic organic market in dairy, beef, lamb, and horticulture.
- » Grow the domestic horticulture and tillage sectors, with a renewed focus on grains and pulses through an improved Tillage Incentive Scheme to reverse the decline in the area of cereal crops planted, and a new Horticultural Scheme.

- » Develop a national strategy and forum to support the expansion of community gardens and allotments to provide space in every community for growing food.
- » Introduce stricter regulations for sale or marketing of high fat sugar and salt foods to children, including on social media and in school.
- » Require all food imported by aeroplane to have carbon footprint labelling to give consumers transparency.
- » Introduce a Farmers Market Incentive Programme and invest in local food networks and market infrastructure so producers have increased opportunities to sell their high-quality products to local communities, reducing import reliance and improving food resilience
- » Introduce financial support schemes like those in place for small farmers to bridge the gap between the inshore and offshore sector and support decarbonisation of our fishing fleet.
- » Expand capacity in our ports to support offshore renewable energy projects and invest in the maintenance of harbour infrastructure.
- » To support coastal communities, ensure local authorities regularly assess and audit the risk of sea erosion and storm damage, and put in place appropriate protections and supports where possible.

FISHERIES AND MARINE

Labour will work towards sustainable fisheries and aquaculture that protects our natural environment, promote more sustainable and environmentally friendly fishing practices, and seek a review of Ireland's fish quotas. We will:

- » Carry out an independent review of the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and ensure proper implementation of Article 17 of the European coastal states' Common Fisheries Policy, ensuring fishing opportunities are allocated using transparent and objective criteria.
- » Redistribute fishing quotas for high-value species such as mackerel and herring so that small inland fishers receive a more equitable share.
- » Ensure the rights and safety of seafarers and maritime workers are upheld and protected through increased inspections.
- » Protect our territorial waters by resourcing our Naval Service and deploy new technologies like marine drones to enforce our laws.

33. COMMUNITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Our mission is to embed the principles of community development across the country and achieve a rural Ireland that is socially, economically, and digitally connected with balanced regional development.

Labour has always supported balanced regional and economic development and we believe investing in local development in partnership with the community and voluntary sector is essential for building social inclusion, solidarity, and shared prosperity.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Labour will develop a new national strategy to build a stronger community and voluntary sector. We want local authorities, instead of government departments, to have a much stronger role in supporting the sector and determining how budgets are allocated and services are coordinated. We will give councils greater autonomy to develop new initiatives as part of our plans for local government reform, and adequately resource Public Participation Network structures. We will establish a dialogue forum involving the local authority and the PPN to discuss their Vision for Community Wellbeing Statement and participate in the development of local community economic plans and the local authority budget process.

Local Development Companies

Labour is committed to supporting Local Development companies and delivering a sustainable funding model to address the annual funding cliff. It is unacceptable that every year staff must receive protective notice as this undermines service delivery, recruitment, and retention. Labour will:

- » Provide multi-annual funding to support stable service delivery and better working conditions in the community and voluntary sector.

- » Examine how to consolidate and streamline funding streams to provide greater certainty and cut down on bureaucracy for LDCs.
- » Review the system of tendering in favour of more stable block grants.

Community Workers and Funding Levels

Without community workers the State would not be able to achieve ambitious goals under programmes like LEADER and SICAP. These two schemes provide essential supports in rural communities but have suffered from funding reductions in recent years. Labour will implement increases for each, and we will also:

- » Restore the public sector pay link for Community workers and supervisors for Community Employment, Tús, Rural Social Scheme and Jobs Initiative.
- » Provide annual support grants to Men's and Women's Sheds.
- » Remove the one-year limit on Tús and increase resources for Community Employment Schemes.
- » Benchmark funding for the Community Services Programme to the living wage, restore the non-wage grant and prioritise new sustainability projects.

New Community Initiatives and Supports

Labour will develop and trial new programmes for the community and voluntary sector to provide social supports and services, advocacy, and integration, and further the Sustainable Development Goals. We will:

- » Develop a new community-based climate programme.
- » Expand the Community Development Pilot Programme to other areas of deprivation.
- » Support skills development, training frameworks and digitisation.
- » Invest in integration strategies, community recognition, dialogue, and restorative justice programmes.

Local Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

Labour will ensure that under a new National Drugs Strategy that additional resources are directed to local Drug and Alcohol task forces which provide vital frontline services in deprived communities. Drug use is not just an urban problem, and we will develop new initiatives to support rural communities. Labour will ensure permanent funding from seized CAB assets is provided for the DRIVE programme which is a community-based project that supports people suffering from drug related intimidation.

THRIVING RURAL COMMUNITIES

Through our manifesto Labour has outlined our plans to ensure thriving rural communities. We will develop a new rural development policy in 2026 to replace Our Rural Future. We will:

- » Support sustainable agriculture and strive for food security with a thriving agri-food sector.
- » Introduce a rural transport guarantee, invest in sustainable transport, and expand local link and rural hackney services.
- » Hire salaried GPs through the HSE to ensure local access to a doctor.
- » Combat rural crime with more Gardaí and a greater community presence.
- » Deliver rural connectivity through the national broadband plan and place a mandate on network operators to provide national mobile/5G data coverage.
- » Restore Town Councils and promote co-operatives and other social enterprises.
- » Introduce a new community banking model to support rural SMEs.
- » Protect public services in rural communities including post offices, primary care centres, local community hospitals and libraries.

Labour will increase funding for the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and expand the Clár programme with a new separate stream for urban settings. We will invest in the local improvement scheme, outdoor recreation and community infrastructure including a further fund for investment in Community Centres.

TOURISM

The tourism sector has long been a major support to rural Ireland and a success story for Ireland. Every year millions of visitors come to Ireland, attracted by our landscape, our cultural heritage, and our people. The sector is a key employer, particularly in rural areas but we recognise that it is struggling with high costs. Labour will:

- » Increase funding to Fáilte Ireland to grow domestic tourism.
- » Adopt an integrated policy approach with industry and communities to grow tourism as part of regional and local development strategies.
- » Include identified hospitality skills on the Critical Skills list to help address labour shortages.
- » Free up tourism accommodation by developing state owned accommodation and repurposing vacant properties for refugees.
- » Produce a blueprint for tourism products and experiences out to 2030 including a review of historic buildings in State ownership and their potential tourism use.
- » Work with councils to develop new local tourism strategies, reviewing the variety and quality of accommodation, signage, visitor facilities and attractions, heritage, eco, arts and sports tourism potential, as well as improved cleaning and maintenance of streets and roadsides.
- » Develop local tourist trails like the East Westmeath Tourist Trail with integrated signage, and promotion by the local authority and Fáilte Ireland.
- » Develop Camper Van “Aire” facilities in suitable locations around the country.

Supporting the Hospitality Sector

Even though employment in the accommodation and food services sector is at an all-time high, many hospitality businesses face serious challenges. Labour will establish a state agency to support the sector, modelled on Teagasc, to

boost sustainability and productivity, and provide research, advisory and training services. We will also:

- » Drive down costs for small businesses focused on energy and insurance prices.
- » Provide local authorities with discretionary power to levy a hotel bed tax to fund investment in the public realm of our cities and towns.
- » Develop a replacement for the outdated commercial rates system.
- » Reform outdated licensing laws to support the night-time economy.

Sustainable and Eco-Tourism

Eco-Tourism is increasingly influential in holiday planning as people are more conscious of their carbon footprint. Labour will develop a bespoke eco-tourism strategy for Ireland and work with stakeholders to improve sustainability standards and create new green tourism opportunities. We will:

- » Invest in increasing the Walks scheme, expand our National Parks and improve access to the countryside with a 'right to roam'.
- » Work with Fáilte Ireland to achieve a greater number of tourism service providers accredited with a UNWTO sustainable tourism certification.
- » Foster a strategic partnership between Fáilte Ireland and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland to decarbonise the sector.
- » Develop incentives to enable Ireland to take a lead in Sustainable Aviation Fuel, hydrogen and biofuels R&D and production.
- » Sign up to the Glasgow Declaration, a UNWTO declaration that aims to lead and align climate action across tourism stakeholders.
- » Assist businesses transition to carbon-neutrality, support the circular tourism economy, and develop off-setting projects within Ireland.

- » Speed up the electrification of road transportation with more fast-charging infrastructure nationwide and provide incentives for bus tour operators to switch to electric buses.

POSTAL SERVICES

Labour will expand the role of Post Offices as social and economic community hubs, and ensure they provide more public services to increase their viability. We will:

- » Ensure in person access to financial and state services including cash payments is maintained and commit to multiannual funding to secure and maintain the Post Office network.
- » Position Post Offices as a one stop shop for all public forms and trial using the network to provide services from community and voluntary bodies.

BALANCED REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Labour will ensure the revised National Planning Framework provides for balanced regional development and allows for continued development in our cities and towns outside Dublin and sustainable rural regeneration. Ireland's demographics have changed, and it is critical that sufficient new housing is provided in compact, well-planned communities with the coordinated provision of public services like schools, creches, primary care and community health facilities and public transport capacity.

Labour will develop a new regional jobs and investment strategy that ensures new industrial opportunities are focused to the regions and towns that have been ignored for too long. Larger towns act as hubs for smaller towns and villages, and in turn for the surrounding townlands and rural areas. We want to ensure that each town has more medium-sized employers. We will give the IDA and Enterprise Ireland a renewed mandate to direct activity outside the Eastern region, and incentives and grants will be created to assist towns that lack larger employers, including infrastructure grants and temporary rebates on commercial rates.

To harness economic growth from the digital and climate transitions, state investment is needed in our water supply and waste treatment facilities, electricity grid and transport networks. Labour will prioritise those projects that secure balanced regional growth.

OUR ISLANDS

Labour will resource and implement the national islands policy and support island communities with reliable public services and transport links. The development of offshore renewable energy and digitisation offer new economic opportunities we will harness and help sustain island populations. We will invest in climate adaptation and sustainability measures on our populated islands and on those returned to nature, we will protect and restore habitats.

34. A VISION FOR DUBLIN

Our Mission is to deliver on the many plans to revitalise Dublin, to create a directly elected Mayor to lead our city and position it as a leading capital of the world.

Cities compete globally for investment, talent, visitors, and attractions. Dublin is being left behind because of a political vacuum at the heart of decision making in our capital city. The neglect has manifested in many policy areas, and a year on from the riots of November 2023 little has changed, despite another new plan for Dublin. Labour will change this while protecting the individual character and strengths of the existing four local authorities.

There is much that is great about Dublin, and we want to harness the spirit and energy of our city as a national and global melting pot. Too much political debate in Ireland is focused around using Dublin as a punching bag for other areas looking for investment. The reality is our city has never been properly invested in or received the attention from government it deserves. When Dublin thrives, Ireland wins because it is the engine of our economy and generates the growth and revenues that provides opportunities for people across our island.

A DIRECTLY ELECTED MAYOR

For decades plans have been mooted for a directly elected Mayor for Dublin. A Citizen's Assembly has reported comprehensive proposals, and it is now time to act.

Labour will hold a plebiscite to formulate the powers of the office by the end of 2026. The Mayor will be responsible for oversight of 15 policy areas including homelessness, housing, community healthcare, transport, the environment, and emergency services.

The new Dublin Mayor will have the authority to raise revenues and to borrow, and the power to introduce new regulations and to convene meetings with local and national agencies.

We will develop a cultural hub in the GPO and also locate the office of the new Dublin Mayor

within that complex on O'Connell Street as part of our plan to regeneration and revitalise our main thoroughfare and provide a new centre of local power separate to the Merrion/Kildare street government quarter.

NEW IDEAS TO REVITALISE DUBLIN

Since Labour drove the redevelopment of the Docklands, the completion of Luas Cross City and the rollout of the Dublin Bikes network very few new flagship projects have emerged in Dublin. Labour is proposing the following ideas and initiatives to revitalise and regenerate our city:

A Dublin food market network

Within 18 months we will drive the opening of a new food market in the historic Fruit and Vegetable market in Smithfield. We will expand the network further using the former tourist office in St Andrews Church, and the reopening of the Iveagh Markets in Dublin 8.

A New Artists Quarter

Between Abbey Street, Bachelors Walk and Eden Quay there are laneways with low rise lock-ups that have become no-go areas with a lot of vacancy. Labour will seek to CPO parts of this area using our proposed Cultural Infrastructure Company to redevelop it as a new artists quarter and offer space for artist studios and co-operatives and creative startups, along with new affordable city centre accommodation for people working there.

Heated Lido at George's Dock

George's Dock has been abandoned effectively as a swamp after proposals for a whitewater rafting facility, and now a rescue training centre. Labour will support the campaign for a year-round heated Lido.

Bridge the Liffey

We will progress plans for a new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the Liffey to connect the War Memorial Gardens to the Phoenix Park, and similar plans for an active travel Point bridge at the East Link. These will integrate the city to the east and west.

District Heating

For years plans for district heating have been proposed, so Labour will ensure it is rolled out starting in the Glass Bottle site and docklands, and then expand provision in the outer suburbs using excess heat from existing data centres.

Expand City Bikes Scheme

There has been no significant expansion of the City Bikes scheme since 2014, but Labour will advance plans to ensure it is provided across the four local authorities and develop a city-wide network of cycleways.

Sports Facilities in every community

Communities across the city do not have enough sports pitches or facilities. Labour will ensure every community has access to multi-sport facilities using models like the proposed sports campus at the Marrowbone Lane depot site which we will deliver on.

A Pet Friendly City

Dublin has suburban dog parks but none in the city centre area. Labour will increase the number of people living in the city, give renter's the right to have a pet in their home, and develop at least four inner city dog parks on underutilised or vacant land.

Restaurant night

We have Culture night and Open House, which bring thousands of people into the city. Our restaurants and cafés which are an intrinsic part of the city would benefit from a similar initiative in the off season. Working with stakeholders we will develop a dedicated 'Restaurant Night' in both January and February to boost the city centre.

A National Exhibition Centre

Dublin lacks a large enough exhibit hall and convention space to attract international trade shows, expos and events like Lisbon or Berlin can. To compete internationally plans will be developed for a national exhibition centre either close to the airport or using port lands near the city centre.

Homes in the North Georgian Core

We can regenerate the north Georgian core from Parnell Square to Mountjoy Square by adopting a new flagship living city project to convert offices and add new infill public affordable housing while conserving the historic buildings, streetscapes, and public realm of the North Georgian core, building on plans for the Parnell Square Cultural Quarter. A similar project will be developed for the south Georgian core.

Many more ideas exist and can be implemented for Dublin: more public playgrounds, a public plaza in College Green, bringing Aldborough House into public ownership for redevelopment, public toilets, a reduction in street clutter and investment in better design for the public realm.

What is missing for Dublin is political leadership with power and resources to deliver for our city. Labour will advance plans for a directly elected Mayor and to fund these ideas we will give Dublin councils the power to raise revenue through a hotel bed tax, with matching capital funding from central government.

Labour will also prioritise the protection and restoration of nature in Dublin with more pocket parks and urban forests. We will establish a Dublin Bay Authority and develop a vision for enhancing public access, protection for biodiversity and improvement of the public amenity along the Poolbeg peninsula

PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND ACTIVE TRAVEL

Labour has comprehensive proposals for Dublin in our transport plan. Our city urgently needs Bus Connects and new Luas lines. Work must advance quickly on Metrolink, and a feasibility study carried out to continue growing the network to the southwest of the city. Labour will ensure these projects are funded and delivered.

Our most immediate priority is ensuring buses arrive on time, when they are scheduled, with sufficient capacity, and that services continue later into the night. We will introduce car free days in the city centre and continue to invest in active travel.

BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES AND HOUSING

A directly elected Mayor for Dublin will have the power and influence to develop and implement better public services for our capital city and coordinate efforts across the county. Three key priorities for Labour in Dublin are:

Housing

The Mayor working with Labour's proposed State Construction Company will drive the regeneration of Dublin and assemble plots for denser and more compact development of housing. Labour will ensure the Mayor has the power to drive the long term transformation of the rental market in Dublin towards a more affordable cost rental model like Vienna. The refurbishment and regeneration of social housing complexes will also be a priority. We will provide stronger regulation of short term lets and ensure the core city centre area has affordable housing so that workers in our public services and hospitality and experience sectors can live near to where they work. Labour will also drive a street-by-street retrofitting programme to upgrade homes across Dublin.

Safer Communities

Dublin needs more visible policing and the political power of the Mayor's office will ensure the commitment to 1,000 new Gardai on our streets is met. Providing extra training capacity in the Garda HQ in the Phoenix Park is one way to do that. We need a Mayor to change the perception of our city centre to attract back more evening visitors and this will take time and effort. New and targeted investment in communities and in particular youth work is needed to address anti-social behaviour and reduce disadvantage by building trust and social inclusion. Labour will establish a transport police as a unit of An Garda Síochána and introduce new community wardens.

Waste Management

Illegal dumping and littering are a scourge for many communities in our city and we have a dysfunctional waste collection system. Labour will begin the process to remunicipalise the waste collection system. We will change the law

to allow for the tendering of collection services in an area for a single provider, while building up a public system. In the urban core we will introduce underground collection bins as shared collection points for residential and commercial waste to reduce street clutter. Dublin can also be a leader in the circular economy by driving greater recycling and reuse initiatives with more bring centres and the development of repair cafes.

ARTS, CULTURE AND NIGHTLIFE

Our manifesto has extensive plans to support a thriving arts and culture sector. For Dublin a long-needed overhaul of licensing laws is essential to regenerate the nighttime economy. This will bring back vibrancy to the city centre and allow for experimentation with new experiences and venues. Labour will ensure this is progressed, and support longer opening hours for cultural institutions.

PART 6

OUR AMBITION FOR IRELAND AND THE WORLD

35. AN IRELAND FOR ALL

Our Mission is to provide a well-managed and resourced system of migration that supports our economy and society, protects human rights, and meets our international obligations, while providing for adequately resourced communities and a comprehensive integration strategy.

People move for love, for work, for safety and to make a better life for themselves and their families. Whatever their reason, Ireland needs a well-functioning, efficient and fair migration system. The government has failed to put in place the infrastructure and systems to manage migration properly and deliver a replacement for direct provision. This failure is being exploited by forces wishing to divide us. People need to have faith in the migration system and the asylum system. Labour has detailed proposals to reform our processes, support communities and resource a national integration plan.

The asylum system must be fair to people seeking refuge from war, violence, and persecution. It must be robust, not open to exploitation and trusted by the public. Those seeking asylum are not the reason communities are struggling. Ireland working with our partners in the EU and globally through the UN will work to address the root causes of migration.

A NEW AGENCY FOR INTEGRATION, MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

Labour will establish a new stand alone, fully resourced, and staffed agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA) modelled on the Portuguese example, and it will be responsible for the administration of migration and asylum. It will:

- » Support refugees, process asylum applications, and deliver publicly run, not for profit accommodation and reception centres to replace Direct Provision.
- » Regulate economic migration including employment permits and residence permits.

- » Deliver on integration policy and supporting communities hosting refugees.

AIMA will be responsible for coordinating a whole of government response, implementing the plans to replace direct provision and bringing a new focus to integration. Addressing these will take time, investment into accommodation, ICT and processing systems, and the recruitment of new staff. Under Labour, the remit of this new Agency will include:

- » Management of the International Protection (IP) system, the timely assessment of IP applications and the repatriation of unsuccessful applicants.
- » Delivery of the comprehensive accommodation strategy for IP applicants and the direct public management of Reception and Integration centres and Accommodation centres.
- » Ensuring that when new centres are opened that access to healthcare, education, transport, and other services are coordinated and resourced.
- » Management of the Temporary Protection system and ensuring where hotels are used for accommodation that there is provision for dual community use.
- » Delivery of clear, transparent communications and the outstanding recommendations of the Expert Advisory Group and the 2021 White Paper.
- » Providing anti-racism and cultural awareness training for public servants.
- » Undertaking socio-economic analyses and impact assessments in host areas to better inform the planning of public services.
- » Overseeing the collection of data and commissioning of research on migration and integration to inform strategic planning and investment.
- » Working with the Department of Enterprise to assess annual additional employment needs, and the management of a comprehensive database showing shortages in specific job fields to ensure

the employment permits system accurately reflects the labour needs of the Irish economy.

- » A review of the permits and visa system to coordinate oversight and the processing of all visa applications, employment permits (working with the Department of Enterprise), student visas, and family reunification.
- » The maintenance of a list of recognised colleges and schools that sponsor student visas and the regular inspection of such institutions to ensure compliance.

SUPPORTING AND PROTECTING MIGRANTS

Labour will provide for immediate family reunion rights for legally resident migrants in full time employment as is the case for critical skills permit holders. The workers currently excluded provide essential services in areas like the care and agri-food sectors that are essential to the functioning of our society.

Labour will improve the employment permit system to protect vulnerable migrant workers, with full mobility to change employers after 12 months. The annual renewal fee should be reasonable, and we will reduce it in line with the cost of other public identity cards. We will consider increasing the number of hours a student visa holder can work to address the increased cost of living after a review of current rules, including family reunion criteria.

Labour will review the current system of direct provision payments to restore the original ratio with the supplementary welfare allowance and seek to introduce an international protection child payment as proposed in the White Paper. We will allow IP applicants to work after three months and seek to process applications within the same time period.

Migrants make a significant contribution to our economy and society but are vulnerable to exploitation, intimidation, and attack. To promote integration and protect social and employment rights Labour will:

- » Roll out information campaigns to inform communities of the positive impact of

migration, what additional supports are being put in place, and debunk myths and misinformation.

- » Fully resource the National Action Plan against Racism, and pass hate speech legislation.
- » Develop more community-based initiatives inclusive of migrants and Irish citizens to grow local social networks and social solidarity.
- » Work with social partners and civil society organisations to ensure migrants are supported in the workplace to tackle exploitation and know their rights.
- » Ensure every recipient of an employment permit is provided with information, independent of their employer, about the right to join a trade union, and their employment rights in Ireland, along with contact details for ICTU and the WRC.
- » Introduce a pilot ongoing mechanism for undocumented people to regularise their immigration status with regular close monitoring.

INTEGRATION AND PATHWAYS TO CITIZENSHIP

Labour will develop a new national migrant integration strategy, make available free English and Irish language, civics, and cultural courses to all migrants, and encourage participation in our communities and political system. We will seek to improve the recognition of qualifications from non-EEA countries, and work with professional bodies to fast-track conversion courses where necessary.

Labour will streamline the naturalisation process after a review of citizenship pathways and develop proposals for the introduction of an English or Irish language and a civics test as is required in other countries like France. We will also:

- » Reduce the cost of citizenship fees, waive these for children and address the long waiting times for naturalisation.

- » Ensure that every child born here has a pathway to Irish citizenship.
- » Review residency rules and ensure that when naturalisation is not an option or desire for long term residents provide clear pathways for permanent residency.

36. DEFENCE, SECURITY AND NEUTRALITY

Our mission is to restore our Defence Forces, strengthen our national security, address historic under-resourcing, and protect our position of military neutrality.

After years of neglect our Defence Forces are in crisis, and the greatest threat to our national security is the falling strength of our army, navy and air corps. Labour will reverse this and rebuild our Defence Forces so that Ireland is prepared for current and future threats and ready to continue our proud role in UN peacekeeping missions.

REBUILDING OUR DEFENCE FORCES

The report of the Commission on the Defence Forces provided a blueprint for rebuilding our Defence Forces, and Labour will invest to meet the Level of Ambition 2 to enhance our military capabilities and continue our strong record of peacekeeping missions.

The establishment strength of the Permanent Defence Forces is 9,600 but at the end of August was 23% below that, with 7,426 personnel across the three services. Our immediate first goal will be to implement a workforce strategy to meet the current agreed strength of 9,600, and a medium-term plan to grow that by a further 2,000.

The housing crisis permeates all aspects of Irish life and providing affordable homes for Defence Forces personnel is a key way to boost recruitment. Vacant properties in the Curragh and on other sites should be brought back into use to house serving members and their families. Labour will also establish a partnership between the Department of Defence and AHBs to develop non-essential sites in the Defence Forces land bank to house service members and their families.

Our Defence Forces must be prepared for the impact of climate change in responding to emergencies and natural disasters, not just at

home but also while operating overseas. Future investment in equipment and facilities must also be focused on achieving carbon neutrality.

To rebuild our Defence Forces, Labour will:

- » Develop a workforce recruitment and retention strategy to reach the current establishment strength of 9,500 and then progress plans to recruit an additional 2,000 Defence Forces personnel within the lifetime of the next government.
- » Reform the command-and-control structures of the Defence Forces to empower the Chief of Staff and provide appointments for the representative associations to the External Oversight Body and make it fully inclusive.
- » Increase investment in our Defence Forces to meet the Level of Ambition 2 as outlined in the Commission on the Defence Forces report, with an accelerated upgrade of the naval fleet and investment in primary radar capability.
- » Ensure barracks and associated facilities are upgraded and maintained to the highest standards, bring vacant residential properties back into use, and work with AHBs to develop new housing on Defence Forces land for service members and their families.
- » Provide suitable facilities in Dublin before the location of the new inshore patrol vessels there.
- » Deploy unmanned aerial and sea drone technologies to improve monitoring and security in our territorial waters.
- » Carry out an evaluation of the Air Corps requirements to protect Irish airspace and provide intercept capability, including the projected cost and infrastructure requirements.
- » Establish expert led reviews on whether to transfer responsibility for the Irish Coast Guard and National Cyber Security Centre to the Department of Defence.

- » Develop and implement plans for carbon neutrality and prepare for the impact of climate change on the operating environment at home and abroad.
- » Undertake a strategy to encourage more women into the Defence Forces, aiming for a target of 35% women participation.
- » Address issues of sexual assault, discrimination, harassment and bullying in the Defence Forces, as brought forward by the Women of Honor group, and work towards implementing outstanding IRG recommendations.

IMPROVING TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Labour will strengthen the roles of the representative associations as key stakeholders with an entitlement to proper engagement, consultation and meaningful dialogue with the military authorities, Department, and Minister of Defence in advance of decisions being made. The long overdue affiliation of Defence Forces representative associations to ICTU is welcome but overly onerous restrictions have been placed on members, and Labour will review these to ensure full affiliate membership for Defence Force representative associations.

A significant barrier to recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces, particularly for women, is the absence of a sufficient work-life balance. The Defence Forces are still excluded from the provisions of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997. Labour will address this while acknowledging that some activities may require exemptions. These exemptions will be mitigated by appropriate protections in agreement with the representative associations, such as Time Off in Lieu (TOIL), additional annual leave in certain streams, and family reunion flights for personnel deployed overseas.

Labour will remove the current policy of not paying Defence Force personnel overtime for working outside of normal working hours. This will enhance recruitment to the service, reestablish the Defence Forces as a competitive employer of choice, and ensure retention is prioritised for those personnel who have made

the choice to remain in the Defence Forces and in the service of the State.

To improve terms and conditions, Labour will:

- » Establish an independent review, in consultation with the representative associations of pay and allowances including duty rates and pension coverage to determine barriers to recruitment and retention, benchmark to international comparators, and implement recommended pay rises and pension changes.
- » The review will include the need for an occupational supplementary pension as a key retention measure for post-2013 Defence Force members, and applicable to other frontline uniformed services such as An Garda Síochána, the Prison Service and Fire Service, to bridge the gap for those forced to retire early.
- » Improve the work-life balance of Defence Forces personnel by implementing the working time directive and pay overtime for working outside normal hours.
- » In consultation with the representative organisations, update the Defence Force Regulations (Administrative Instructions) C.S.4, revise on an annual basis to ensure more flexibility and review technical pay to improve retention.
- » As recommended by the Commission of the Defence Forces, introduce Long Service Increments to the pay scales of all ranks of enlisted personnel.
- » Fast track the introduction of Lance Corporal Rank following acceptance by the Commission of the Defence Forces.
- » Establish workable family friendly policies to include the provision of childcare facilities for those serving both at home and overseas.

RECOGNISE NATIONAL SERVICE

Ireland must do more to recognise and reward the contributions of veteran Defence Force members. We will develop a National Veterans Policy that will clearly and respectfully establish

the State's obligations to those who have served in our armed forces. We will work with veterans, the Defence Forces representative associations and other stakeholder groups such as ONE to ensure that our ex-servicemen and women are supported in post-military life. The strength of the Reserve Defence Force needs to be swiftly rebuilt and skills in areas such as cyber defence and security will be fully incorporated.

To recognise national service, Labour will:

- » Introduce an automatic medical card for any member of the Defence Forces who must leave the service due to medical reasons.
- » Work with the different veterans' groups and other stakeholders to create a National Veterans Policy that clearly and respectfully establishes the State's obligations to those who have served in our armed forces.
- » Establish an Office for Veterans Affairs, support and enhance Veteran Homes and Support Centres, and deliver dedicated mental health supports.
- » Initiate a review of the policy for the awarding of medals to all ranks of the Defence Forces, removing administrative barriers to recognition of distinguished and meritorious service, both current and posthumous.
- » Reinvigorate the Reserve Defence Forces through improved benefits for volunteers and establish a Cyber Defence Reserve within the RDF.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Ireland needs to overhaul our national security structures and underpin the National Security Analysis Centre in the Department of An Taoiseach with legislation. There is a growing lack of democratic scrutiny and oversight despite recent alarming developments such as the HSE cyber-attack, the impact of the pandemic and rising global tensions. The veil of secrecy should be partially lifted with national security briefings provided to Opposition Leaders as is routine in many neighbouring countries.

To strengthen our national security, Labour will:

- » Publish a National Security Strategy, place the National Security Analysis Centre (NSAC) on a statutory footing as an accountable agency, and review the progress of relevant recommendations from the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, and the Commission on the Defence Forces.
- » Develop an Oireachtas accountability mechanism to oversee the National Security strategy, NSAC and the security roles of the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána.
- » Establish an independent Examiner of Terrorist and Serious Crime legislation.
- » Review the vulnerabilities from the use of CCTV and other technologies in the Houses of the Oireachtas, other State properties and high security locations.

NEUTRALITY

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, war in the Middle East and increased prevalence of hybrid warfare by state and non-state actors has brought security considerations to the fore. Ireland should not compromise on our long-established position of military neutrality but equally, we should not compromise on our values and their promotion – we cannot be politically neutral in the face of imperial aggression or genocide.

Labour is committed to retaining and protecting Ireland's long-standing policy of military neutrality by amending our Constitution. Our proposed wording published in 2002 if adopted would confirm Ireland may accept any obligation arising from membership of the UN or from action taken under its aegis but shall not be a member of any organisation or party to any international agreement or arrangement whereby it becomes bound to commit its military aid to the defence of another state.

Labour recognises the incredible work done by the Irish Defence Forces over many decades in cultivating and maintaining an excellent reputation abroad on UN peacekeeping missions and we want to ensure that that

reputation endures. Our position of neutrality and support of the Triple Lock protects our Defence Forces, whereby they would only serve as representatives of the global community approved through the UN rather than acting as just for a part of the world.

To protect our neutrality, Labour will:

- » Maintain and protect Ireland's long-standing position of military neutrality and support a referendum to enshrine it in our Constitution.
- » Retain the Triple Lock for approval of peacekeeping missions under the UN with changes to allow for larger, short-term deployments of personnel for emergency evacuations and protection missions, up from the current limit of 12.
- » Ensure Irish air space and airports are not used for the transport of munitions and weapons of war.

37. OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD

Our Mission as a party of the international movement of socialists and social democrats is an ethical Irish foreign policy that is rights-based, respects international law, promotes human rights and development, seeks to limit and address the impacts of climate change, and gives concrete expression to our ideals of international solidarity.

OUR FOREIGN POLICY COMMITMENTS

Labour believes that Ireland must be an active global voice for the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and that the Irish government must focus our national and international activity on achieving these aims.

Labour will pursue a distinctive foreign policy for Ireland that promotes peace, human rights, equality, and respect for international law with a specific focus on gender equality, workers' rights and climate advocacy. We will continue to develop Ireland's strategic relationships with the EU, strengthen and renew ties with the UK, and build our role internationally as a voice for peace and development.

Labour supports international tax justice and recognises the link between tax and human rights and will continue to work for increased international tax transparency and the implementation of both Pillar One and Pillar Two of the OECD/G20 inclusive framework on BEPS. We will oppose trade agreements that include investment court systems that have the potential to undermine social and environmental regulations.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change deepens global inequality, increases conflict, causes hunger and disease, and results in increased migration. It is the greatest issue facing our planet and our people. Labour will:

- » Seek a clear commitment at the UN to end fossil fuel extraction and endorse the development of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

- » Work to build an international coalition to limit the influence of fossil fuel companies and petro-States in UN COP conferences.
- » Meet Ireland's commitments at recent COP meetings to keep 1.5 alive, and work with partners for a stronger and more ambitious loss and damage fund.
- » Work with international partners to deliver on the annual global commitment of \$100 billion a year in climate finance for developing countries, and for an Irish fair share commitment of €500m per year.
- » Withdraw Ireland from the Energy Charter Treaty, and support efforts at a European level for the EU to leave the ECT en bloc.
- » Ensure the EU develops a comprehensive strategy for working with African and other vulnerable countries to address the impact of climate change and climate driven migration, with a specific focus on sub-Saharan and western Africa.

GENDER EQUALITY

Labour will pursue a feminist foreign policy because women and men are globally not equal, and women and children are particularly at risk in conflict and war, so we will:

- » Advocate for the rights of women and girls globally, for equal participation of women in all areas of society and critically for reproductive rights, and campaign for dedicated resources to achieve this.
- » Appoint a dedicated Ambassador for advancing gender equality and a feminist foreign policy.

WORKERS' RIGHTS

As the political wing of the trade union movement, Labour has always sought decency at work. In a globalised economy where many goods and services consumed in Ireland derive from the labour of workers based overseas, continuing this advocacy means pushing for better working conditions in all countries. Labour will, working with like-minded countries and international trade union organisations support the strengthening of international corporate

sustainability and human rights due diligence legislation and:

- » Promote workers' rights globally with strong support for the International Labour Organisation.
- » Back calls for the implementation of dissuasive sanctions for those who violate workers' human rights or their environmental duties.
- » Ensure transparent reporting by firms about the risk of labour exploitation and human trafficking in their supply chains.
- » Seek the introduction of meaningful remedies for victims and trade unions where such violations are found.

OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Labour will meet our longstanding commitment of 0.7% of economic output for development assistance by 2030, and direct that to projects where it will have the most impact on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular for hunger, the climate crisis and gender inequality. We will target for 25% of all Irish ODA to be allocated to locally led initiatives in partner countries.

PALESTINE

Labour supports the cause of the people of Palestine and in government will work to find a peaceful and secure resolution of the conflict. Labour opposes the permanent annexation by Israel of Palestinian land and the system of apartheid, and this is why we support the BDS movement. We will enact the Occupied Territories Bill to ban the sale of settler goods. Within the EU and UN, Ireland must act to hold the Israeli government to account for its continued violation of international law and human rights.

There must be an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza to stop the genocide. All hostages must be released, unimpeded access granted for humanitarian aid, the illegal occupation of Palestinian land must end and there must be prosecutions for all those involved in war crimes. The Israeli military should

stop its invasion of Lebanon and respect UN peacekeepers.

We support a two-state solution for Palestine and Israel, and we will seek trade sanctions on Israel due to its actions against the Palestinian people, and a suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. Labour will provide statutory protection against dismissal for workers who refuse to handle goods produced by regimes formally being investigated for genocide by the ICJ.

UKRAINE

Labour recognises the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders and condemns unequivocally Russia's brutal invasion and war crimes against Ukrainian civilians. Labour will provide political, humanitarian, financial and other appropriate support to the Ukrainian people and continue to support Ukrainian refugees in Ireland and Ukraine's membership application of the European Union. We will also:

- » Ensure Russia is held to account for its war of aggression against Ukraine.
- » Support the use of sanctioned Russian assets to rebuild Ukraine.

TACKLE HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Labour will pass our Proceeds of Crime (Gross Human Rights Abuses) Bill, a Magnitsky type law, to allow for the seizure of the assets of human rights violators, and work at an EU level to strengthen laws to tackle and seize the billions of illicit revenue generated by crime, war and conflict. We will also:

- » Increase support to human rights defenders and civil society worldwide.
- » Seek to protect persons with disabilities in conflict areas and promote the international implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- » Ensure Ireland recognises the Armenian genocide.
- » Advocate for the improved treatment of the Uigher people in China.

- » Support the Belarussian democratic movement, civil society, and democratic forces in exile.
- » Support people globally affected by civil war and insurgencies, recognising that conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Ethiopia, and countries across the Maghreb are contributing to the deaths of tens of thousands of people annually and driving increased migration into Europe, and that climate change will only cause more war.

IRISH EMBASSY NETWORK

Labour will assess where new embassies and consulates can be opened to grow Irish trade and international influence and meet our climate, workers' rights, and feminist policy objectives. We will review the purpose of our new Embassy in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

RE-ENGAGING THE DIASPORA

As our diaspora ages, and generations become more distant and dispersed, Ireland needs to develop a new strategy to re-engage with those less connected to their Irish heritage. Labour will create a summer programme in Ireland for young adults from our diaspora to build a new generation of ties within the global Irish network. We will also enhance our capacity to respond to the needs of the Irish global community, particularly those concentrated groups in the UK, US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and introduce a new Diaspora strategy from 2025.

EUROPEAN UNION

As members of the Party of European Socialists, Labour is committed to the European Union as a project of peace and shared prosperity, and to realising the project of a social Europe in which democracy, freedom, equality, and justice form the basis of all policymaking. In the EU, we will strongly promote adherence to human rights, democratic freedoms, and international law among EU member states and in countries on Europe's borders. We will oppose moves towards a deeper militarisation of the EU.

Labour supports:

- » A more social and environmental Europe, and stronger compliance by Ireland with EU directives
- » Better communication with the public about the policy changes that are being debated in Europe and how those proposals will impact on our lives.
- » A more democratic Europe with stronger powers for the European Parliament, and measures to ensure compliance with the rule of Law in the EU.
- » The future enlargement of the EU based on the full respect of workers' and social rights, social dialogue, and the EU social acquis with membership pathways for Ukraine, Moldova, and countries in the Western Balkans.
- » A statutory commitment to nominate a male and a female Commissioner and have those names approved by the Oireachtas.

We will seek EU agreement for transferable voting rights for EU citizens resident in a country for more than five years to vote in the national elections of their new home country.

IRISH-BRITISH RELATIONS

We welcome the moves by the new British government to improve relations with the EU. Ireland must continue to rebuild links with the UK post -Brexit, embed the Windsor Agreement, and support ambitious closer cooperation in the years ahead including with the Scottish government and Welsh Executive. Labour will seek to work with the British government on planning for a future referendum as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement.

UNITED NATIONS

In the UN we will seek to offer a distinctive Irish contribution to build global coalitions for progress rather than take sides with any of the traditional divisions in international affairs.

Labour supports:

- » Ambitious UN reform in favour of transparency, accountability, and effectiveness, and full commitment to the Agenda 2030 and the development of an ambitious and effective successor.
- » The introduction of a UN binding treaty on business and human rights, and a new Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation
- » Continue to work to achieve progress within the UN on the range of treaties and negotiations including on weapons and materials of war.

We support reform of the World Trade Organisation to make it fit for the challenges of the 21st century including the green transition and the digital revolution by ensuring a level playing field. In advance of future pandemics, we must be ready to embrace proposals like the TRIPs waiver.

APPENDIX: BUDGET PLANS AND COSTINGS

The recently published Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan outlined average net expenditure growth of 5.1% from 2026 to 2030 but includes a 6.5% increase in 2026. The Labour Party asked the Parliamentary Budget Office to model our Budget conditions including what an alternative annual expenditure ceiling of 6% would entail. The criteria we sought were:

- » Indexation for income tax credits and bands, and weekly social welfare payments based on an average of projected inflation and wage growth.
- » A new public sector pay deal from 2027 linked to projected wage growth.
- » Maintaining existing levels of service and accounting for demographic changes.
- » Additional capital spending from 2027 to reach and maintain 14.5% of total spending.
- » Inclusion of €400 million of annual net revenue raising measures.

There is great uncertainty in future fiscal and budget projections, as we have also seen over the last five years. The long-term impact of corporation tax reform under the OECD BEPS2.0 process and the new Trump administration on future revenues is unknown.

Labour believes that average net expenditure growth of just above 5.1% will be sufficient factoring in the future demands on public services however more detailed analysis will be required by a new government before the submission of a revised Medium Term Fiscal and Structural Plan.

Labour will also undertake a comprehensive review of public spending including a waste audit across each Department and agency. Due to time constraints the analysis also does not include the impact of growing employment to 3 million and reducing unemployment below 4%.

Overview of Data and Methodology (From PBO)

The analysis relies on the following data and assumptions:

- » Expenditure data is taken from the Government's Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan.
- » Population projections are taken from the CSO.
- » Forecasts for inflation (HICP) and wages (wages per head), are taken from the Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan.
- » The cost of indexing tax credits, bands and social welfare payments are estimated using the ESRI's microsimulation model, SWITCH. The underlying dataset for SWITCH is the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022. Forecasts of earnings, price, population and the growth of macroeconomic variables, as per the Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan, are nested into the SWITCH analysis. Through a cumulative uprating process, the costs are calculated up to 2030. The use of a microsimulation model enables us to capture the interaction effects between these policies.

The cost of the Public Sector Pay Deal and the Existing Level of Service (ELS) expenditure are determined using a top-down macroeconomic approach. This involves uprating the relevant spending category according to the growth rate of the corresponding macroeconomic factor.

- » The cost of the new public sector pay deal is calculated by linking government employee compensation to wages per head growth as set out in the Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan. This cost has also been adjusted to account for the cumulative increase in public sector numbers stemming from ELS spending to meet demographic needs.
- » ELS spending is calculated by considering demographic changes and indexing certain expenditures to forecast inflation. For intermediate consumption and capital

expenditure, ELS spending is estimated based on price and population growth. For all other expenditure components (excluding interest and expenditure items largely outside the government's control), it is estimated based on population growth alone. This reflects a "no policy change" stance, with the per capita nominal expenditure remaining constant over time. Adjusting for inflation, such as indexing social payments, would be considered a policy change.

- » Adjustments are made to the ELS estimate for certain spending items to account for the impact of the proposed policies. For example, the ELS estimate for government social payments incorporates the impact of the policies indexing social welfare rates. Additionally, ELS spending for current year's capital is calculated by applying inflation and population growth to the previous year's capital allocation.
- » Fiscal space is estimated by comparing the available funds against the two proposed expenditure baselines, subtracting the projected new modelled net primary expenditure, as it includes proposed expenditure measures, revenue-reducing measures related to the indexation of tax credits and bands and an allowance of €400 million for next revenue raising measures. The baselines are:
 1. A cap on the annual growth of net primary expenditure, aligned with the Government's Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan, averaging 5.1% annually from 2026 to 2030.
 2. Net Primary spending growth set at 6% year-on-year from 2026 to 2030.
 - *Note that under our calculations, an estimated negative fiscal space indicates that, after accounting for proposed policy measures, revenue-raising will be needed to adhere to spending rule.*

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results.

- » First, we compare the modelled net primary expenditure to an expenditure ceiling aligned with the Government's Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan (MTFSP), with net primary spending growth averaging 5.1% annually from 2026 to 2030. This comparison shows that the unallocated fiscal space starts at €2,963 million in 2026 and increases over time, reaching €5,633 million in 2030.
- » Under an expenditure ceiling of 6% growth, the unallocated fiscal space begins at €2,386 million in 2026, and increases over time, standing at €12,319 million in 2030.

Table 1: Results and cost estimates (€ million per annum)

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Indexing of tax credits and bands	-	739.5	806.4	842.1	904.8	969.9
Indexing social welfare payments	-	785.3	806.3	799.4	819.9	853.6
Cost of Public sector pay deal**	-	554.7	1,663.2	1,550.6	1583.3	1613.6
Net Revenue Raising Measures	-	-400.0	-400.0	-400.0	-400.0	-400.0
ELS Cost Estimate***		2,032.5	2,733.7	2,842.9	2852.6	2,894.8
Allocated capital expenditure (in levels)	16,115*	17,530*	20.875	21,668	22,535	23,431
Modelled Net Primary Expenditure (A)	125,215*	130,342	138,463	143,969	149,547	155,247
Expenditure Ceiling MTFSP (B)	125,215 *	133,305*	139,835*	147,415*	154,385*	160,880*
Expenditure Ceiling at 6% (C)	125,215*	132,728	140,692	149,133	158,081	167,566
Unallocated fiscal space MTFSP (B-A)	-	2,963	1,372	3,446	4,838	5,633
Unallocated fiscal space at 6% (C-A)	-	2,386	2,229	5,164	8,534	12,319

Notes: Income tax credits and bands, as well as social welfare payments, are indexed to the average of projected inflation and wage growth. Net primary expenditure is total government expenditure net of interest payments, with levels of interest payments taken from the Government's Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan. It also excludes expenditure on programmes matched and/or cofinanced by the European Union, and cyclical elements of unemployment benefit expenditure. Discretionary revenue measures and one-off/temporary expenditure are set to zero. An allowance of €400 million for net revenue raising measures is incorporated into the calculations. The base year in the calculations is 2025, with reported net primary expenditure and its components taken from the Government's Medium-Term Fiscal

and Structural Plan. Rounding may affect the aggregation of totals.

* denotes expenditure levels taken directly from the Government's Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan.

**Cost of the public sector deal is calculated to account for the increase in numbers resulting from demographic changes. The cost for 2026 is estimated by the PBO by applying the 2026 pay deal to the 2025 compensation of employees figure and adjusting it for population growth in 2026.

*** In addition to accounting for the impact of population growth and inflation, it also reflects the effect of cumulative increases in capital and social welfare payments.



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