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# Our Shared Future

## Introduction

This is a defining moment for our country. We face urgent challenges which touch every community. In the space of a few short months our world has turned upside down. Lives have been lost and hearts broken, and our lives and livelihoods have been changed utterly. In striving together against something which threatens us all, we have shown we can surprise ourselves - adapting quickly, building new alliances and collaborating in ways we never expected. All to realise a common purpose: our common future.

COVID-19 has presented the global community with a terrible set of challenges to add to the ongoing climate and biodiversity emergency. In this Programme for Government we are asserting our ambition to meet these challenges, repair the damage that has been inflicted by the pandemic, and take the renewed spirit arising from these challenging times and translate it into action. Action that can deliver a better quality of life for all, equality within society and a deeper sense of connection to the natural world around us, and each other.

The world was approaching a climate crisis long before COVID-19 hit our shores. The pandemic has acted as a catalyst, enabling us to implement radical policies that were considered impossible before; it will not and must not be used as an excuse for failure to take immediate action to deliver on all that is needed to build a better society and a secure future for all living things. This is a Programme to recover our economy, rebuild our society, renew our communities, and respond to the challenges we face both nationally and internationally. This will be a Government of enterprise, creating new jobs, preparing for the jobs of the future, driving our economic recovery, and improving the quality of life for all our people.

This Programme shows that it is possible to bring together the best thinking from three distinct parties, who differ fundamentally in terms of history. It creates a vision for reform and renewal that can help Ireland recover and thrive. It will not be easy, and this Programme does not offer easy solutions. Not everything will be achieved within the lifetime of this Government. But as we begin to make some transformative changes for our country we recognise that these steps have the potential to deliver radical change. This Government will be a genuine partnership between all involved and the policies outlined reflect a shared desire to work together and a mutual respect for each other's policies, beliefs and values.

The actions taken over the next five years will define this nation's future direction for decades to come. Our objective is to contribute positively towards a wider global response to how we shape the post-COVID recovery and also how we lead as an exemplar in decarbonising our economy.

We recognise that the task is immense. Some of the biggest tasks include achieving social solidarity and equality of opportunity, reaching ecological harmony and economic equity, securing good livelihoods from our land and housing for all, and embracing our cultural diversity. It is a task we will not shirk from.

The new Government will make every effort to get people back to work, to reopen businesses, while developing the strategies and the policies to drive this forward. We will stimulate the economy through investment in public infrastructure, and critical areas such as housing, healthcare, transport and energy.

The wellbeing of our nation, however, goes beyond the narrow confines of economic growth. Over the next five years the Government will use wellbeing indicators as well as economic indicators to point out inequalities and help ensure that policies are driven by a desire to do better by people.

Our economy must recover in a way that is fair and balanced, leaves no one behind, and is future-proofed against shocks. Embedding resilience within our economy must become a way of life, recognising our strength as a home for international business, and crucially how our own indigenous small and medium sized enterprises can trade in a supportive environment.

This is a vision for Ireland that seeks to move beyond division and discord and find shared solutions. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of Climate Action where we show that it is possible to move beyond politics and deliver transformative change that benefits our agriculture and fisheries, our society, our economy and our planet.

This Programme seeks to deliver a better life for all. We must take the good things we have learned from the pandemic and apply them towards a resilient future. Therefore this Government will facilitate and support remote working, reduce the time wasted in our cars and ensure that families have more time together.

The Programme has balanced regional development at its heart because all parts of Ireland must thrive if we are to prosper as a country. By continuing to invest in rural Ireland, ensuring global connectivity without sacrificing its best features, we will ensure that all parts of our country are prosperous, sustainable and resilient.

As we rebuild our economy and reimagine our society we will renew our role in Europe and the world. Ireland's total commitment to the aims and ideals of the EU has been a consistent feature of our membership. Ireland is also committed to the aims and ideals of the United Nations and we willingly accept the obligations that arise from being part of the world community.

Our relationship with our nearest neighbour has been challenged by Brexit but this government will build on the good work of the last administration by ensuring that the spirit and the letter of the Good Friday Agreement are protected. We will work to protect the island of Ireland from the worst effects of Brexit as we develop a new relationship with the United Kingdom. By continuing to build a close relationship with Northern Ireland, the new Government will also look forward to how we can share this island together.

This Programme outlines a vision of an Ireland for all ages where arts and culture thrives, the Irish language is nurtured and developed, and sport inspires us to healthier and better lives. An Ireland that is a welcoming place to all visitors, whether they are here on holidays, to learn, to seek refuge, or for business. An Ireland for people of all ages. The Programme therefore includes policies to help

people raise their children in all circumstances with real care, encourage youth political participation, promote digital safety, and value our older people.

As the country begins to reawaken, this Programme will strive to commemorate those we have lost, to celebrate all those who helped us survive and endure, and ensure that there is support for all those who feel alone or lost. The pandemic has shaken us in many ways. Repairing that in every aspect, including mental health, will take time and the support of this Government.

COVID-19 upended our certainties and changed our world. It is our obligation to ensure that we emerge from this Emergency having learned its lessons and with a renewed determination to build a better future. The solidarity shown during the emergency can serve as an article of faith in the future and what we can achieve together.

The goals which we have set ourselves are deeply ambitious, but they are achievable. Our commitment is that we will work with good faith and urgency to deliver this programme of recovery and reform for the benefit of all our people.

Éire atá ar thóir láidreachta ó thaobh an gheilleagair agus ó thaobh na sochaí sóisialta de, ceangail a thógáil agus a neartú ar an oileán seo agus a bheith mar ghuth dearfach don chomhoibriú idirnáisiúnta - seo ár dtiomantas.

## Mission: A Better Quality of Life for All

### Measurement

The Government is conscious that we need to supplement our existing economic measurements with new ones. We know that our existing measures of economic performance fail to measure matters such as damage to the environment and voluntary work. They also overlook equality of opportunity, distribution of wealth and income and only value public expenditure on the basis of the inputs used, not the outcomes achieved.

We will develop a set of indicators to create a broader context for policy making, to include

- A set of well-being indices to create a well-rounded, holistic view of how our society is faring.
- A balanced scorecard for each area of public policy focused on outcomes and the impact that those policies have on individuals and communities. Initially this will be focused on housing, education and health.

The development of this work will be informed by the experience of other jurisdictions which have developed similar measures in recent years. Through the Department of the Taoiseach, we will convene a group of experts from the public service, academia, NGOs and the private sector to guide this work.

Once developed, we will ensure that it is utilised in a systematic way across government policymaking at local and national levels in setting budgetary priorities, evaluating programmes and reporting progress. This will be an important complement to existing economic measurement tools.

### Town Centres First

We will commit to the development of a Town Centre First policy, modelled on the scheme developed by the Scottish Government, and informed by the Town Centre First pilot project. We will implement a strategic approach to town centre regeneration by utilising existing buildings and unused lands for new development, and promote residential occupancy in our rural towns and villages. We will use the National Planning Framework as our template.

We will:

- Prioritise a Town Centres First collaborative and strategic approach to the regeneration of our villages and towns, using the Collaborative Town Centres Health Check (CTCHC) framework to gather data and lead actions.
- Bring forward an expanded Town and Village Renewal Scheme to bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use and promote residential occupancy.
- Provide seed capital to local authorities to provide serviced sites at cost in towns and villages to allow individuals and families build homes.

# A National Clean Air Strategy

We will publish the first ever clean air strategy. We will:

- develop a regional approach to air quality and noise enforcement.
- develop a multi-agency approach to clamping down on the sale of high sulphur content fuel imported from the UK, with local authorities and the Revenue Commissioners involved.
- invest in our network of monitoring stations, to provide scientific evidence of air quality across different parts of the country, including real-time and localised air quality information.
- Extend the Smoky Coal ban to new towns and over the term of government move towards a full nationwide ban.

## Work-life Balance

We will bring forward proposals on a right to disconnect in 2020. We will also consider a role for the Workplace Relations Commission in drawing up a code in this area.

# Transport

We are committed to a fundamental change in the nature of transport in Ireland.

Necessary improvements in climate impact, quality of life, air quality and physical and mental health demand that every effort is made by the Government to make active travel and public transport better and more accessible.

Each local authority will be immediately mandated to carry out an assessment of their road network to see where space can be reallocated for pedestrians and cyclists. This should be done immediately.

## Cycling and Walking

Cycling and electric cycling have enormous potential to facilitate a high proportion of daily trips if we provide an environment which protects and prioritises this mode of transport. We will promote cycling and pedestrian safety and enable this through improved design, increased separation and better signage and marking.

The Government will commit to an allocation of 10% of the total transport capital budget for cycling projects and an allocation of 10% of the total capital budget for pedestrian infrastructure. The Government's commitment to cycling and pedestrian projects will be set at 20% of the 2020 capital budget (€360 million) per year for the lifetime of the Government.

This commitment will deliver a five-year, multi-annual funding programme linked with a specific target of new separated cycling and walking infrastructure which will be delivered or under construction by end 2024. This will enable a step change in the number of people taking daily journeys by foot and bicycle which will help improve quality of life and air quality.

The total spend on walking and cycling infrastructure includes committed funding from Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport for active travel, greenways and an agreed pedestrian and cycling allocation from the Bus Connects programme.

Additional funding to meet the annual ceiling will be provided through the Recovery Fund with a focus on jobs-intensive infrastructure.

This funding will be subject to the normal rules in relation to the carry forward of capital funding.

In addition to this expenditure commitment we will undertake other measures to help enable the continued increase in the numbers of people walking and cycling each day.

We will:

- Mandate that every local authority, with assistance from the National Transport Authority (NTA), adopts a high-quality cycling policy, carries out an assessment of their roads network and develops cycle network plans which will be implemented with the help of a suitably qualified Cycling Officer with clear powers and role.
- Expand and enhance the expertise on active travel needed to dramatically improve infrastructure and participation both in the NTA and local authorities, including by establishing Regional Cycle Design Offices, co-located in the seven Regional Design Offices for roads, to support local authorities.
- Dramatically increase the number of children walking and cycling to primary and secondary school by mandating the Department of Transport to work with schools across Ireland, local authorities, the Green Schools programme and local initiatives, including Cycle Bus and School Streets.
- Widen the eligibility of the Bike to Work scheme. We will provide an increased proportionate allowance for e-bikes and cargo bikes.
- Ramp up the Cycle Right programme to ensure that all children are offered cycling training in primary school.
- Conduct a review of road traffic policy and legislation to prioritise the safety of walking and cycling.

### Greenways

We will lead the development of an integrated national greenways strategy. This has the potential to transform modal shift, improve air quality and public health.

This commitment to cycling will enable us to achieve the huge ambition of developing an integrated national network of greenways to be used by commuters, leisure cyclists and tourists. We will continue the coordinated approach between central government, local authorities and agencies to deliver on this ambition.

### Transport Infrastructure

In relation to new transport infrastructure, the Government is committed to a 2:1 ratio of expenditure between new public transport infrastructure and new roads over its lifetime. This ratio will be maintained in each Budget by the Government. In the event of an under-spend on roads, this will not impact on public transport spending.

Essential road and public transport maintenance and upkeep budgets will be fully protected to ensure continued public safety and connectivity.

We will continue the investment programme in public transport to improve our bus, light rail, commuter and inter-city rail network across our country.

We will develop and implement the existing strategies for our cities such as the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy, the Galway Transport Strategy, the draft Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy, as well as strategies being developed for Waterford and Limerick, and other projects progressing through planning.

Specifically, the Government will prioritise plans for the delivery of Metrolink, Luas and other light rail expansion, DART expansion and interconnector and Bus Connects in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick.

We are committed to maintaining the existing road network to a high standard and funding safety improvements.

We will continue to invest in new roads infrastructure to ensure that all parts of Ireland are connected to each other.

## Public Transport

We will:

- Review fare structures to ensure that public transport is as accessible as possible, supports the delivery of services and incentivises off-peak travel.
- Task the NTA to produce a park and ride implementation plan for each of the five cities to help reduce congestion and journey times. These will integrate car parking facilities with public transport and cycling networks and will include the provision of secure lockers for bicycles.
- Develop and implement a sustainable rural mobility plan. This will introduce a public transport service standard under which all settlements over a certain size in terms of population, combined with employment or education places, will have a service connecting them to the national public transport system. Local Link will play a key role in this development. This service standard will be informed by the Connected Ireland research being carried out by the NTA.
- Within 12 months conduct a review of the operation and funding of the Local Link service with a view to protecting their existing services and exploring the opportunity to significantly increase their impact on the communities they serve.
- Prioritise public transport projects that enhance regional and rural connectivity, in line with the National Planning Framework, for additional funding in the lifetime of a reviewed and extended National Development Plan.
- Establish a Working Group to utilise the modelling capacity of the NTA and commuter and travel data held by the CIE Group of Companies, the Central Statistics Office, NTA and other stakeholders to identify existing and potential demand for public transport and work to match demand with available services and new services where appropriate.

- Ensure a national integrated public transport system with an integrated timetable, one tag-on ticketing system and coordination between bus and rail timetables of all operators.
- Establish a National Public Transport Forum involving all stakeholders and commence Section 17 of the Dublin Transport Authority Act to establish the Dublin Transport Advisory Council.
- Explore potential synergies between different forms of transport and transport-related services funded by the State via different departments and agencies.
- Accelerate sustainable transport plans for schools. We will complete the review of the School Transport Scheme to seek better outcomes and reduce car journeys. The School Transport Scheme should work in liaison with the Safe Routes to Schools Programme.

## Rail

We will protect existing services by continuing to ensure the level of payment required to operate the Public Service Obligation fleet is adequate to maintain and improve service capacity and frequency.

We will:

- In line with the commitment in the National Planning Framework to balanced regional development, prioritise rail projects in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford on existing and unused lines.
- Continue to fund safety works and capital improvements to the rail network, expand the Irish Rail fleet and progress the electrification of rail services to decrease journey times and emissions.
- Commission an economic evaluation of higher speed rail links between our main cities.
- Improve cycling and storage facilities at stations and on trains, where possible.
- Enhance suburban and commuter rail across the country.
- Consider the report on the future of the Western Rail Corridor and take appropriate action.
- Ringfence funding to ensure swift train platform lift repair and upgrades, to ensure accessibility.

## Buses

We will:

- Protect and expand regional connectivity and connectivity between towns and villages in rural Ireland.
- Address pinch points for buses and expand priority signalling for buses and Real Time Passenger Information.
- Give greater priority to bus services by expanding Quality Bus Corridors and consider the introduction of Bus Rapid Transit Services.

## Decarbonisation of road transport

To achieve our ambitious emission reduction targets, we need to significantly decarbonise our transport fleet with a particular focus on cars and light goods vehicles.

We will:

- Use a range of policy approaches to incentivise use of electric vehicles (EVs) and encourage a shift away from petrol/diesel vehicles.
- Legislate to ban the registration of new fossil-fuelled cars and light vehicles from 2030 onwards and phase out diesel and petrol cars from Irish cities from 2030.
- Review the current motor taxation regime to ensure it adequately captures the harm caused by NOx (nitrogen oxide) and SOx (sulphur oxide) emissions. This will only apply to newly registered vehicles.
- Publish an EV strategy to ensure charging infrastructure stays ahead of demand and provide planning guidance to local authorities.
- Publish a public procurement framework for EVs. By at least 2025, we will only allow public sector bodies to purchase low or no-emissions cars and light goods vehicles.
- Require that all new urban buses be electric hybrid or electric.
- Legislate for e-scooters and e-bikes.
- Publish and implement a 10-year strategy for the haulage sector focused on improving efficiencies, standards, and helping the sector move to a low-carbon future.

## Taxis

The taxi fleet has a disproportionate impact on air quality and climate emissions in urban centres.

We will:

- Continue to support the greening of the taxi fleet and continue to provide financial assistance to taxi drivers switching to battery electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles.
- Review supports available for wheelchair accessible taxi vehicles to enhance accessibility for people with disabilities.

## Road Safety

We will introduce an ambitious road safety strategy targeting the Vision Zero principle.

We will:

- Introduce a new road safety strategy focused on reducing death and injuries of vulnerable road users, pedestrians and cyclists.
- Prioritise the consolidation of the existing road traffic legislation and use that as an opportunity to rectify any anomalies that may have developed which hinder appropriate enforcement.

## Other measures

We will:

- Review and extend the statutory remit of the NTA. This will allow the NTA to work with local authorities to develop transport strategies with a strong legal basis in our cities, towns and regions.
- Enable schools, workplaces and other institutions to stagger opening and closing times.
- Evaluate and bring forward measures for demand management to incentivise modal shift.
- Review and reduce speed limits where appropriate to address both road safety issues and carbon emissions and we will ensure greater compliance.
- Run a pilot to examine the potential for ride sharing apps to improve rural connectivity.

## Mission: Reigniting and Renewing the Economy

### A Jobs-led Recovery

In a few short months, Ireland has gone from a position of record employment to record unemployment and faces an unprecedented challenge in terms of getting people back into employment. Never before has any government faced such a challenge and we will not be found wanting in our response.

Our focus will be to get people back to work as quickly as possible. Our aim is to create 200,000 new jobs by 2025 as well as helping people currently unemployed due to COVID-19 back to work. This will require a concerted focus on SMEs, large companies and the self-employed.

In doing so, we will build a stronger, fairer and more sustainable economy prepared for the next phase of disruptive technologies and on a pathway to a low-carbon future.

By getting people back to work, we can restore our public finances and enable, on a sustainable and long-term basis, better and more accessible public services.

A jobs led recovery will ultimately depend on our ability to secure markets for our goods and services and attract investment into Ireland. We are committed to a pro-enterprise policy framework by providing a stable and sustainable regulatory and tax environment and sound management of the public finances so we can invest in the infrastructure and skills required to enhance competitiveness.

While focusing on the immediate challenge of getting people back to work, we are also conscious of the importance of Just Transition as we end fossil-fuel dependence and as digital disruption and automation becomes more prevalent. We will create economic opportunity through climate action and establish bottom up mechanisms to ensure local and national policy making addresses community needs to ensure that nobody is left behind.

Our approach will be two-fold.

We will publish a series of immediate actions to support the economy to return to capacity – the ‘July Stimulus’. The main tool of that will be the Recovery Fund.

Then, in conjunction with Budget 2021, we will bring forward a National Economic Plan to set out our long-term approach to restore employment. The plan will also detail how we will secure our public finances in a world where we must live with COVID-19 while driving our efforts to decarbonise the economy and prepare for the next phases of technological transformation.

#### Recovery Fund

The Recovery Fund will be a targeted stimulus to increase domestic demand and employment. This Fund will drive strategic change through SMEs, accelerating job creation, decarbonising the economy and ensuring that Ireland is at the forefront of a digital future. Delivering balanced regional growth will be a crucial priority of this Fund.

The Recovery Fund will be available for 2020, 2021 and 2022. It will fund investment for both current and capital projects and will adjust in size as our economy grows and employment recovers.

The Recovery Fund will have three different elements:

- (a) **Infrastructure Development:** Prioritising productive and labour intensive capital investment projects focused on areas such as housing, retrofitting and public and active transport to directly assist and maintain employment but support future employment.
- (b) **Reskilling and retraining:** Expenditure measures to help those who have been made unemployed by COVID-19 and are unable to return to their previous employment, to receive training and upskilling to enable them secure new opportunities.
- (c) **Supporting Investment:** In addition to the assistance provided to boost business agility such as online trading, management and innovation capabilities, we will put in place measures to help Irish companies in accessing credit and capital to support the retention and creation of jobs. This will include consideration of credit guarantees and the role of state backed lenders such as SBCI.

### Immediate Actions

In addition to the Recovery Fund, we will pursue the following actions across the period as part of our July Stimulus.

We will:

- Set out a pathway for the future implementation of the Temporary Wage Subsidy.
- Set out the future distribution of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment based on the principles of fairness and equity.
- Establish sectoral taskforces, comprising of government, independent experts and stakeholders and chaired by line ministers, to focus on the specific needs of sectors and bring forward plans in the context of the National Economic Plan.
- Convene a SME and State Bodies Group to be chaired jointly by the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Business to coordinate the Government's ongoing response to COVID-19 for SMEs.
- Commence a high-level review of the Irish economy led by the Department of the Taoiseach to identify the sectors, which have the greatest opportunity to grow and sustain quality employment in light of the continuing public health crisis, resulting geo-political trends, as well as the long-term challenges of the climate crisis, technological disruption and future public health challenges.
- Enact legislation for the introduction of a new €2 billion Credit Guarantee Scheme, SURE scheme and the warehousing of tax liabilities.
- Review the Business Restart Grant and consider further grant supports for SMEs.
- Scale up MicroFinance Ireland so that it can support greater numbers of small businesses and start-ups in accessing finance. Review how we can utilise and leverage European Investment Bank funding and other opportunities for external funding to the maximum extent possible to support our recovery and transition to a low carbon future.
- Review the operation of the Pandemic Stabilisation Tool and whether changes are needed to enhance the role of the Irish Strategic Investment Fund.
- Set out how commercial rates will be treated for the remainder of 2020.
- Create a code of conduct between landlords and tenants for commercial rents.

- Take further sector specific measures where required. We will consider additional measures that may be needed to support the hospitality, retail, entertainment, arts and leisure sectors.



# National Economic Plan

On the same day as Budget 2021, the Government will set out a National Economic Plan charting our longer-term jobs led recovery.

While there has necessarily been unprecedented state interventions during the COVID-19 Emergency to date, the next suite of measures must take a long-term view of how we return people to employment in a manner that is sustainable.

Throughout this period, we will continue to focus on preparations for a possible transition by the UK to WTO trading terms on the 1st of January 2021.

The National Economic Plan will be guided by the following parameters:

- Support for those who have lost their jobs to return to employment as quickly as possible.
- Promoting a major reskilling programme to enable those who have lost their jobs to develop existing and new skills to match with enterprise need.
- Enabling our SMEs to return to capacity where possible and more broadly to strengthen SME's resilience, productivity and innovation. SMEs are the backbone of our economy and communities across the country and are key drivers of employment.
- Supporting SMEs to compete for public service contracts.
- Ensuring that the employment opportunities created are sustainable and part of our national move to a low-carbon future.
- Identifying and supporting potential areas of growth for Ireland in the COVID-19 global economy.
- Improving the quality and security of jobs and work-life balance.
- Innovation in our workplaces through digitalisation, remote and flexible work practices.
- Backing entrepreneurs and pro-enterprise initiatives.
- Promoting balanced regional development and support for the rural economy.
- Maintaining a supportive environment for Foreign Direct Investment.
- Restoring consumer confidence.

Underpinning the National Economic Plan will be the need to protect the Irish workforce and economy to the greatest extent possible from future shocks due to another public health crisis, Brexit, digital transformation and climate change. That will mean focusing on opportunities in those sectors that are most robust to those and other identifiable threats on the horizon.

This government will put sustainability at the heart of our fiscal, enterprise, innovation and environment policies. We see this recovery as an opportunity to embed structural shifts that will benefit our economy and people, the adoption of technology and innovation, the pursuit of climate resilience both sectorally and nationally.

## Empowering the public service

The National Economic Plan will require a new drive for public services reform for its delivery. It will be implemented through a cross governmental structure with outside involvement to steer the recovery, driven from the Department of the Taoiseach.

We will empower the public service to sustain the speed and flexibility it has shown during the COVID-19 Emergency. We will focus on developing leadership capacity, decision making and the capacity to lead and deliver effective change.

The key levers we will use through our National Economic Plan are:

- Education, training and reskilling
- Investment and stimulus
- Enterprise policy
- Business financing
- Regulation and costs

The measures within each sector to be developed for the National Economic Plan are set out below in greater detail.

### National Economic Plan - Education, Training and Reskilling

We will:

- Implement an upskilling and reskilling programme so that workers from sectors, which are unlikely to return to full capacity in the following year, are enabled to avail of the opportunities in other more sustainable sectors. As part of this, we will publish an updated Apprenticeship Action Plan to look at new ways of structuring, funding and promoting apprenticeships. It will have specific targets for the uptake of apprenticeships by women, people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups. We will by the end of 2020 develop a strong pipeline of apprenticeships and traineeships (including mature apprenticeships) to support our recovery phase and to provide new career paths for people with different interests and abilities. We will embed apprenticeships and traineeships into Irish enterprise.
- Put in place strong and varied labour market activation programmes.
- Publish a Regional Technology and Clustering Programme to strengthen the links between SMEs, Educational Training Boards, multi-national corporations and Third Level Educational institutions and help drive competitiveness, productivity, and innovation in the regions.
- Scale up Enterprise Ireland support for smaller companies to invest in technology for clean processes, waste and energy efficiency.
- Use the Human Capital initiative to deliver a wide range of education and training programmes for jobseekers in tertiary education, including fast turnaround specific skills training, conversion courses into areas of skills shortage and emerging technology.
- Further promote a culture of lifelong learning within the workforce, focusing on increasing the lifelong learning rate from 9% currently to 18% by 2025.
- Work with Further and Higher Education institutions to put in place a strategy to develop new fast track mid-career educational models that can meet the rapidly evolving needs of our new economy.
- In consultation with stakeholders, seek to utilise the surplus from the National Training Fund to implement an upskilling and reskilling programme along with the additional funding for Further and Higher Education institutions.

## National Economic Plan - Investment and stimulus

We will:

- Build upon the **July stimulus plan** and use the Recovery Fund to support those elements of the economy which
  - (a) are in line with the public health advice, able to facilitate additional demand.
  - (b) are in line with the high-level review of the economy.
  - (c) will have the greatest impact nationally and regionally.
- Bring forward the review of the National Development Plan.
- Transform NewERA from an oversight role to a more developmental role where it evolves strategies to leverage the balance sheets of state companies to drive new economic opportunities.
- Publish our National Retrofitting Plan as part of the National Economic Plan. It will set out our commitment to:
  - Develop a new Area-Based and one-stop-shop approach to retrofitting to upgrade at least 500,000 homes to a B2 by 2030.
  - Group homes together to lower cost, starting in the Midlands area.
  - Leverage smart finance (e.g. loan guarantee, European Investment Bank, Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI)).
  - Develop easy pay back mechanisms (i.e. through your utility bill).
- Bring forward funding for the Project Ireland 2040 Climate Action Fund and the Disruptive Technologies and Innovation Fund and issue new awards in conjunction with the National Economic Plan.

## National Economic Plan - Enterprise policy

We will:

- Update the Future Jobs policy framework. Future Jobs Ireland seeks to put our economy in a better place to withstand shocks when they come. COVID-19 highlights the need to make a deliberate policy shift to increase both quality jobs that will allow for better living standards and sustainable jobs, which will be less vulnerable to loss.
- Reaffirm our commitment to Foreign Direct Investment and work to defend our existing foreign investment, attract new investment and increase our export capacity further. We will develop the potential for Ireland as a location of choice for resilient supply chains.
- Establish a SME Growth Taskforce to design a National SME Growth plan that will map out an ambitious long-term strategic blueprint beyond COVID-19. It will cover scale up and internationalisation issues, online trading, management skills, diversification. We will ensure that our tax system remains supportive of the SME sector.
- Continue to support entrepreneurs and investors in high-risk innovative start-ups through bodies like Enterprise Ireland and the SBCI. We will review our existing supports in light of the COVID-19 and the economic crisis, and set out a new programme if required. We will set clear targets to increase the survival rate of high growth start-ups.
- Mobilise agencies, public and private, to focus on strengthening the capacity of enterprises in critical areas and encourage the uptake of structural changes which will make enterprises more resilient for the longer term.
- Expand the role of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEO), so they can go further in supporting local job creation and allow them to provide direct grant support to businesses with more than 10 employees.

- Put in place the structures to enable a seamless transition from LEO to Enterprise Ireland so that ambitious and high performing companies, regardless of size, are supported in scaling and achieving their potential.
- Streamline the process when applying for LEO or Enterprise Ireland support so that SMEs have a clear roadmap of progression.
- Leverage existing hubs and national and local networks which have developed in recent years to help deliver local job creation.
- Review the taxation environment for SMEs and entrepreneurs with a view to introducing improvements to different schemes so that Ireland remains an attractive place to sustain and grow an existing business or to start and scale up a new business.
- Continue to support and train Irish indigenous SMEs so that they can compete for public procurement contracts in Ireland and abroad.
- Review the Companies Acts with a view to addressing the practice of trading entities splitting their operations between trading and property with the result being the trading business (including the jobs) go into solvency and the assets are taken out of the original business.
- Examine the legal provision that pertains to any sale to a connected party following the insolvency of a company including who can object and the allowable grounds of an objection.
- Enable increased remote, flexible and hub working arrangements to promote better work life balance, higher female labour market participation, less commuting and greater regional balance.
- Commence a public consultation on the National Digital Strategy with a view to completing and publishing the strategy within six months.

#### National Economic Plan – Business Financing

We will:

- Develop approaches whereby the State partners with financial institutions and large corporations to support SMEs to recover and to retain and expand employment.
- Support the role venture capital can play in driving growth in the indigenous economy by ensuring a stable, long term funding landscape.
- Support the development of sustainable plans to manage potentially higher levels of corporate and SME debt. This will be done in conjunction with the Central Bank of Ireland.
- Drive the early relaunch of exporting efforts under an “Ireland open for Business” initiative backed by a tailored programme from key agencies.
- Enhance the mandate for the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) in order to get low cost finance to SMEs.  
Enable the credit union movement to grow as a key provider of community banking in the country.

#### National Economic Plan – Regulation and Costs

We will:

- Establish a forum where all sectoral regulators measure their regulatory approaches against best practice. Its task will be to test Irish preparedness for emerging challenges and make recommendations to Government and submit an annual report to the Dáil.

- Review the Companies Acts and make any necessary changes to simplify and improve receivership, examinership and liquidation laws in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This must include a review of the protection periods for companies.
- Review whether the legal provisions surrounding collective redundancies and the liquidation of companies effectively protect the rights of workers.
- Publish and begin implementing a reform programme to reduce the costs associated with access to the legal system in Ireland.
- Review the regulation of receivers to ensure that, in all cases, they are accountable and act with transparency on such issues as fees, asset sales, the overall conduct of the receivership, and treat all parties involved fairly.
- We will enable regulatory bodies such as ComReg, the Central Bank and the CCPC to have greater use of administrative penalties to sanction rogue operators, as is the norm in other EU Member States.

### The European Green Deal

We will support the European Green Deal, which provides a roadmap for Europe to take advantage of the opportunities presented by moving to a low-carbon future.

We will direct any relevant funding under the European Green Deal towards decarbonising projects such as renewable energy, retrofits, ecosystem resilience and regeneration, clean research and development spending and reskilling needs to address unemployment from COVID-19 and structural shifts from decarbonisation.

This will be an important element of our National Economic Plan.

## Budgetary Policy

At Budget 2021, as we have greater clarity as to the likely economic impact of the COVID-19 emergency domestically and internationally, we will set out a medium-term roadmap detailing how Ireland will reduce the deficit and return to a broadly balanced budget.

We will utilise taxation measures, as well as expenditure measures, to close the deficit and fund public services if required. In doing so, we will focus any tax rises on those taxes which tax behaviours with negative externalities such as carbon tax, sugar tax, plastics, etc.

We will examine, in advance of Budget 2022, appropriate funding measures to support the implementation of Sláintecare.

### Corporation Tax

We are committed to the 12.5% corporation tax rate and recognise that taxation is a national competence. We will continue to engage constructively on international tax reform through the OECD process.

We will continue to implement the Roadmap on Corporation Tax Reform.

We recognise that taxation policy needs to reflect a changing digital economy. This work is best done through the OECD, as opposed to unilateral measures that could undermine trade. In the context of Budget 2021, we will update our future projections on corporation tax revenues.

### Public Pay Deal

We will seek to negotiate a new public pay deal with the public service unions. Our approach to those negotiations will be guided by the State's financial position and outlook, challenges in relation to recruitment and retention, and conditions within the broader labour market, and will be anchored in the respect for the important role played by public servants. As part of any pay deal, we will ensure that there is an emphasis on embedding positive work practice changes that have emerged due to the COVID-19 Emergency as well as general productivity gains and effectiveness based on measurable outcomes.

We will introduce a bargaining clause in the new agreement to make progress on sectoral issues.

### Small Business Taxes

We will review Capital Gains Tax in each Budget over the next five-years, in particular with the objective of supporting innovation driven enterprises that will help us transition to a low carbon economy.

We will continue to encourage greater take-up of the R&D Tax Credit by small domestic companies. We will build on recent changes and examine issues with respect to the preapproval procedures and reduced record-keeping requirements.

### National Assets Management Agency (NAMA)

We will work with NAMA to achieve the best possible return to the taxpayer from its portfolio. This will be done while continuing with existing plans to wind down this organisation.

### The Irish Banking Sector

We will support the European Central Bank and the Central Bank of Ireland's actions to ensure stability in the banking sector. We will encourage competition within our banking sector, and develop the Fintech sector as a source of employment and competition. We do not believe that there is a long-term case for the State to remain as a shareholder in the Irish banking sector. However, we should not sell our current holdings until such a time as we are likely to recoup a significant portion, if not all, of the State's investment.

We will:

- Introduce the Senior Executive Accountability Regime to deliver heightened accountability with the banking system.
- Continue working with the banking industry and non-bank lenders to support customers during and after the COVID-19 crisis.
- Support measures to ensure the smooth transition of ECB monetary policy for the benefit of consumers and the real economy.
- Implement the Finance for Ireland Financial Services Strategy to continue to deliver a competitive and resilient financial services sector.
- Prioritise Green Finance strategic actions that are developed in line with climate justice targets and Sustainable Development Goals.
- Seek to enact the Investment Partnership legislation in the Oireachtas.

## Credit Unions and Community Based Financial Services

We will:

- Review the policy framework within which credit unions operate
- Enable and support the credit union movement to grow.
- Support credit unions in the expansion of services to encourage community development.

## Mortgages

We will:

- Work with the Central Bank of Ireland and the Irish banking sector, to increase the availability of long-term fixed rate mortgages.
- Examine in 2020 the international experience of state backed mortgages for first-time buyers in order to assess whether they should be introduced in an Irish context to support affordable home ownership.
- Examine the development of green mortgages and financial products to assist in the upgrade and retrofit of energy efficient homes.
- Introduce the necessary reforms to our personal insolvency legislation and ensure that sufficient supports are in place for mortgage holders with repayment difficulties.
- Assess the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears, including the available suite of alternative repayment arrangements, and ensure it has full legal effect.
- Examine the introduction of a code of conduct on mortgage switching to make the process of switching mortgages easier and to underpin competition in the market.
- Strengthen the Mortgage to Rent Scheme and ensure that it is helping those who need it.

## Windfall Gains

We will use any windfall gains such as the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) surplus, the final resolution of the liquidation of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation (IBRC) or the sale of the state shareholdings in the banks, to reduce our borrowing requirements.

## Budgetary Process

We will improve budgeting for demographic related costs. Spending in the areas of health and social welfare will be prioritised for improved budgeting. Each minister will be required to produce service improvement and reform plans in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Budget overspends within the budgetary year must be included in department budgetary plans each year, in line with changes in Budget 2020.

Budget and expenditure plans for each department must include measures to drive the digitisation of public services and work within our public services, while maintaining access to those services to all.

We will utilise both the new well-being indices and balanced scorecards in the development of government budgeting.

## Procurement

We are committed to evaluating and managing the environmental, economic and social impacts of procurement strategies within the state. During the lifetime of this government we will develop and implement a sustainable procurement policy. The policy will:

- Ensure strong value-for-money for the taxpayer.

- Seek to minimise the environmental impact and optimise the community benefit of products and services procured.
- Support innovation in supply markets to increase the availability and effectiveness of sustainable solutions.
- Encourage suppliers to adopt practices that minimise their environmental impact and deliver community benefit.
- Work in partnership with suppliers to achieve common goals and continually improve performance over time.

We will task the Office of Government Procurement to update all procurement frameworks in line with green procurement practice over the next three years.

### Commission on Welfare and Taxation

We will establish a Commission on Welfare and Taxation to independently consider how best the tax system can support economic activity and promote increased employment and prosperity while ensuring that there are sufficient resources available to meet the costs of the public services and supports in the medium and longer term.

In doing its work, the Commission must have particular regard to the impact of the COVID-19 Emergency, as well as long-term developments such as aging demographics, the move to a low-carbon economy and the rise of digital disruption and automation.

It will review all existing tax measures and expenditures and have regard to the taxation practices in other similar sized open economies in the OECD.

It will have regard to the principles of taxation policy outlined within this document.

### Local Property Tax

We will bring forward legislation for the Local Property Tax on the basis of fairness and that most homeowners will face no increase.

We will also bring new homes, which are currently exempt from the LPT, into the taxation system.

All money collected locally will be retained within the county. This will be done on the basis that those counties with a lower LPT base are adjusted via an annual national equalisation fund paid from the Exchequer, as is currently the case.

## Public Finances and Taxation

### National Development Plan

We will bring forward the planned review of the National Development Plan (NDP) from 2022. We will use the review to set out an updated NDP for the period to 2031.

The review of the NDP will be consistent with the ambition of the Programme for Government. The updated NDP will be aligned with the National Planning Framework (NPF).

The NPF recognises the crucial importance of balanced regional development, clustered and compact growth and improved connectivity to deliver economic prosperity and environmental sustainability.

The NPF is mandated for updating in 2024 and must respond to the evolving challenges across its strategic goals and be consistent with national policies.

The process of review of the NDP and updating of the NPF will not frustrate or delay existing projects.

## Ports

In line with the National Ports Policy, we will work with our port companies to ensure they have the capacity, finance and policy supports to deliver in the years ahead.

We will:

- Work with ports and airports to safeguard supply chains for businesses and access for tourists as the economy is opened on a phased basis.
- Review potential to expand passenger and cargo capability at all of our ports, prioritising rail connections and interchange.
- Work to ensure that ferry companies provide access for foot passengers without cars.

## Aviation

As an island, connectivity is essential to our economic development. We recognise the huge value of our aviation sector in supporting economic development, international connectivity and tourism via our airports.

We will:

- Deliver the capital programmes required to support services and ensure safety at our State and regional airports.
- Support EU and international action to reduce aviation emissions in line with the aims of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

## Brexit

We will continue to work with Dublin and Rosslare Ports and Dublin Airport to make sure they are ready for all Brexit scenarios. We will continue to underline the importance of the UK Landbridge with the European Commission negotiating team and engage with our partners in France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany to ensure the UK Landbridge remains a viable and efficient route to market.

## Tourism

Tourism is one of Ireland's most important economic sectors and the Government recognises its significance as a source of local employment and regional development. COVID-19 has had a

devastating impact on tourism and the Government will, as a matter of urgency, set out how we will support the sector through the remainder of 2020. We will prioritise a domestic tourism campaign to promote staycations, subject to public health advice.

A Tourism Recovery Taskforce comprised of key stakeholders has already been established. We await its recommendations on how best the tourism sector can adapt and recover. It will identify priority aims, key enablers and market opportunities for the sector in 2021, 2022 and beyond and will feed into the National Economic Plan. We will ensure tourism is placed at the centre of our National Economic Plan. The sector is uniquely positioned to contribute strongly to our overall target of creating 200,000 jobs by 2025 and reverse unemployment in communities throughout the country. We believe tourism can recover strongly, just as it did after the last recession. We will seek to emulate the success of the Gathering in 2013 by making 2023 the Year of the Invitation.

The warmth of our welcome, the beauty of our landscape and the richness of our culture are enduring strengths we can build on. The Government will work with the sector to develop the skills required to meet future challenges, adopt a coordinated approach to promoting Ireland overseas across our agencies and embassies and improve access to and within Ireland in a sustainable way.

We will:

- Work with our EU partners to introduce new tourism-specific funding supports for Member States and to allow maximum flexibility in State Aid rules to enable the provision of timely and appropriate supports.
- Make 2023 the Year of the Invitation – a global invitation to visit Ireland on the 10-year anniversary of The Gathering.
- Sustain investment in Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland to improve our overall offering as a top quality and value-for-money destination.
- Develop and promote Ireland as a long stay tourism destination to spread tourism more evenly across the country. This will help reduce emissions and maximise economic return.
- We will develop a Sustainable Tourism Policy document, and in advance of this an Interim Action Plan.

The success of the Wild Atlantic Way has demonstrated the potential for marketing Ireland as a clean green holiday destination. We will build on this and develop and strengthen Ireland's image as an outdoor activity holiday destination to the domestic and international markets.

We will:

- Develop a new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy.
- Further develop the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Ireland's Ancient East to bring further sustainable benefits to rural communities.
- Initiate a consultation process with communities along the entire Wild Atlantic Way with a view to creating a continuous walking route from Malin to Kinsale.
- Initiate a consultation process with communities along the coastline from Carlingford Lough to Cobh with a view to creating a new tourism trail, the Irish Sea Way, along the east and south-east coast to boost tourism.
- Work with the Northern Irish Executive to create a coastal tourist trail, linking the Wild Atlantic Way, the Causeway Coastal Route and along our eastern and southern coast.

- Work with local authorities and appropriate agencies to continue development of an integrated national network of greenways to be used by commuters, students, leisure cyclists and tourists.
- Support cross-border greenway projects, such as the Sligo-Enniskillen Greenway, and continue to fund longer-term projects across the country like the Galway to Dublin Greenway, Fingal Coastal Way and the extension of the Waterford greenway into the city centre.
- Invest and promote blueways and recreational trails for the benefit of the local community and tourists alike.
- Work with the Northern Ireland Executive to deliver the flagship cross-border Ulster Canal project in order to restore the all-island inland water system as a premier tourism attraction.
- Expand the Walks Scheme to achieve a target of 80 trails.
- Continue to sustainably develop the marine sector by building on existing partnerships to optimise our assets for the benefit of tourism and broader economic development.
- Promote Seafest a significant marine and tourism event in the national calendar.
- Support Fáilte Ireland to further develop food trails to build on our reputation for high quality produce.
- Work with the activity tourism sector to identify the interventions the State can make to support their expansion, including exploring the feasibility of a group insurance scheme.
- Prioritise the work of Údarás na Gaeltachta in strengthening the identity and branding of our Gaeltacht areas and the development of a Tourism Strategy for the Gaeltacht areas.
- Develop and support the agri-tourism sector.

## Access

As an island, connectivity is essential to our tourism sector. We recognise the huge value of our maritime and aviation sectors in supporting economic development, international connectivity and tourism via our ports and airports. We will:

- Deliver the capital programmes required to support services and ensure safety at our State and regional airports.
- Fund the Tourism Ireland Regional Cooperative Marketing Fund which seeks to encourage new access and maximise the potential of existing air and sea services to those areas outside of Dublin.
- Examine the development of national tourism trails linking our ferry ports and rail network.
- Work with the ports and ferry companies to increase the number of foot and cycle passengers.

## Insurance Reform

Insurance costs are a hugely significant issue for businesses, motorists, households and a range of sporting, community and voluntary groups. We need to ensure that insurance acts as a safety net that enables our economy and our society to fully function. Addressing high claim pay outs and competitive issues will be critical in building an insurance system which is affordable and reliable and underpins a vibrant economy.

The Government will continue to prioritise reform of the insurance sector with particular emphasis on motor, public liability and employer liability insurance.

We will:

- Establish a cabinet sub-committee to deal urgently with insurance reform.
- Work to protect customers during and after the COVID-19 crisis with particular emphasis on business disruption insurance, travel insurance and rebates for motor insurance customers.
- Support the Central Bank's direction on compensating businesses with disruption cover for infectious diseases.
- Tackle insurance costs by:
  - Recognising the work of the Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee under the Judicial Council to provide guidance on personal injury claims.
  - Enhancing and reforming the role of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board.
  - Regulating claims management companies and claims harvesters.
  - Considering changes to the Occupiers Liability Act and the Civil Liability Act (duty of care) to strengthen waivers and notices to increase protections for consumers, businesses, sporting clubs and community groups.
  - Strengthening the Solicitors (Advertising) Regulations of 2002.
  - Considering the need for a constitutional amendment to enable the Oireachtas to set down guidelines on award levels.
- Get tough on insurance fraud by:
  - Seeking to increase coordination and cooperation between An Garda Síochána and the insurance industry. We will seek to expand the Garda Economic Crime Bureau which deals with fraud. Under new structures, it will train and support Gardaí in every division to ensure expertise and skill is diffused across the State.
  - Increasing the penalties for fraudulent claims.
  - Reviewing the penalties for fraudulent claims.
  - Placing perjury on a statutory footing, making the offence easier to prosecute. We will broaden the scope of the Perjury and Related Offences Bill, ensuring that the maximum penalty on indictment should be harmonised with the equivalent maximum penalties for largely similar offences in the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004.
  - Ensuring that fraudulent claims are forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP).
  - Publishing insurance fraud data.
  - Exploring the feasibility of obliging fraudulent claimants to pay the legal expenses for defendants.
- Increase transparency, tackle anti-competitive behaviour and foster competition by:
  - Giving the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) effective enforcement powers to punish and deter anti-competitive conduct.
  - Requesting the industry and stakeholders to give an assessment of the expected impact on premium levels of the key reforms being fully introduced.
  - Expanding, with urgency, the National Claims Information Database to employer liability and public liability to track the level of claims.
  - Establishing a databank within the Central Bank for new entrants.
  - Prioritising the establishment of a fully functioning European-wide single insurance market.
  - Working to remove dual pricing from the market.
  - Creating an office within Government tasked with encouraging greater competition in the Irish insurance market.



## National Digital Strategy

We will develop a new National Digital Strategy which will:

- Utilise the increased level of national connectivity that is being delivered by the National Broadband Plan, particularly in rural Ireland.
- Drive digital transformation in the public service, with greater integration of digital services.
- Further develop Ireland's leadership in new digital technologies including cloud computing, data analytics, blockchain, Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence.
- Direct the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) to support the adoption of new technologies through the development of new public service frameworks.
- Explore how Ireland can be at the forefront of protecting citizens' rights with respect to facial recognition technology, access to encryption tools and net neutrality.

We will commence a public consultation on the National Digital Strategy with a view to completing and publishing the strategy within six months.

## Mission: A Green New Deal

### Emissions

We are committed to an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 (a 51% reduction over the decade) and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The 2050 target will be set in law by the Climate Action Bill which will be introduced in the Dáil within the first 100 days of government alongside a newly established Climate Action Council. The Bill will define how five-year carbon budgets will be set. Every sector will contribute to meeting this target by implementing policy changes as outlined throughout this Programme for Government. The special economic and social role of agriculture and the distinct characteristics of biogenic methane as described by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will be fully recognised in plans to achieve these targets. We will continue to work to achieve a broad political and societal consensus on a Just Transition to a sustainable future for all communities.

With the increased scale and depth of this ambition, new strategies will be needed to sustain a reduction trajectory which will increase over time to meet an average 7% per annum fall in emissions to 2030. In setting the initial carbon budget, we will incorporate measures which initiate significant change in line with this ambition. The strategies to deliver these emissions reductions from will require genuine consultation, detailed planning, organisation and adequate mechanisms for funding and incentives, as well as the gradual build-up of their impact. Many of the changes started in the first carbon budget period will only lead to reductions in the second carbon budget period. In this initial phase we will also ensure that the economic recovery is a green recovery. We will directly draw on the National Economic Plan and associated funding to front load investment that is directly aligned with our climate ambitions.

In setting the second carbon budget for 2026-2030, we will not yet be in a position to identify all the emerging technologies, changing scientific consensus or policies to meet our full ambition. This will require a further allocation within the overall carbon budget, subject to intense evaluation. This approach, which mirrors the Danish model, will be reflected in the Climate Action (Amendment) Bill and in future iterations of the Climate Action Plan.

In the second carbon budget period, strong climate action will be delivered from the foundations established in the initial phase, enabling more significant gains in order to reach the binding average 7% per annum reduction to 2030. This in turn will lay out a pathway for the third carbon budget to drive on reductions from 2030 onwards to achieve full de-carbonisation and net sequestration by 2050.

As we set our society on a trajectory towards net zero emissions by 2050 it is vital that there is adequate time and effort devoted to working with communities and sectors in designing and delivering the pathway to achieve the goal in a fair way. This will mean creating fresh opportunities for those sectors most exposed by the transition and supporting those in our community least equipped to make the changes. This fundamental step change in ambition and broadening of our target horizon to a 7% reduction average per annum will be underpinned by the core philosophy of a Just Transition. We are committed to ensuring no sector of society or community is left behind in the movement to a low carbon future.

In order to deliver this expanded and deepened climate ambition, far reaching policy changes will be developed across every sector, including in particular:

- Delivery of a National Aggregated Model of Retrofitting reaching over 500,000 homes by 2030 as part of the EU Renovation Wave.
- Learning from district heating pilot projects to launch a scaled-up programme.
- Accelerated electrification of the transport system including electric bikes, electric vehicles and electric public transport alongside a ban on new registrations of petrol and diesel cars from 2030.
- A strategy for remote working and remote service delivery, taking advantage of the opportunity for rapid roll out of the National Broadband Plan.
- An unprecedented modal shift in all areas by a re-orientation of investment to walking, cycling and public transport.
- A new sustainable rural mobility plan.
- A transformational programme of research and development to ensure Ireland is at the cutting edge of scientific and technological innovation in meeting our climate change targets, including in the bioeconomy, in marine sequestration, in green hydrogen, in wave technology, in developing floating offshore wind turbines to take advantage of the Atlantic coastline, and in agriculture to improve breeding programmes, feed additives to reduce biogenic methane, agroforestry, paludiculture and nutrient management. We will mobilise

“Challenge Calls” to identify and fund fresh, disruptive ideas to help meet our targets from broader society.

- A major drive to realise the immense potential of Ireland’s offshore renewables.
- A systematic programme of sectoral audits of the commercial and industrial sector to underpin area by area strategies to meet the new national targets. These will be done in consultation with relevant stakeholders in those sectors to meet targets consistent with our national climate objectives (with particular potential in food, cement and refrigeration).
- Expansion and incentivising of micro generation including roof top solar energy.
- A new strategy to expand afforestation, particularly Close to Nature Forestry and agro-forestry.
- Transforming the scale of organic farming with delivery of a fair price for farmers at its heart.
- Building on Ireland’s relative carbon efficiency in food production and ensuring the delivery of the measures identified by Teagasc to the fullest extent possible.
- Rapid evaluation of the potential role of sustainable bio-energy.

The completion and implementation of a major waste and circular economy action plan.

We will also evaluate and implement plans to realise the carbon sink potential of our marine environment based on the introduction of Marine Protection Areas.

Land use offers significant potential to sequester additional carbon and provide a new source of family farm income and rural economic benefit. The achievement of such improvements is not addressed in current EU policy. We shall seek to incentivise land use in the new European Green Deal and broader EU policy. We shall evaluate, before the end of 2020 whether Ireland should include wetlands in our land use inventory notified under EU regulations. Within 24 months we will evaluate the potential for contributions towards our climate ambition from land use improvements and set in train the development of a land use plan based on its findings.

Every minister will make climate action a core pillar of their new departmental strategies, which must be produced within six months of the Government taking office. Each minister will direct each of the agencies and offices under their department to adopt a climate mandate under which those bodies will seek to support climate action within their own operations and among their clients and suppliers.

## Climate Governance

Climate change is the single greatest threat facing humanity. The Government will react comprehensively and imaginatively to this challenge by bringing all communities with us in a manner which ensures that we achieve a rapid reduction in and then reversal of our impact on the climate. It is in all of our interests as we aim to protect and improve public health and quality of life. We will work with all parts of society to achieve this in a fair way, with every sector playing its part, ensuring the resilience of our economy, the fairness of our society and the quality of our environment.

We will introduce the Climate Action (Amendment) Bill 2020 into the Dáil within 100 days. It will:

- Set a target to decarbonise the economy by 2050 at the latest.
- Make the adoption of five-year carbon budgets, setting maximum emissions by sector, a legal requirement.
- Establish the Climate Action Council on an independent statutory footing and ensure greater gender balance and increased scientific expertise in its membership.
- Ban the sale of new and the importation of second hand petrol and diesel cars from 2030.

We will:

- Update the Climate Action Plan annually and report progress quarterly.
- Maintain the existing Climate Action Delivery Board model.
- Propose that the Oireachtas establishes a standing Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, with powers similar to the Public Accounts Committee.
- Ensure that the Department of Climate Action has the capacity and expertise to manage the transition in energy efficiency and renewable energy and to carry out its expanded function in relation to carbon budgets.
- Review on an on-going basis the structure and operations of state agencies who will be responsible for delivery of increased targets under this plan.
- Work with the European Commission to advance a stronger National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) for 2030 consistent with the ambition of this programme.
- Respond to the OECD review of the Environmental Protection Agency and ensure that our legislative framework for licensing pollution is fit for purpose.

We are conscious of the limitations of examining greenhouse gas emissions solely on a production basis. We will conduct a review of greenhouse gas emissions on a consumption basis, with a goal of ensuring that Irish and EU action to reduce emissions supports emission reductions globally as well as on our own territories.

# Energy

Energy will play a central role in the creation of a strong and sustainable economy over the next decade. The reliable supply of safe, secure and clean energy is essential in order to deliver a phase-out of fossil fuels. We need to facilitate the increased electrification of heat and transport. This will create rapid growth in demand for electricity which must be planned and delivered in a cost-effective way.

## Energy Efficiency

We will implement a new National Energy Efficiency Action Plan to reduce energy use, including behavioural and awareness aspects of energy efficiency such as building and data management.

## A Revolution in Renewables

We are all committed to the rapid decarbonisation of the energy sector. We will use this as an opportunity to create new, quality jobs across the country.

We will take the necessary action to deliver at least 70% renewable electricity by 2030. To achieve this we will:

- Hold the first Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) auction by the end of 2020, with auctions held each year thereafter, including the first RESS auction for offshore wind in 2021.
- Give cross-government priority to the drafting of the Marine Planning and Development Bill so that it is published as soon as possible and enacted within nine months.
- Produce a whole-of-government plan setting out how we will deliver at least 70% renewable electricity by 2030 and how we will develop the necessary skills base, supply chains, legislation and infrastructure to enable that. This new plan will make recommendations for how the deployment of renewable electricity can be speeded up, for example the provision and permissioning of grid connections.
- Complete the Celtic Interconnector to connect Ireland's electricity grid to France.
- Commence planning for future inter-connection with our neighbours.
- Finalise and publish the Wind Energy Guidelines having regard to the public consultation which has just taken place.
- Develop a solar energy strategy for rooftop and ground based photovoltaics to ensure that a greater share of our electricity needs are met through solar power.
- Continue Eirgrid's programme "Delivering a Secure, Sustainable Electricity System" (DS3).
- Ensure that the energy efficiency potential of smart meters starts to be deployed in 2021 and that all mechanical electricity meters are replaced by 2024.
- Strengthen the policy framework to incentivise electricity storage and interconnection.
- Support the clustering of regional and sectoral centres of excellence in the development of low carbon technologies.
- Invest in research and development in "green" hydrogen (generated using excess renewable energy) as a fuel for power generation, manufacturing, energy storage and transport.

We will also produce a longer term plan setting out how we will take advantage as a country of the massive potential of offshore energy on the Atlantic Coast. This plan will set out how Ireland can become a major contributor to a pan-European renewable energy generation and transmission

system, and taking advantage of a potential of at least 30GW of offshore floating wind power in our deeper waters in the Atlantic.

This plan will focus on utilising our existing energy and maritime infrastructure. It will seek to create the right investment environment, support ocean energy research, development, and demonstration of floating wind, tidal, and wave power, together with the development of innovative transmission and storage technologies such as high voltage direct current interconnection and green hydrogen on an all-island basis. This plan will set out a path to achieving 5GW capacity in offshore wind by 2030 off Ireland's Eastern and Southern coasts.

### Bringing Communities with Us

We need to bring communities with us as new energy infrastructure gets installed.

We will:

- Increase the target for the number of Sustainable Energy Communities.
- Prioritise the development of microgeneration, letting people sell excess power back to the grid by June 2021.
- Ensure community energy can play a role in reaching at least 70% renewable electricity, including a community benefit fund and a community category within the auction.
- Continue to work with the EU to agree community participation as an integral part of installing new renewable energy and a route for community participation in the projects.
- Support a new Green Flag programme for communities building on the successful programme in schools.
- Conclude the review of the current planning exemptions relating to solar panels to ensure that households, schools and communities can be strong champions of climate action.
- Implement an ambitious national energy efficiency action plan which will set higher targets for all sectors.

### Regulation Driving Climate Action:

Government will give a clear pathway towards better practices and less reliance on fossil fuels across every sector. Timely signposts will be set out, giving the sectors the chance to adapt. We will publish a schedule of incentives and regulatory changes to allow people and businesses to plan.

We will develop:

- New stress tests for financial institutions to look at the impact of tangible risks of higher temperature scenarios and involvement with the fossil fuel economy on their portfolios as recommended by the Taskforce on Climate Financial Disclosures.
- New standards to reduce emissions from F-gases and new requirements to make lighting more energy efficient.
- New requirements around heating systems.
- A regulatory environment to support development of district heating
- Efficiency standards for equipment and processes, particularly those set to grow rapidly such as Data Centres.
- Expectations for "Obligated Entities" to leverage carbon credits.
- A policy framework for low emission zones.

## Decarbonising Energy Production

We will support a just transition for the workers and regions impacted as peat and coal fired power generation is phased out.

We will consider the implementation of a carbon price floor in the ETS to support the transition from fossil fuels to renewables.

## Natural Resources:

We will harness the natural resources to meet our needs in this country, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. We will:

- End issuing of new licenses for exploration and extraction of gas, on the same basis as the recent decision in relation to oil exploration and extraction.
- Support the tightening of the sustainability assessment rules prior to the approval of any projects on the EU PCI list.
- Ensure that Bord na Móna is required to take into account climate, biodiversity, and water objectives as they deliver on their commercial mandate, through an amendment to the Turf Development Acts 1998.

As Ireland moves towards carbon neutrality, we do not believe that it makes sense to develop LNG gas import terminals importing fracked gas, accordingly we shall withdraw the Shannon LNG terminal from the EU Projects of Common Interest list in 2021.

We do not support the importation of fracked gas and shall develop a policy statement to establish that approach.

We will ensure that local development plans are developed to stimulate economic activity for those areas which were expecting economic development arising from new fossil fuel infrastructure. As part of that we will consider how the potential of the Shannon Estuary in terms of regional economic development across transport and logistics, manufacturing, renewable energy and tourism, and develop a strategy to achieve that potential with support from the Exchequer.

## Waste and a Circular Economy Action Plan

We will work in partnership with industry, retailers and consumers to promote a more sustainable and responsible system and culture for consumption, use and re-use of materials and end of use recycling and disposals. We will also work with the EU implementing the agreed Circular Economy approach.

We will

- Publish and start implementing a new National Waste and Circular Economy Action Plan.
- Strengthen the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) model (for packaging) to ensure the coverage of the full net costs related to the separate collection and treatment of the

end-of-life products. We will end self-compliance as an option under EPR to ensure that all producers are equitably treated and to remove potential loopholes.

- Consider ways in which we can better inform consumers about the carbon footprint of products, including through labelling.
- Ensure that public procurement leads the transition to the Circular Economy through an evidence-based approach such as relying on Environmental Product Declarations. We will mandate the inclusion of green criteria in all procurements using public funds to be completed within 36 months.
- Work with EU Member States to encourage the further reduction and prevention of plastic packaging.
- Continue and expand the Clean Oceans Initiative to collect, reduce and reuse marine litter and clean up our marine environment.
- Examining changes to the tax system to encourage the efficient use of resources.
- Creating a Circular Economy Unit in government to ensure a whole-of-government approach to the circular economy.
- Phase out the use of single use plastics.
- Examine the potential of a municipal compost system for biodegradable packaging.
- Intend to introduce a deposit and return scheme for plastic bottles and aluminum cans in line with the findings of the recently commissioned report.

#### Combined Heat and Power:

We will support the development of Combined Heat and Power through a range of incentives to encourage uptake in the marketplace.

## Retrofitting

#### The contribution of the Built Environment to climate action

We will commence an ambitious retrofitting programme to make our buildings warmer and more energy efficient, reduce our emissions and deliver a crucial economic stimulus.

We will publish our National Retrofitting Plan as part of the National Economic Plan. It will set out our commitment to:

- Develop a new area-based and one-stop-shop approach to retrofitting to upgrade at least 500,000 homes to a B2 energy rating by 2030.
- Group homes together to lower cost, starting in the Midlands area.
- Leverage smart finance (e.g. loan guarantee, European Investment Bank, Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland).
- Develop easy pay back mechanisms (i.e. through your utility bill).

We will ensure economies of scale and employment generation by combining social homes owned by local authorities and approved housing bodies (AHBs), with privately owned homes in the wider community in a single area based scheme.

To deliver on our retrofitting ambition we will:

- Designate a National Retrofitting Delivery Body by the end of 2020.
- In addition to the current scheme, use resources from the National Recovery Fund to immediately finance local authority retrofit programmes and to offer grants to owners of private properties. This effort will initially be focused on the midlands, where dependence on fossil fuel is greatest.
- Commence pilot schemes in early 2021, to test key elements of the national plan, building on the work being started in the Midlands. Following evaluation of the pilots, we will roll out our National Retrofitting Scheme.
- Overhaul existing apprenticeships, traineeships and education programmes in the short term and launch a significant effort to upskill the existing workforce for new technologies and building methods (e.g. heat pumps).
- Work with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland to develop funding options to deliver retrofitting with suitable retail partners, such as An Post and the Credit Unions.
- Establish a loan guarantee scheme to support access to finance for retrofitting.
- Amend the Energy Efficiency Obligation Scheme to boost the supply of retrofits by increasing the targets which obligated parties must deliver, including for domestic homes and those in energy poverty.
- Take steps to increase the number of homes and businesses with Building Energy Ratings (BER) and Display Energy Certificates (DEC), and use this data to increase the number of home and business retrofits being carried out.

Our plan will grow the existing retrofit industry ten-fold and provide opportunities that the SME sector can take advantage of. We will also give enterprise the confidence to set up supply chains, train staff and invest in the required equipment.

We will make Ireland a leader in retrofitting by developing innovative ways in which to roll out retrofitting by lowering the cost and improving efficiency and productivity. This will include:

- Developing standard designs available for all property types.
- Automating and digitising construction through design tools and digital scanning of properties.
- Investing in research and development to improve products and materials.
- Centralising procurement and quality assurance.
- Using pre-assembled materials.

We will:

- Strengthen the capacity of state agencies who will be responsible for the delivery of the ambitious targets we are setting out.
- Commence a targeted programme to install heat pumps in homes that are already suitable for the technology, as part of our plan to install 600,000 heat pumps by 2030.
- As well as developing a regularity environment for district heating, we will publish a feasibility study on establishing a district heating authority and setting new targets for district heating as part of a new strategy.

- Take actions to drive energy efficiency upgrades in rented properties and commercial building stock following a consultation which has already been completed.
- Work with tenants and landlords to ensure that disruption caused by retrofitting is minimised to both parties.
- Publish a new Public Sector Decarbonisation strategy for 2030. This will include the development of policies to ensure greater use of energy performance contracts within the public service. We will set a public sector decarbonisation target of at least 50% . We will also focus on a step-up in public bodies which are not on target to deliver the existing energy efficiency target of 50% do so, and work with others to go further. The Office of Government Procurement will play a key role in rolling out this strategy, through the central procurement of energy related investments and services.

## Just Transition

The next decade will see two major transitions; to a low-carbon future and to greater digitalisation, automation and robotics.

Both transitions will unleash huge changes in society, and while presenting significant challenges, will also bring a range of opportunities. The impacts of these changes will be unevenly spread and will manifest themselves in different ways.

In some cases, these transitions will impact entire industries and regions. In others particular trades or professions may become obsolete. It is vital that a Just Transition pathway be found which delivers alternative job opportunities to sectors and regions most affected and ensures that vulnerable groups are helped as transformative policies are implemented. This will require the anticipation of challenges and planning for responses to them.

We will:

- Publish a Just Transition Plan, to frame the work of a permanent Commission for Just Transition. The plan will identify and prepare for challenges which will arise in a number of sectors and regions, recognising that there will be a variety of different transitions, and that it is clear that there will be no simple one-size fits all approach.
- Establish the Just Transition Commissioner as a statutory office with appropriate staffing and resources. The experience of the Just Transition Commissioner's work in the Midlands and the work of the National Economic and Social Council will inform the approach.
- Ensure that financing is available and continue to grow the size of the Just Transition Fund.

## The Exit from Peat in the Midlands

We are committed to ensuring that the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy is fair. The transition out of peat in the Midlands is the first test of the just transition. We will ensure that the Just Transition in the Midlands works inclusively and is an example of how large communities can introduce major changes in their daily lives and workplaces and still thrive.

We will:

- Support the Just Transition Commissioner in designing a comprehensive and inclusive response.
- Publish and implement a detailed all-of-Government implementation plan consistent with the recommendations of the first report of the Just Transition Commissioner.
- Conduct a feasibility study into the establishment of a Green Energy Hub/Renewable Energy Hub in the Midlands, using the existing infrastructure in this region.

## Climate Action Fund

We will establish the Climate Action Fund in law within 100 days through the early enactment of the National Oil Reserves Agency Bill. We will quickly launch a second call under the Climate Action

Fund. We will also launch a call under a Local Environmental Innovation Fund to enhance community participation.

#### Environment Fund:

We will expand the Environment Fund, taking account of the consultation process which has been completed, through the introduction of new levies, and ring fence this money for investment in biodiversity and climate initiatives, including a parks fund to support the development of new parks and wildlife areas.

#### A new Engagement Model

The transformation to a low carbon, digital economy requires the concerted mobilisation of every element of Irish society. To succeed we need four interlocking elements:

- Sustained leadership from government and the Oireachtas.
- Sustained engagement with citizens, sectors and regions.
- Support for the workers, sectors and regions most exposed to help them to benefit from the new economic opportunities afforded to us by the transition to a low-carbon digital economy.
- Protection for vulnerable families and communities least equipped to make the transformation.

We will develop a new model of engagement with citizens, sectors and regions as an early priority for government, building on the learning of recent years. It shall embrace:

- Dialogue on a structured basis, so that the diverse elements of society can input into the process. There will be a specific youth dialogue strand.
- A process of accountability on progress, including an annual review.
- Promotion of citizen, sectoral and regional involvement in delivering actions within their own sphere of influence.

It will remain the responsibility of the government to lead and take decisions, to deliver on actions and to be accountable for achieving the goals of the Programme for Government.

## Natural Heritage and Biodiversity

Biodiversity is vital to the continued health of our society, economy, species and planet. Following on from the Dáil's declaration of a Biodiversity Emergency last year, we will work in a supportive and constructive way with those agencies and organisations tasked with protecting our biodiversity and natural heritage.

We will:

- Progress the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity.
- Promote biodiversity initiatives across primary, post primary and third-level sectors, and ensure that schools, colleges and universities across the country play an active role in providing areas to promote biodiversity.
- Review the remit, status and funding of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to ensure that it is playing an effective role in delivering its overall mandate and enforcement role in the protection of wildlife.
- Ensure that every local authority has a sufficient number of biodiversity and heritage officers among their staff complement.
- Support biodiversity data collection.
- Publish a new National Pollinator Plan and encourage public bodies to promote and protect biodiversity.
- Review the protection (including enforcement of relevant legislation) of our natural heritage, including hedgerows, native woodland and wetlands.
- Develop a new National Invasive Species Management Plan.
- Coordinate the actions in the Programme for Government regarding peatlands to maximise the benefits for biodiversity.
- Introduce policies on supports for urban biodiversity and tree planting.
- Encourage and support local authorities to reduce the use of pesticides in public areas.
- Continue implementation of the third National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021 and build on the commitments made at the first National Biodiversity Conference.
- Support local nature groups and local authorities to work in partnership on local biodiversity projects.
- Continue to raise awareness of biodiversity through initiatives like the Annual Biodiversity Awards Scheme.
- Building on the success of the UNESCO Dublin Bay Biosphere, achieve further UNESCO designations for Irish sites, including the Lough Allen region.
- Appoint Education Liaison Officers in each of our National Parks to work with schools across the country, to promote the importance of biodiversity and the natural world, and to involve pupils in the work that goes on in our National Parks.

## Water

Water infrastructure deficits impact on the provision of safe and secure drinking water, leads to pollution and environmental damage and presents a challenge in achieving sustainable development across urban and rural Ireland.

Continued investment in infrastructure is required to ensure continued supply of good quality drinking water and appropriate treatment of wastewater to protect our waterways. To achieve this, the Government will:

- Retain Irish Water in public ownership as a national, standalone, regulated utility.
- Ensure Irish Water is sufficiently funded to make the necessary investment in drinking water and wastewater infrastructure.
- Mandate Irish Water to develop plans to ensure security of supply and sufficient capacity in drinking and wastewater networks to allow for balanced regional development.

### Capital programme

The Government will fund Irish Water's capital investment plan for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure on a multi-annual basis and deliver the €8.5 billion funding package committed to in Project Ireland 2040.

We will also:

- Support take-up of Irish Water's Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme 2020-2024 which will provide water and wastewater growth capacity in smaller settlements which would not otherwise be provided for in Irish Water's capital investment plan. Ensure that the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund supports the development of such projects.
- Support continued investment in reducing leakage across the network.
- Fully consider the review from the Commission for Regulation of Utilities to Irish Water's proposed approach to the Water Supply Project for the Eastern and Midlands Region.

### Drinking water

- We will develop a scheme between local authorities and Irish Water to provide drinking water fountains nationwide to reduce plastic bottle litter.
- We will continue to help fund upgrades to wells.

### Wastewater

- We will continue to help fund upgrades to domestic wastewater treatment systems, including septic tanks.
- We will review and work to improve the inspection regime for the 500,000 domestic wastewater systems and incentivise upgrading works.

### Safety and Standards

Ensuring provision of safe drinking water and proper treatment of wastewater will remain a priority for the Government.

We will:

- Ensure Irish Water progresses works to reduce the number of schemes on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Remedial Action List.
- Support Irish Water in its programme to remove lead pipes from the public supply.
- Ensure the State complies with the EU Water Framework Directive.
- Expand programmes, including the Agriculture Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP), and work with farmers, industry and advisory services, to protect and deliver improvements in water quality.
- Launch a new revised and strengthened River Basin Management Plan in 2022 drawing on a collaborative approach between all stakeholders.
- Ensure Irish Water develops Drinking Water Safety Plans to protect abstraction sources and that it reduces public health risks including Trihalomethane (THMs) exceedances in treatment plants.
- Continue to support the Local Authority Waters Programme and expand the Community Water Development Fund.

### Conservation

The Government will continue to provide a generous free allowance of water to every citizen to meet their basic everyday needs and provide an extra free allocation for people with specific health needs. To reduce water consumption across all sectors of society, we will:

- Implement the recommendations of the Committee on Future Funding of Domestic Water Services in relation to excess use.
- Advocate at EU level for more water and energy efficient white goods.
- Conduct a feasibility study examining how further assistance can be given to low income households for the installation of water efficient appliances.

### Group Water Schemes

- We will support the National Federation of Group Water Schemes to ensure that issues of quality and security of supply are addressed.
- We will continue to invest in a multi-annual capital funding programme to improve the quality of drinking water in group water schemes, while protecting water quality.

### Research

We fully support the work of the Water Services Innovation Fund which aims to investigate solutions to promote greater efficiency in water usage. We will continue to work with An Fóram Uisce to review and develop water quality strategies.

We will commission a range of research projects to explore innovative ways of improving our water infrastructure and reducing consumption.

### Energy

As a very significant user of electricity, we will review the electricity requirements of water and wastewater treatment plants and carry out a series of pilot projects to incorporate onsite renewable energy generation.

## Mission: Universal Healthcare

### Delivery of Care in a COVID-19 Environment

COVID-19 has led to an unprecedented interruption in healthcare delivery all over the world. It has affected services across all of our hospitals and community care settings. This is occurring against the backdrop of increasing demand across primary, social and acute hospital care.

The new government will ensure that as services resume, they are delivered in a planned, appropriate and considered manner. Our priority is to protect public health, patients and to ensure capacity for future surges of COVID-19.

In doing this, equity, safety, need and long-term population benefit will be our guiding principles, along with public health advice.

We have to learn from, retain and build on some of the COVID-19 healthcare responses, particularly eHealth and ePrescribing

As we move forward, we will accelerate the implementation of Sláintecare..

We will:

- Quickly Identify the impact of COVID-19 on Sláintecare implementation.
- Examine new ways to utilise community settings and create partnerships with our private hospitals to avoid placing increased pressure on the public system.
- Ensure capacity, particularly bed and critical care capacity, for a COVID-19 rapid response and for non-COVID-19 emergencies into the longer term.
- Prioritise the elective-only programme to treat patients and to manage the reduced capacity as a result of COVID-19.
- Maintain an intense focus on COVID-19 and follow four guiding principles: isolate, test, trace and treat, to enable a speedy reaction should there be an increase in cases.
- Continue to deploy new technologies, telehealth; and innovative ways to support vulnerable groups, as well as new pathways of care.
- Ensure patients and healthcare staff are kept informed of and fully engaged in changes in healthcare practice due to COVID-19.
- Maintain ongoing monitoring of international experience and knowledge to assist in ensuring the safety of patients and healthcare workers.

#### Learning the lessons of COVID-19

Undoubtedly, our public health system has responded well and played an essential role in reducing the impact of COVID-19. As we move from the initial phases of the Emergency, we must reflect on the lessons learned and determine how best to strengthen emergency preparedness and provide for the security and safety of our citizens.

As an immediate first step, we will examine international public health models, learning from best practice and reshape our public health system to ensure an agile and well-planned response to future epidemics.

## Implementing Sláintecare

At its core, Sláintecare commits to ensuring people have access to affordable health care services. The response to the COVID-19 emergency has demonstrated that by working together, we can make progress and achieve these aims in the longer term. It has also necessitated new ways of delivering care. We must ensure these new models meet demand, while taking account of lower occupancy rates and the longer time now needed to prepare for procedures.

Many of the healthcare responses to COVID-19 are important elements of Sláintecare, and we will identify how to keep the gains. Underpinning our approach will be the provision of more health services in the community, increases in capacity including bed, ICU and critical care capacity and the promotion of good public health policy. Our approach will be patient centred.

We will maintain leadership at the highest level with the Cabinet Committee on Health, chaired by the Taoiseach, giving overall strategic direction and overseeing implementation of Sláintecare.

### Structural reform

Enhanced governance and accountability in the health service is a key component of Sláintecare reform. The HSE Board is now in place and we must now bring forward detailed proposals on the six new regional health areas to deliver services for patients locally that are safe, high quality and fairly distributed.

We will finalise the new Sláintecare consultant contract and legislate for public-only work in public hospitals.

We will also undertake an analysis of key indicators and healthcare metrics to examine how care needs are being met or unmet, to be used as a component in the planning of future healthcare delivery. This will increase people's quality of life and life expectancy.

### Fairer and affordable Care

Over the lifetime of the Government, we will seek to expand universal access to healthcare in a manner which fair and affordable.

Over the term of the Government, we will:

- Increase homecare hours and introduce a Statutory Homecare Scheme.
- Extend free GP care to more children.
- Extend free GP care to carers in receipt of the Carer's Support Grant..
- Abolish in-patient hospital charges for children.
- Extend free dental care to more children.
- Introduce baby boxes for all new parents.
- Reduce prescription charges and the Drug Payment Scheme threshold.
- Increase the income threshold on medical cards for people over 70.
- Extend discretionary medical cards to those with a terminal illness.
- Introduce a cap on the maximum daily charge for car parking charge for patients and visitors at all public hospitals, where possible. Introduce flexible passes in all hospitals for patients and their families.
- Establish a National Medicines Agency, promoting national prescribing to reduce the cost of medicines including via generic prescription where appropriate, and to set a fair price for drug reimbursement.

- Retain access to private health services ensuring choice for those accessing healthcare.

### Deliver more care in the community

Expanding primary and community care is at the heart of Sláintecare – making the vast majority of healthcare services available in the home or close to home, rather than in our hospitals. We will expand community-based care by:

- Developing Community Healthcare Networks supporting the expansion of services based on the need and size of local populations.
- Targeting increasing opening times for unscheduled care, radiology and diagnostic services in the community.
- Strengthening general practice – implement the contract with GPs, sustain out-of-hours and rural services and increase GP training places, including for GP with Special Interest qualifications.
- Establishing a “Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)” type programme for health, providing GP practices, community pharmacies and public health staff with dedicated additional resources to communities, focused on improved health outcomes and driven by strong data.
- Rolling out the chronic disease management programme.
- Increasing telemedicine and virtual clinics based on the very positive usage and experience during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Supporting the Dialogue Forum working with voluntary organisations to build a stronger working relationship between the State and the voluntary healthcare sector.
- Commencing talks with our pharmacists on a new contract and enhancement of their role in the delivery of healthcare in the community, including via e-prescribing and issuance of repeat prescriptions.
- Supporting the expansion of community ophthalmology and the wider adoption of the Sligo pilot model.

### Increase Capacity

Even before the impact of COVID-19 on our health service, significant additional capacity was required across all aspects of care to provide access to quality services and to meet the needs of our growing population. Under our plans to increase capacity, we will:

- Continue investment in healthcare infrastructure and equipment, together with the recommendations of the Capacity Review, in line with Project Ireland 2040.
- Ensure capacity for a COVID-19 rapid response, including bed and ICU capacity and for non-COVID emergencies into the longer term by utilising some private hospital capacity if necessary.
- Open the National Children’s Hospital.
- Deliver the second cath lab in Waterford University Hospital.
- Conclude the governance arrangements and commence the building of the new maternity Hospital at St Vincent’s Hospital.
- Provide new radiation oncology facilities in Galway and Dublin.
- Through the Design and Dignity Programme renovate and renew eleven mortuaries across the country.
- Increase capacity in our National Ambulance Service and expand Community First Responder schemes.

- Work with the HSE to improve palliative care across the country by aiming to ensure a seamless pathway for palliative care patients across inpatient, homecare, nursing home and day care services.

### EHealth and ICT

Digital health services are a key enabler to deliver care more effectively, empower patients in accessing their own medical records and manage their care, as well as providing more services in patients homes and the community. To advance these services, we will:

- Invest in a modern eHealth and ICT infrastructure, in line with Project Ireland 2040 and the eHealth strategy.
- Build on the progress already made in responding to COVID-19, by working with GPs to improve eHealth measures, providing for the secure electronic sharing of patient information, lab results, diagnostic imaging reports, and prescription orders between medical providers.
- Roll out Individual Health Identifier programme ensuring patient information is accessible across different services to improve patient safety. This will allow direct patient access to view and correct inaccurate information.
- Implement an Electronic Health Record system in the new National Children’s Hospital, and prepare to roll out nationwide.
- Explore the potential for introducing a 24 hour triage and health concerns telephone and website service which helps to direct patients into appropriate streams of care.

### Supporting our Healthcare workers

Everyday our healthcare professionals, through their dedication and professionalism, demonstrate their willingness to protect us all – we must show our support in return. We will:

- Recruit additional frontline community staff, including public health nurses and allied health professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists, dementia advisers and speech and language therapists.
- Continue to implement the Nursing Agreement, which includes additional measures to assist with the recruitment and retention of nurses into the public health service.
- Establish an expert group on nursing and midwifery to advance the nursing and midwifery professions.
- Engage with radiographers, paramedics and healthcare assistants on how their roles can be developed.
- Increase the number of public only consultants in our hospitals.
- Implement the GP contract.
- Transfer GP training to the Irish College of General Practitioners.
- Establish a workforce planning expert unit to work with the education sectors, regulators and professional bodies to improve the availability of health professionals and reform their training to support integrated care across the entire health service.
- Require continuous professional development for all staff in the health sector.

### More compassionate care

A culture of open disclosure, where health professionals are supported and patients’ voices are heard, must be the bedrock of delivering safe services. To ensure this is the case we will:

- Enact the Patient Safety (Notifiable Patient Safety Incidents) Bill 2019, providing for mandatory open disclosure.

- Enhance the patient safety role of HIQA.
- Continue to support the National Patient Advocacy Service, and the work of the National Patient Safety Office (NPSO) in overseeing a programme of patient safety improvements and reforms.
- Reassess how claims for medical negligence are handled in Ireland including the role of the State Claims Agency so that the Irish medical negligence regime is brought into line with other OECD countries following from the Meenan Report. Examine the potential to legislate for mediation as a first resort for disputes involving medical negligence in healthcare.
- Introduce a package of supports for those affected by patient safety incidents at the same time as an open disclosure and ensure that an apology is made.

### Focus on Rare Diseases

We know that many rare conditions are complex and their impacts are severe on the patients living with them. At times, it can be difficult to access appropriate medications and technology. We will ensure an increased focus on rare diseases by:

- Publishing an updated National Rare Diseases Plan.
- Promoting research and in particular clinical trials, which are key to improving prevention, diagnosis and treatment of rare diseases.
- Enacting the National Research Ethics Committee Bill.
- Establishing a National Genetics and Genomics Medicine Network.
- Supporting the medical genetics service in Our Lady's Children Hospital, Crumlin.

### Implementation of National Health Strategies

By ensuring continued implementation of key health strategies, which have a particular focus on patient care, we can improve survival rates and significantly improve peoples' quality of life. We will continue implementation of the:

- National Cancer Strategy
- Trauma Strategy
- National Dementia Strategy
- National Maternity Strategy
- Neuro Rehabilitation Strategy
- National Clinical Programme for Stroke.

### Organ Donations

- Enact the Human Tissue Bill, providing the legal basis for an opt-out system of organ donation and deliver a public information campaign.

### Sustainable Care

- Examine WHO recommendations and best practice approaches to reducing waste and improving ecological practice in healthcare.

## Promoting Women's Health

There is now an increased focus on women's health issues, together with greater scrutiny of women's experiences of health care and it is incumbent upon us to act. We will:

- Support the work of the Women's Health Taskforce, including the development of a Women's Health Action Plan, to tackle a wide range of issues impacting women's health outcomes in Ireland.
- Promote an increase in the number of new mothers breastfeeding by increasing support in our maternity hospitals and primary care centres, through access to lactation specialists and public health nurses.
- Fully implement the recommendations contained in Dr Scally's Reports of the Scoping Inquiry, and all other reports into Cervical Check.
- Support the CervicalCheck Screening Programme and promote the uptake of the HPV vaccine.
- Provide free contraception over a phased period, starting with women aged 17-25.
- Enact the Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) Bill.
- Introduce a publicly funded model of care for fertility treatment.
- Extend BreastCheck to those aged 69.
- Implement the National Maternity Strategy, to support recruitment and training of additional key midwifery and medical staff, options for homebirth, access to dating and anomaly scanning in all maternity units and care pathway across the maternity network.
- Progress the planning, tender and design stages for the relocation of the Coombe Hospital to St James's, the Rotunda Hospital to Connolly, and Limerick University Maternity Hospital to University Hospital Limerick.
- Establish exclusion zones around medical facilities.
- Note the review as required under Section 7 of the Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy Act 2018 which will take place in 2021.

## A Healthier Future

The State has a major role to play in promoting good health. A healthy lifestyle is one of the foundations of a better quality of life. Healthy Ireland is the national action plan to help people live healthier and longer lives.

The most recent Healthy Ireland survey demonstrates good progress in reducing the prevalence of smoking, but also indicates that less than half of those surveyed are achieving the weekly minimum level of physical activity and that obesity remains a major concern.

To support the continued health and well-being of everyone, we will:

### Tobacco and Nicotine

- Increase the excise duty on tobacco in the years ahead to further discourage smoking.
- Bring in a targeted taxation regime to specifically discourage ‘vaping’ and e-cigarettes.
- Ban the sale of nicotine-inhaling products, including e-cigarettes, to people under 18 years, introduce a licensing system for the retail sale of nicotine-inhaling products and restrict the types of retailers who can sell these products.
- Curb the advertising of nicotine-inhaling products near schools, on public transport and in cinemas.

### Alcohol

- Continue to implement the Public Health (Alcohol) Act and honour our longstanding commitment to introduce minimum unit pricing in consultation with Northern Ireland.

### Tackling Obesity

- Work with key stakeholders to introduce a Public Health Obesity Act, including examining restrictions on promotion and advertising aimed at children.
- Ensure all local authorities embed actions on obesity prevention in future County and City Development Plans.

### Children’s Health

- Introduce planning restrictions on outlets selling high calorie ‘junk-food’ and beverages adjacent to schools.
- Extend the oral health promotion programme to reach all children in primary schools.

### Exercise

- Promote more physical exercise among all sections of the community, young and old, for the long-term health and benefit of society.
- Work to encourage increased participation in Physical Education in primary and secondary education.
- Support SMEs to have adequate shower and changing facilities to support workers who cycle and run to work.
- Encourage close collaboration between the Departments of Education, Health and Sport and sporting organisations to encourage and enable physical activity amongst children, in particular at primary school.

### Screening and Immunisation

- Remain committed to protecting the nation’s health and wellbeing through immunisation, infectious disease control and continued support for our screening programmes.
- Examine the possibility of introducing a national immunisation register.
- Extend BreastCheck to women aged 69 and BowelScreen to all aged 55-74.
- Make the flu vaccine available to more people without charge.

- Continue to support the National Vaccine Alliance in promoting the uptake of childhood vaccines and reducing vaccine hesitancy.
- Examine the inclusion of chicken pox vaccine in the children's immunisation schedule.
- Following completion of the work of the Health Research Board on approaches to vaccination in other countries, act on its advice and recommendations.

## Mental Health

Promoting positive mental health and reducing the burden of mental illness can have benefits for everyone. The outbreak of COVID-19 in Ireland has created significant anxiety, stress and fear for many people, reinforcing the need for a range of mental health supports and services. Mental health service users are among the most vulnerable people in Ireland, we should aim to become an international leader in supporting and caring for people with mental health needs.

### Sharing the Vision – a Mental Health Policy for Everyone

*Sharing the Vision – a Mental Health Policy for Everyone*, is a new national health policy focusing on a ‘stepped care approach’ to enable individuals to access a range of services which best meet their needs and circumstances, as close to home as possible.

It retains multi-disciplinary staff teams as the cornerstone of support to individuals with mental health concerns attending primary care services.. By providing more assistant psychologists, occupational therapists and other key workers, we will create a flexible approach and encourage more collaboration with acute services and the voluntary and community sector.

We will ensure that any new services, such as outreach, are supported by community cafes and intensive rehabilitation units. Care will be provided to vulnerable people in a variety of in-patient and community settings.

The outbreak of COVID-19 advanced the development of online training, counselling and crisis texting within our health service. Through the promotion of digital health interventions such as online training, safe talk training and new pilot tele-psychiatry services including in an emergency department, we will significantly improve access to mental health services. The new national policy is well suited to develop these forms of counselling and supports into the future.

Importantly, *Sharing the Vision* recognises that many vulnerable groups including those who are homeless, or have an intellectual disability, or an eating disorder have specific needs, which our mental health services should be equipped to meet.

### Implementation Plan

A *Vision for Change*, the predecessor to the new national policy, set a high standard for the development of mental health policy but it did not have an implementation plan to effectively measure outcomes.

*Sharing the Vision* includes an implementation roadmap with outcome indicators and allocates ownership of the recommendations to lead agencies, with time-bound implementation targets against each action.

In order to deliver fully on these commitments, we will immediately establish a national implementation and monitoring committee which will have representatives from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. This national committee via the Minister for Health will report progress to a Cabinet Committee.

In further developing our mental health services, we will:

- Work to end the admission of children to adult psychiatric units by increasing in-patient beds, as well as examining the model of assigning these beds.
- Continue to support the expansion of Jigsaw services and their existing network of early intervention and prevention services and supports.

- Integrate mental health services provided by non-governmental organisations, with a system of care that includes local statutory and community services.
- Continue to resource the national roll out of the model care for Specialist Perinatal Mental Health, with the expansion of mental health supports to be made available to both parents and parents of adopted children.
- Open the new National Forensic Mental Hospital in Portrane.
- Implement the Pathfinder inter-departmental unit on youth mental health.
- Examine a one-door policy, a single psychological assessment tool, to determine the most appropriate service .
- Extend the remit of the National Treatment Purchase Fund to secure timely assessment to both child and adult psychological services.
- Seek to expand social prescribing where patients are referred to non-clinical activities, as means of positively influencing mental well-being.
- Complete the update of the 2001 Mental Health Act, including amendments to allow young people, aged 16-17 years old, the right to consent to treatment for their mental health.
- Publish a Traveller and Roma Mental Health Action Plan.
- Examine the appointment of a Chief Psychiatrist in the Department of Health and a National Director for Mental Health in the HSE.
- In line with the Expert Group on the Review of the Mental Health Act 2001, we will increase the number of Authorised Officers to support families.
- Examine extending the Patient Advocacy Service to support those accessing public mental health services.
- Ensure that mental health services are accessible to people in the deaf community.
- Promote mental health research to assist in better responding to the mental health needs of the population.

### Suicide Prevention

Overcoming stigma and preventing the tragedy of suicide will be at the core of any mental health policy.

We will:

- Work closely with the National Suicide Prevention Office to develop specific suicide prevention policies and to ensure a whole of government approach to suicide prevention.
- Support ongoing implementation of the extended Connecting for Life, focused on reducing the loss of life by suicide and reducing cases of self-harm.

## A Health-led approach to Drugs Misuse

Substance abuse and addiction affects people from all walks of life. By treating the use of substances as a public health issue, rather than solely as a criminal issue we can better help individuals, their families and the communities in which we all live. We are concerned about the increasing prevalence of the illegal drug use over recent decades.

The National Drugs Strategy, Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery 2017-2025, provides a roadmap to achieving these aims by promoting a more compassionate approach to people who use drugs, with addiction treated first as a health issue.

The Drug and Alcohol Task Forces (DATFs) play a key role in implementing this strategy and increasing access at local level to harm reduction initiatives. We will examine how we can continue to support them in identifying local need in communities, and support targeted initiatives addressing drug and alcohol misuse.

Recognising the link between drugs and mental health, we will ensure a representative of the National Oversight Committee for Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery is included in the implementation and monitoring arrangements for *Sharing the Vision – a Mental Health Policy for Everyone*, a new national mental health policy.

We will implement the recommendations of the Working Group to Consider Alternative Approaches to the Possession of Drugs for Personal Use, as an important step in developing a public health led approach to drug use in this country. This approach will connect people who use drugs with health services and a pathway to recovery, avoiding a criminal conviction, which can have far-reaching consequences for people, particularly younger people. We will undertake a review of this alternative approach to ensure it is meeting all of its aims, following the first full year of implementation, and make any necessary changes.

In addition, we will:

- Examine the regulations and legislation that apply to cannabis use for medical conditions and palliative care having regard to the experience in Northern Ireland and Great Britain.
- Convene a Citizens' Assembly to consider matters relating to drugs use.
- Build on recent initiatives at junior and senior cycle and support secondary schools in introducing drug and alcohol awareness programmes, particularly in relation to the hazards of casual drug use.
- Recognising the additional risk faced by people who use drugs, specific actions have been taken to support increased and improved access to opioid substitution services during COVID-19.
- We will seek to retain these measures to reduce waiting times in accessing these services.
- Examine approaches to identifying at risk young people and vulnerable groups to interrupt their potential trajectory into problem drug and alcohol misuse.
- Increase and support drug quality-testing services, particularly at festivals.
- Recognising that women can face barriers to accessing and sustaining addiction treatment, arising from an absence of childcare or the presence of domestic violence, develop targeted interventions aimed at responding to their needs.
- Expand services for pregnant and post-natal women affected by substance use, and their children.
- Examine the potential for an information campaign on the health impacts of steroid use, particularly on young men.

- Create a path for people in rehabilitation from drug addiction to access education and training facilities in their local areas.
- Re-establish the Galway City Community Based Alcohol Treatment Service.
- Progress the National Clinical Programme for Dual Diagnosis and work to develop joint protocols and referral pathways.
- Support the Drug Related Intimidation Reporting Programme, developed by the National Family Support Network, in partnership with An Garda Síochána, to respond to the needs of drug users and families facing the threat of drug related intimidation.
- Establish a 24-hour helpline based on the FRANK helpline in the UK providing advice and assistance to people who use drugs and their family members.
- Develop health and social interventions based on an inclusion-health approach to target people who are homeless and in addiction.
- Ensure in-reach supports and pathways to access to treatment for homeless, traveller and new communities.
- Increase the number of residential treatment beds for those stabilising, detoxing and/or seeking drug-free services.
- Significantly increase support for 'step-down' accommodation to prevent high-risk single people and families, exiting treatment into homelessness.
- Reduce the number of lives lost through overdose by opening a pilot medically supervised injecting facility in Dublin City.
- Support roll-out of access to and training in opioid antidotes.
- Ensure a 'Good Neighbour' policy for drug treatment centres to address any concerns held by local residents and businesses alike.
- Legislate against the coercion and use of minors in the sale and supply of drugs.
- Continue to resource harm reduction and education campaigns aimed at increasing awareness of the risks of drug use and the contribution of drugs to criminality.

## An Age Friendly Ireland

As more of us enjoy our older years, we must plan to meet the accommodation and future healthcare needs of our diverse, aging population. Our approach is to support older people to live in their own home with dignity and independence for as long as possible. To deliver on this vision, we need to recognise the close connection between healthcare supports and housing options.

### Commission on Care

The impact of COVID-19 has been particularly difficult for older people. It has been challenging for those who live on their own and for those residing in nursing homes.

Learning from COVID-19 we will assess how we care for older people and examine alternatives to meet the diverse needs of our older citizens. We will establish a commission to examine care and supports for older people.

### Home and community care support

By keeping care close to home and expanding the range of health and social care services in the community, we want to enable everyone to live longer healthier lives. This is particularly important for older people, who access these services more frequently.

We will:

- Expand community-based care bringing it closer to home, in line with the Sláintecare Implementation plan.
- Introduce a statutory scheme to support people to live in their own homes which will provide equitable access to high quality, regulated home care.
- Increase homecare hours.
- Expand Community Intervention Teams to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions and to support timely discharges of patients to their homes.
- Ensure that community services assign a case manager for older people with chronic conditions to assist them with accessing the care they need.
- Develop the role of advanced nurse practitioners in older person services and chronic disease management.
- Increase the availability of stepdown facilities.
- Support eHealth and the increased use of assistive technologies, supporting people to live independently.
- Deliver a 'Carers Guarantee' proposal that will provide a core basket of services to carers across the country regardless of where they live.
- Increase access to talk therapies and improve access to specialist expertise when it is required in line with Sharing the Vision – A Mental Health Policy for Everyone.  
Develop a plan aimed at tackling loneliness and isolation, particularly amongst older people as outlined in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion.

### Delivering Choice

Being able to live in appropriate housing with access to health and social care services improves our health, but also ensures older people stay close to their families and actively participate in their communities. In developing a wider choice of appropriate housing options and community supports,

We will:

- Embed ageing in place options for older people into the planning system as the county and city development plans are redrawn this year.
- Drawing on the Housing Need and Demand Assessments, develop demographic reporting tools and population projections to gain a better national understanding of the needs and location of housing options for older people.
- Increase the provision of smaller homes in developments, ensuring that older people can remain living in their communities close to essential services and facilities.
- Task local authorities to work with Approved Housing Bodies, co-operatives, private developers and Age Friendly Ireland on the development/redevelopment of older person housing.
- Maintain support for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme.
- Promote active retirement and positive aging initiatives to tackle social isolation.
- Explore a new digital skills for citizens grant scheme focussing on one-to-one training.
- Ensure that older people who are at greater risk of fuel poverty and the respiratory illnesses associated with air pollution be prioritised in climate action and climate mitigation plans.
- Encourage book clubs for older people to tackle loneliness.

### Long-term residential care

While we all want to grow old at home that may not always be possible and long-term residential nursing home care may be required. Globally, the impact of COVID-19 on those living in long-term residential care settings has been significant. As we reopen our society, we must plan to meet these challenges into the future. We will:

- Work with the Nursing Home Expert Panel, which has been tasked with examining and advising on the ongoing COVID-19 response.
- Examine ways to improve integration with the health service and clarify clinical governance arrangements for nursing homes.
- Support the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (The Fair Deal) to provide assistance when staying at home may no longer be an option.
- Enact legislation implementing the revised Nursing Homes Support Scheme arrangements for farmers and business owners.
- Ensure that no Nursing Homes Support Scheme resident is charged for services they do not use.
- Examine extending the remit of the Patient Advocacy Service to residents of long-term residential care facilities.
- Champion a whole of life approach to care and caring responsibilities.
- Ensure the best possible safeguards are in place to protect our friends and family in nursing homes.

### Enhancing dementia care

While dementia brings many challenges for people living with it and for those who care for them, access to the right services and supports can assist people to live well in their communities. To achieve this, we will:

- Implement the National Dementia Care Strategy.
- Ensure that home support is adaptable and responsive to the needs of those with dementia.
- Increase the number of dementia advisers.
- Investigate the possibility of establishing a dementia village along the lines of Hogeweyk in the Netherlands.

- Finalise a code of practice on Advanced Healthcare Directives, allowing for full commencement of the legislative framework.

### End-of-life care

In developing end of life services, the care and dignity of a dying person and their family must be our focus. In ensuring this, we will:

- Increase the number of specialist palliative care beds countrywide over the next five years, ensuring that there will be a hospice serving every region in the country.
- Open new units in Mayo, Waterford and Wicklow in 2020.
- Progress plans to build units in Drogheda and Cavan, and a further inpatient unit planned for the Midlands.
- Support Community Specialist Palliative Home Care Teams in all HSE areas, fund designated home care packages and resource specialist palliative care provided in Section 39 acute hospitals.
- Increase resources for the Children's Palliative Care Programme. This will be supported by consultants with a special interest in children's palliative care and children's outreach nurses to coordinate care for children with life-limiting conditions and their families.
- Publish a new Palliative Care Policy for Adults by mid-2021 to update the 2001 policy. This will reflect the many developments in end-of life care and international best practice and better interact with children's palliative care.
- Complete the research being carried out in association with the Irish Hospice Foundation into the cost of bereavement and funeral poverty in Ireland. This research will inform our approach to determining any further interventions or supports the State can provide to alleviate any hardship associated with loss and bereavement.

## Mission: Housing for All

We believe that everybody should have access to good quality housing to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard and located close to essential services offering a high quality of life. We understand that provision of more affordable housing has a profound benefit socially and economically and believe the State has a fundamental role in enabling the delivery of new homes and ensuring that best use is made of existing stock.

There have been large increases in the building of new homes over the past four years. However, we still need to build far more homes. While the COVID-19 crisis will present challenges in maintaining that level of growth in 2020, we will work with the construction sector to ensure that the number of new build homes continues to grow in the years ahead.

Over the next five years we will:

- Put affordability at the heart of the housing system.
- Prioritise the increased supply of public, social and affordable homes.
- Progress a State-backed affordable home purchase scheme to promote home ownership.
- Increase the social housing stock by more than 50,000, with an emphasis on new builds.
- Tackle homelessness.
- Ensure local authorities are central to delivering housing.
- Work with the private sector to ensure an appropriate mix and type of housing is provided nationally.
- Improve the supply and affordability of rental accommodation and the security of tenure for renters.

We recognise the important role that private housing supply will continue to play. We will seek to address challenges in this sector including viability, access to finance, land availability, the delivery of infrastructure, building quality, building standards and regulation and an adequate supply of skilled labour.

### Homelessness

Reducing and preventing homelessness is a major priority for the Government. We recognise the particular challenges of homelessness, for families and for individuals. We will focus our efforts on reducing the number of homeless families and individuals and work with local authorities and housing agencies to support them into long-term sustainable accommodation.

We will:

- Increase funding and work with stakeholders, case workers and homeless people on a suite of measures to help rough sleepers into sustainable accommodation.
- Continue to expand the Housing First approach with a focus on the construction and acquisition of one-bed homes and the provision of relevant supporting services.

- Ensure the HSE provides a dedicated funding line and resources to deliver the necessary health and mental health supports required to assist homeless people with complex needs.
- Ensure Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) levels are adequate to support vulnerable households while we increase the supply of social housing.
- Move away from dormitory-style accommodation on a long-term basis and aim to provide suitable tenancies.
- Ensure that aftercare and transition plans and protocols are developed for vulnerable homeless people or those at risk of homelessness leaving hospital, State care, foster care, prison or other State settings.
- Develop a National Youth Homelessness Strategy.
- Continue the Housing Agency's Acquisition Fund to purchase vacant stock from financial institutions.
- Increase funding for drug free hostels.
- Continue to fund the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service, Abhaile.

### Affordable Home Ownership

We believe that home ownership should be within reach of all our citizens. We will bring forward measures over the lifetime of the Government to enable home ownership for more people through increased supply and interventions that make home ownership more affordable.

An overriding objective of our housing policy is to make homes more affordable.

We will:

- Progress a State-backed affordable home purchase scheme to promote home ownership.
- The Minister for Housing will bring forward a target for the delivery of affordable homes over the lifetime of the Government to be available for qualifying purchasers as a matter of priority. Recognising the ambition of the Government in this area, these homes could be delivered through a number of channels including local authorities (Serviced Sites Fund), introducing affordable homes requirements to Part V and the Land Development Agency and will be sold through the State-backed Affordable Purchase Scheme.
- Extend the Serviced Sites Fund.
- Provide seed capital to local authorities to provide serviced sites at cost in towns and villages to allow individuals and families build homes.
- Retain and expand the Help to Buy scheme for new properties and self-build properties.
- Expand the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.
- Explore expanding Part V to encompass affordable purchase and cost rental units.
- Strengthen the Mortgage to Rent scheme and ensure that it is helping those who need it.

## Public and Social Housing

Having a safe home is a cornerstone of a decent quality of life. We will push forward the role of the State to play a greater part in directly providing affordable public and social homes. We will invest in housing as a social and economic imperative focused on low and middle-income earners and developing sustainable mixed tenure communities.

We will:

- Increase the social housing stock by over 50,000 over the next five-years, the majority of which are to be built by local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies and State agencies.
- Ensure an appropriate mix of housing design types is provided, including universally designed units, accommodation for older people and people with disabilities.
- Put in place the appropriate controls to allow local authority discretionary funding to increase from €2m to €6m for social housing projects.
- Expand the role of Vacant Homes Officers in local authorities and support local authorities to bring vacant stock into productive use.
- Work on a package of reforms with Approved Housing Bodies to ensure they can access finance and move off balance sheet.
- Introduce a package of social housing reforms to:
  - a) Introduce a social housing passport to allow households move from one local authority list to another.
  - b) Maintain the right of social housing tenants to purchase their own home, but require them to be in situ for ten years, reduce the discount to a maximum of 25% and give local authorities the first call on purchase.
  - c) Standardise the differential rents regime across the country to ensure fairness.
  - d) Create a website to allow for choice based letting on a nationwide basis.
- Ensure that procurement policy for social housing has strong social clauses, is in line with the new Green Public Procurement policy and delivers strong value-for-money protections for public funds.

Local authority direct build housing projects, specific timelines and all gateway approval processes will be transparent and open to public oversight.

## Rental

Improving the standards, security and affordability for renters is a priority for the Government. To achieve this, we will:

- Develop a cost rental model for the delivery of housing that creates affordability for tenants and a sustainable model for the construction and management of homes. In doing this, we will be informed by international experience of the delivery of cost rental, such as the 'Vienna Model' and others.

- Examine the creation of a system of holding rental deposits informed by international experience.
- We will reduce our reliance on the use of HAP for new social housing solutions as the supply of social and public housing increases.
- Mandate and resource the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to hear dispute resolution cases where deposits are concerned so that the tenant can have their deposit returned to allow them secure another property and to allow for swift resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants.
- Continue the RTB change programme, transforming it into an independent and strong regulator for tenants and landlords.
- Strengthen the regulatory and enforcement mechanisms with regard to short-term lettings.
- Support the adequate supply of rental accommodation by ensuring equity and fairness for landlords and tenants.
- Reform the Fair Deal scheme to incentivise renting out vacant properties.
- Improve the security of tenure for tenants, through legislating for tenancies of indefinite duration, increasing RTB inspections and enforcement and examining incentives for long-term leasing.
- Instruct local authorities as part of their housing strategies to undertake and publish a rental needs assessment.
- Examine the measures that may be needed to support tenants, as a result of COVID-19 informed by the forthcoming research from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).
- Extend the moratorium on the termination of tenancies, in line with public health advice, if the requirements of Section 4 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 are met.

### Land Development Agency

Mindful of the need to properly manage and utilise state-owned lands the Government will legislate to establish the Land Development Agency (LDA) on a statutory basis as a matter of urgency. It will be tasked to work with government departments, local authorities, state agencies and other stakeholders to assemble strategic sites in urban areas and ensure the sustainable development of social and affordable homes for rent and purchase.

We will ensure the LDA operates to the highest standard of corporate governance and has strong accountability and transparency requirements within its legislation. We will ensure that all procurement carried out by the LDA has strong value-for-money protections and oversight.

We will:

- Ensure that development of sustainable communities is the core objective of the LDA delivering sustainable, climate resilient, low-carbon housing.

- Task the LDA with driving strategic land assembly to ensure the sustainable development of new and regenerated communities well-served by essential services.
- Provide homes for affordable purchase, cost rental and social housing through the LDA.
- Ensure the LDA Board includes a cross spectrum of housing, financial, governance and other independent experts needed to fulfil its remit.
- Allocate Compulsory Purchase Order powers to the LDA.
- Complete the audit of State lands, identifying land banks in public ownership which are suitable for housing and other purposes.
- Mandate the LDA to work with local authorities, State agencies and other stakeholders to develop masterplans for strategic sites.
- Ensure that the LDA is subject to Freedom of Information.
- Require the LDA to give regular updates to the Oireachtas and review the legislation underpinning the LDA after a three-year period.
- Ensure the LDA uses modern methods of construction, including offsite construction to deliver high quality sustainable homes quickly and at scale. Local supply chains and labour should be used to increase community gain.
- Ensure that any State lands being offered for sale, whether owned by a local authority, government department, commercial or non-commercial semi-state agency or any other agency, would automatically first be offered to the LDA.
- Ensure the public housing rental stock on public lands is under the control of local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies or other similar bodies.

## Defects

We will:

- Examine the issue of defective housing in the first twelve months, having regard to the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing report, 'Safe as Houses'.
- Bring forward law reform to improve the legal remedies for home owners dealing with defects.
- Ensure the remediation fund for Pyrite and Mica is fully drawn down.
- Assist owners of latent defect properties by identifying options for those impacted by defects to access low-cost, long-term finance.

## Management Companies

We will conduct a review of the existing management company legislation to ensure it is fit for purpose and acts in the best interests of residents.

## Planning and Reform

We will:

- Introduce a ‘use it or lose it’ condition for all planning applications of ten units or more.
- Review and reform the judicial review process so that such reforms come into effect upon the establishment of the Environmental and Planning Law Court, while always adhering to our EU law obligations under the Aarhus Convention.
- Examine the creation of an independent Building Standards Regulator to oversee building control nationwide and to act as custodian of the Building Control Management System, including the re-establishment of the Building Regulatory Advisory Body.
- Introduce a new scheme to expand and build on the Living Cities Initiative to encourage infill development.
- Review how community gain can be captured through a review of the development levy process, rezoning system and planning permission conditions.
- Ensure that the Planning Regulator is adequately resourced and proactively engages with all stakeholders in the planning system, including informing and assisting the general public in inputting into local and regional development plans.
- Ensure construction materials and standards adhere to UN Sustainable Development Goals, EU Green Deal objectives and our emissions targets.
- Work to ensure our ageing population has a range of options for living independently and alternatives to long-term residential care to support ageing in place in line with the policy statement ‘Housing Options for Our Ageing Population’.
- Avoid over-concentration of particular housing types in areas by requiring local authorities to complete Housing Need and Demand Assessments to inform delivery of an appropriate mix of housing typologies to cater for the needs of disparate household types and sizes.
- Reform and consolidate Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) laws.
- Enhance skills and capacity in the construction sector by increasing training places for apprentices, reviewing the funding model and expanding shared apprenticeship initiatives.
- Strengthen enforcement of the Vacant Site Levy and keep the legislation under review.
- Work to enhance productivity in the construction sector, including utilising modern methods of construction. This work will be guided by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
- Continue to ensure Home Building Finance Ireland is funding SME builders and helping to bring down the cost of construction finance.
- Not extend Strategic Housing Developments beyond their legislative expiry in eighteen months’ time.
- Examine ways to ensure unused or underused building stock in cities and other urban centres can be made available for upgraded and sustainable housing and further develop ‘Live Above the Shop’ measures.

### Commission on Housing

In addition to the measures on housing set out above, the Government will establish a Commission on Housing to examine issues such as tenure, standards, sustainability, and quality of life issues in the provision of housing.

## Mission: Balanced Regional Development

We have a vision of a vibrant, inclusive and thriving Ireland where no one is left behind. As the economy recovers from COVID-19, the Government will enact measures to revitalise and reboot the economy across our cities, towns, villages and rural areas. The Government is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all our citizens, regardless of where they live.

We will:

- Ensure that policy and planning across Government in relation to the future provision of services and infrastructure will be fully aligned with the National Planning Framework to ensure balanced and sustainable development in Ireland over the next 20 years.
- Develop the cities of Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Galway as viable alternatives to Dublin and use Project Ireland 2040 to help regional towns prosper.
- Continue the Project Ireland 2040 Rural and Regeneration Fund and Urban Regeneration and Development Fund.
- Drive an informed and proactive engagement approach in the planning system. We will involve communities at an early stage and instil the concept of community gain. The new Office of the Planning Regulator will have a role in this regard.
- Recognise the importance of agriculture, fisheries, tourism and other sectors that support balanced regional development and employment.

### Rural Development

We believe progressive actions should be taken to support livelihoods and enhance the rural environment. We will ensure our regional towns and villages act as hubs of sustainable development to serve a thriving hinterland.

We will:

- Publish and implement a new Rural Policy to build on the progress of the Action Plan for Rural Development to promote rural recovery and development in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Initiate a regular series of Rural Ideas Fora to foster ongoing contributions from communities to inform rural policy development and innovation.
- Invest in infrastructure, including broadband and waste and waste water infrastructure, to support the development of rural towns and villages.
- Prioritise the upkeep and expansion of parks, green spaces and other recreational infrastructure for community enjoyment and biodiversity enhancement.
- Support, through a consultative process, community groups, arts and cultural bodies, sports clubs, voluntary organisations and charities to recover and enhance their impact in the aftermath of COVID-19.

## The LEADER Rural Development Programme

We will support a LEADER Programme and deliver a Rural Development Programme which is led by independent Local Action Groups and supported by Local Community Development Committees.

We will:

- Prioritise a state-led Rural Development Programme to bridge the gap between the wind-up of the existing LEADER Programme and implementation of the new Programme.
- Simplify and reduce bureaucracy and promote the role of independent Local Action Groups (LAGs), while ensuring that strong accountability and transparency mechanisms are in place to protect taxpayers' money.
- Prioritise national and local government support to pursue extra EU funding opportunities through Community Led Local Development (CLLD).
- Apply to the EU for exemption from State Aid rules constraining the potential of the LEADER Programme to help communities and small business, particularly in the context of COVID-19.
- Review capital funding restrictions under the LEADER Programme for broadband.
- Increase Rate of Aid available to private enterprise through LEADER from 50% to 75% for capital projects.

## High-Speed Broadband and Remote Working

Ensuring access to high quality internet connections for people across Ireland is essential to the development of all parts our country, socially and economically. Facilitating remote working and innovation opportunities is essential in addressing climate change, adapting to an evolving economy and competing internationally.

We will:

- Seek to accelerate the roll out of the National Broadband Plan.
- Work with local councils to establish designated groups to help facilitate the local rollout of the infrastructure.
- Learn from initiatives like the Ludgate Centre in Skibbereen to enable greater public/private cooperation in developing digital hubs and smart working facilities.
- Continue to support the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce.
- Support the development of Broadband Connection Points across the country, and the development of digital hubs which can support remote working in as many of the Broadband Connection Points as possible.
- Expand the provision of free-to-use wireless internet connectivity in rural areas through the roll-out of Broadband Connection Points, WiFi4EU public Wi-Fi networks and the Digital Innovation Programme.

- Develop a national remote working policy to facilitate employees to work from home or from co-working spaces in rural areas and to support the retention of skilled young people in rural communities.
- Mandate public sector employers, colleges and other public bodies to move to 20% home and remote working in 2021.
- Examine the feasibility and merits of changing tax arrangements to encourage more people to work remotely.

### Balanced Regional Development

We recognise that balanced regional development is critical to reduce pressure on the Greater Dublin area. We are mindful that balanced regional development will in itself reduce environmental pressures and keep our smaller urban centres vibrant.

We will:

- Pursue a coherent policy approach to the enterprise needs of every part of Ireland through the Regional Action Plan for Jobs.
- Acknowledge the ongoing importance and role of regional assemblies in management of European Union funding programmes.
- Where possible prioritise the siting of new State agencies, departments and enterprises in towns and cities outside of Dublin.
- Assist rural economies to diversify into new sectors and markets and capitalise on emerging job opportunities by taking advantage of high-speed broadband and new technologies.
- Continue to roll out the development of the Technological University model with a particular focus on establishing the Technological University in the South East.
- Develop new apprenticeships in sectors with a strong regional footprint.

### The Islands

We will publish the Islands' Action Plan this year, so that action can be taken on improving connectivity, transport links, education, job creation and fully exploiting the potential for tourism on our islands.

### Improving connectivity and transport in rural Ireland

We will:

- Further integrate Local Link services with other existing public transport services (e.g. the National Transport Authority) and build on exemplar models of integrated rural transport, improve connectivity and access for rural dwellers to work, study, social activities and public services while reducing car dependence.
- Ensure sufficient investment in the local and regional road network to maintain roads to a proper standard, deal with road safety challenges and improve regional accessibility.
- Develop a subsidised Local Area Hackney Scheme informed by the pilot in 15 designated areas of rural Ireland which are too small or remote to support a full-time taxi or hackney service.

- Ensure the Local Improvement Scheme is funded into the future.

## Young People and Rural Ireland

We will:

- Establish a Rural Youth Assembly as part of a National Youth Assembly to allow young people in rural Ireland identify and influence policy issues that impact on them and their future.
- Seek to increase funding for the national network of Comhairle na nÓg.
- Encourage young people to participate in community development initiatives through special awards for youth-led involvement e.g. Tidy Towns Youth Award.
- Establish a national network of Teen Sheds similar to Mens' Sheds.
- Commission research using the ESRI's Growing up in Ireland on outcomes for children and young people in rural Ireland.
- Support the work of Young Social Innovators to assist young people to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath in Ireland, to address issues facing their communities and the country as a whole, and to harness their energy, skills and talent.
- Expand access to social innovation programmes to all post primary schools.

## An Post

A modernised post office network will provide a better range of financial services and e-commerce services for citizens and enterprise, as part of our commitment to a sustainable nationwide post office network.

While An Post has faced significant financial challenges with a significant decline in mail volumes, they have put in place a strategic plan to transform the company. This has resulted in An Post recording an operating profit of over €41m for 2019, the third consecutive year of significant financial improvement bringing the Group out of its loss making position of 2016.

This Government believes An Post has untapped potential to do more and make a further significant contribution across many areas of public, business and community life in Ireland. With an evolving mandate An Post can emerge as a central hub for a wide variety of valuable community focused services.

## Agriculture and Food

The agri-food sector is our most important indigenous industry, providing 173,000 jobs and accounting for 10% of Irish exports. As a Government, we are fully committed to supporting farmers and food businesses, which underpin the vitality of rural villages and towns across the country. The sector has come through a difficult number of years, dealing with many challenges such as Brexit, COVID-19, a new Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), significant market disruption in the beef sector and extreme weather events.

We know farm families and food businesses are the heartbeat of rural Ireland, and we will work with the sector to improve farm incomes and protect the family farm for future generations. We will drive innovation and improvements in land management to reduce emissions and build on Ireland's green reputation for producing high-quality and sustainable produce at the least environmental cost, ensuring the long-term outlook for the agri-food industry remains positive and vibrant.

We outline here the range of initiatives and policies, approaches and strategies that reflect the approach to farming and land use over the lifetime of the Government.

### Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

The negotiation of the next CAP will be critically important in the next decade of farming. Maintaining the CAP budget is our top priority in negotiations. We are prepared to contribute more to the overall EU budget, if it is spent on measures that advance the European ideal. The CAP must continue to deliver on high standards of food production, food security, farm income, improvements in animal welfare, and better environmental outcomes. It is critically important to the future of the family farm, farm incomes and long term economic and environmental sustainability.

We will:

- Establish a well-funded CAP transition period and new CAP to maintain investment levels in the rural economy and safeguard direct payments.
- Seek reforms to the CAP to reward farmers for sequestering carbon, restoring biodiversity, improving water and air quality, producing clean energy and developing schemes that support results-based outcomes.
- Utilise CAP funding and the expertise of state agencies to develop more profitable routes to market for farmers.
- Continue to support farmers to embrace farming practices that are beneficial environmentally, have a lower carbon footprint and better utilise and protect natural resources.
- Support the beef, dairy, sheep, pig, poultry, tillage and horticulture sectors in the context of the next CAP through on-farm investment, the development of producer groups, animal welfare measures and marketing tools such as Protected Geographical Indicator (PGI) status.
- Introduce a new cap on basic payments, in line with the outcome of CAP negotiations.

- Advocate for a fair system of eligibility conditionality under reform of Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition rules, recognising that farmers should not be unfairly penalised for maintaining land that contributes to biodiversity principles.
- Invest in enhanced farm safety and wellbeing measures under the next CAP.

### Protecting farm incomes and sectoral supports

Article 39b of the Lisbon Treaty references improving farm incomes to *“ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increasing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture.”* It is vital that this article is a guiding vision and encompassing objective of the next CAP.

We will:

- Protect and enhance the incomes and livelihoods of family farms as a key objective of the Government, as the agriculture sector embraces the mission of delivering on climate change and biodiversity objectives, while building on its achievements as a world-class producer of quality food.
- Build upon schemes such as Areas of Natural Constraint, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme, Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme (Suckler), the Knowledge Transfer Scheme and the Sheep Welfare Scheme, in a way that enhances farm incomes while contributing to climate change, biodiversity and animal welfare objectives, while recognising their significant contribution to net farm incomes.
- Conduct a review of the means test disregards for Farm Assist with a view to better rewarding farmers availing of the Scheme for their enterprise. Measures such as Farm Assist and the Rural Social Scheme are important supports for low-income farmers.

### Beef

We are fully committed to the future of the beef sector and the work of the Beef Market Taskforce. We acknowledge that beef farmers have experienced serious hardship and low-income challenges in recent times.

We will:

- Ensure the Beef Market Taskforce implements the agreement reached with stakeholders in the beef sector.
- Ensure greater transparency, cooperation and fairness in the beef industry throughout the supply chain – from farm to fork.
- Ensure that the challenges beef farmers have been dealing with are recognised and supported under the next CAP.
- Encourage the establishment of more producer organisations in the beef sector, to provide farmers with the opportunity to build strength in the marketplace.
- Work at EU level for the development of a Protected Geographical Indicator (PGI) for Irish beef.
- Prioritise funds for the promotion of beef in key markets through Bord Bia.
- Acknowledge the important and unique role that the suckler sector plays in the beef industry and commit to developing supports that recognise this critical role.

### Dairy

We will:

- Invest strategically in the future development of the dairy sector, focusing on greater efficiency and sustainability.
- Work with dairy farmers and other stakeholders through the Dairy Forum to consider emerging challenges and continue to focus on developing new markets.
- Encourage investment in renewable infrastructure on farms to reduce energy costs.
- Consider further taxation measures to manage evolving issues such as market volatility.
- Work with farmers to improve the viability of dairy calf-to-beef systems.
- Support farmers who wish to add value through on-farm processing of their milk.

### Sheep

We will:

- Support the sheep sector under the next CAP and recognise the vital role it plays in food production, demonstrating our commitment to maintaining farm incomes in the sheep sector.
- Deliver on further export opportunities for the Irish sheep sector.
- Defend the interests of the sector in trade negotiations.
- Undertake a review of the potential demand in domestic and international markets for wool based products such as insulation and fertilisers.

### Pigs

We will:

- Support pig farms through on-farm investment under the next CAP, focusing on energy efficiency, biosecurity and animal welfare.
- Work with stakeholders in the pig sector on opening new markets.
- Focus on animal health in the sector, preventing emerging threats such as African Swine Fever.

### Poultry

We will support further investment in the poultry sector, providing further improvements in the areas of welfare, biosecurity and energy efficiency.

### Tillage

We will:

- Work with tillage farmers in the context of the CAP and in the development the successor strategy to *Foodwise 2025* to build growth in the sector.
- Focus particularly on maximising potential opportunities in the organic sector, the supply of quality Irish grains to an expanding food and drinks industry and opportunities for homegrown proteins in animal feeds.
- Work to increase the adoption at farm level of Teagasc recommendations for climate smart cultivation methods.

### Horticulture

We will:

- Review the supports available to the horticulture sector and encourage greater expansion and growth in this sector, supplying both the domestic and international market.
- Invest in the promotion of Irish horticultural products and enhance capital investment available to horticulture producers.

### Fibre Crops

We will fully explore the potential for growing fibre crops such as hemp , considering whether these crops have a viable market.

### Young farmers

The generational nature of Irish farming must be nurtured and protected, while providing opportunities for new farmers and producers to enter the sector in a financially viable way.

We will:

- Invest further in the next generation of farmers under the new CAP, encouraging generational change and land mobility to young, educated and trained farmers.
- Continue to prioritise access to entitlements for young trained farmers under the National Reserve.
- Ensure an increased emphasis through our agricultural colleges on education in the areas of sustainability, agroecology, climate action and biodiversity and the link to land use, soil health and agriculture.
- Examine how other countries have supported and encouraged young farmers into the sector.
- Seek to resolve under the next CAP the issue of support for the category of farmers known as ‘Forgotten Farmers’.

### Agri-food policy

We recognise that the new CAP, the EU’s Farm to Fork and biodiversity strategies and the future direction of agri-food policy at a national level will be central to a coherent and strategic COVID-19 and Brexit response and to the delivery of the European Green Deal.

Primary producers must be adequately supported in the implementation of these strategies to ensure there is level playing field right across the supply chain from the primary producer through to the consumer.

We will:

- Implement these strategies, ensuring that the competitiveness and financial viability of food production systems are maintained and enhanced, while increasing environmental and biodiversity benefits to the economy and society.
- Publish a successor strategy to *Foodwise 2025*, within six months of Government formation, providing an ambitious blueprint for the industry for the years ahead, adding value sustainably in the agri-food sector into the future and supporting family farms and employment in rural Ireland.
- Ensure that in addition to growing international markets and value-added export growth as a key priority, a strategic focus of the *Foodwise 2025* successor strategy will be on environmental protection, reversing biodiversity decline and developing additional market opportunities for primary producers closer to home.

- Ensure fairness, equity and transparency in the food chain by establishing a new authority called the National Food Ombudsman (NFO) to enforce the Unfair Trading Practices Directive. This new authority will enforce EU wide rules on prohibited unfair trading practices in the food supply chain and will have powers to enforce this Directive, penalising those who breach regulations. The NFO will have a specific role in analysing and reporting on price and market data in Ireland.
- Provide the necessary supports for primary producers and the agri-food sector to respond to potential market disturbances arising out of COVID-19 and Brexit.
- Review the role, structures and strategic focus of state agencies in the food sector to ensure their programme of work is fully aligned with future Government and emerging EU policy.
- Establish an Independent Agriculture Appeals Review panel in legislation as a priority and ensure the panel includes participants with practical knowledge and experience of farming.

### International market diversification and trade

As a small open economy, exporting food and drinks produce to over 180 countries internationally, we recognise the importance of international markets and trade.

We will:

- Seek to protect existing markets and open new markets.
- Support the promotion of sustainable, high-quality Irish produce in premium target markets, to give our farmers a competitive advantage.
- Firmly defend Ireland's interests in international trade deals that may emerge, working with our network of colleagues in the European Commission and representatives in the European Parliament.
- Work closely with the agri-food sector to secure access to priority markets and to avail of opportunities that existing markets such as China and Japan afford the sector.
- Maintain the strongest possible trading relationship with the UK post Brexit but while recognising that market diversification is necessary, we will continue to support industry in doing so, by opening new markets for Irish produce.
- Develop premium, sustainable markets closer to home for Irish producers.
- Carry out an economic and sustainability assessment of the headline EU/Mercosur trade agreement to inform future action in this area.
- Increase the number of trade missions with a focus on premium Irish products and continue targeted supports in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and Bord Bia.

### Domestic Market/Local Supply Chain

Irish agriculture must maintain a strong export focus, however, this Government wishes to also see a greater emphasis on producing a more diverse range of food to meet our domestic needs. The link between communities and food production must be enhanced and greater options and incentives must be made available to farmers who wish to diversify what they produce.

We will:

- Promote short, efficient routes to market that connect small food producers to the consumer and provide advisory, investment and marketing support for those who wish to diversify into new products.
- Support local authorities to expand the number of farmers' markets, farm shops and food emporiums and support the formation of community-owned markets in all towns, showcasing local food produce from local farmers, growers and food producers.
- Work with local authorities and local communities to develop community gardens, allotments and urban orchards.
- Encourage schools and colleges to provide access to land where students can grow their own food.
- Support the small food producer, providing support for on-farm diversification enterprises and investment in local processing facilities, allowing farmers to sell their products into the local and wider domestic markets.
- Examine how other countries have been successful in developing premium markets from family farm produce.
- Introduce local food procurement policies for the public sector to encourage the availability of nutritious, locally sourced food in public sector areas such as schools, hospitals, government buildings, prisons, etc.
- Continue to work to minimise food waste across the economy and promote food education in the school curriculum.

### Climate and Biodiversity

We recognise that farmers are the primary custodians of the rural environment, and have a vital role to play in addressing the climate and biodiversity crisis. We will work with farmers to bring about change on every farm in the country in a practical way, giving farmers an opportunity to benefit from environmental actions and providing farmers with options for income generation, through alternative land use options.

We will:

- Carry out a baseline biodiversity survey on every farm to inform future policy development.
- Publish a new National Pollinator plan and encourage public bodies to promote and protect biodiversity.
- Complete a national hedgerow survey.
- Incentivise the re-wetting of carbon rich soils.
- Invest in research in the agri-food sector, prioritising investment in areas such as climate and the bioeconomy. We will implement the National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy, providing the agri-food sector with new opportunities, using biological resources from the land and sea in a sustainable and circular manner.
- Explore and develop potential opportunities for farmers from anaerobic digestion.
- Develop climate action 'signpost farms' to provide on-farm experience of the benefits of farming sustainably.
- Direct a proportion of the proceeds of the Carbon Tax towards climate focused measures in the agri-food sector.
- Establish an 'Energy Efficient Farming' scheme to include a farm efficiency rating, educational support and grant subsidies for onsite renewable energy options and the promotion of energy efficient technology for farm use.

- Expand programmes such as the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP), working with farmers, industry and advisory services to deliver real improvements in water quality.
- Continue to enhance dairy and beef breeding programmes.
- Implement the climate adaptation plan for the agri-food and seafood sector and assist these sectors, to adapt with the changed environment.
- Review pesticide use across the agricultural sector, whilst acknowledging the comparatively low level of pesticide use in Ireland, and provide supports to farmers who are undertaking practices to reduce their dependence on such chemicals.
- Continue to enforce the EU's Sustainable Use Directive.
- Legislate to designate our western lakes as salmonid lakes.

### Flagship environmental scheme

We believe farmers must be rewarded for adapting to more sustainable methods of farming. We will design a flagship environmental scheme under the new CAP which is user friendly for farmers, delivering broader environmental and biodiversity benefits and aligning financial support with climate, forestry and land use objectives. This will be complemented by an ambitious ECO-scheme under Pillar 1 of the CAP rewarding farmers who deliver enhanced environmental performance.

The conclusion of the current CAP at the end of 2020 provides a significant opportunity to reorient agri-environment and land use policy to deliver more in the short term on the key priorities of climate, biodiversity, designated land, water quality and carbon reduction and removal. We will pilot this agri-environment scheme during the transition period, supported by additional exchequer funding. The scheme will seek to include farmers not currently in GLAS who previously participated in AEOS, and those exiting GLAS. This pilot will inform the shape of the flagship agri-environment scheme for the next CAP.

## Land Use, Nutrient Management and Soil Health

### Land Use Review

The Government will undertake a national land use review including farmland, forests, and peatlands so that optimal land use options inform all relevant government decisions. The review will balance environmental, social and economic considerations and involve a process of evaluation of the ecological characteristics of the land. It will include consideration of emissions to air and water, carbon sequestration, as well as climate adaptation challenges. Policy co-benefits, such as rewetting or forest regrowth to mitigate flooding risks in river catchments will be considered. All stakeholders will be consulted. Such a review would allow knowledge transfer to policy makers, advisory services and landowners, to assist farmers in making an informed choice as to how best to use their land while also benefiting from available supports and incentives.

### Soil Health and Nutrient Management

We understand the significant economic, biodiversity and environmental gains to be made from improving soil health and fertility, optimising fertiliser use and maximising our grass-based production system. We will work with farmers to improve standards of soil health and fertility and embark on a trajectory of reducing inorganic nitrogen fertiliser by 2030, without undermining farming opportunity.

We will:

- Deliver an incremental and ambitious reduction in the use of inorganic nitrogen fertiliser through to 2030.
- Publish a National Soils Strategy that will assess all appropriate soil health parameters and will inform future policies on good soil management practices.
- Review the effects of the nitrates derogation on water quality in conjunction with the EPA which will inform future policy in this area.
- Work with nitrates derogation farmers to improve environmental outcomes on their farms, ensuring the sustainable use of the derogation, in line with our environmental objectives.
- Encourage farming practices, which preserve or enhance soil organic matter.
- Introduce a national liming programme to improve nitrogen use efficiency.
- Encourage the use of protected nitrogen (urea) on grassland and greater take up of low emissions slurry spreading.
- Improve nutrient management planning and investigate and support dry manure systems for housed livestock.
- Encourage better grassland management and support the use of clover and other mixed species in grass reseeded and the protection of older swards.
- Invest in research and innovation in areas such as feed additives, protected nitrogen and other climate action areas of advancement.
- Focus on improving knowledge transfer in the area of nutrient management and soil health.
- Publish a roadmap with specific targets and actions on each of these measures within the first 100 days of Government.

### Organic Farming Scheme

We will set an ambitious new target for organic farming, to meet changing consumer trends in this area. We will commit to aligning Ireland's organic land area with that of the current EU average over the lifetime of this government. We will focus on developing domestic and international organic markets to ensure farmers have access to premium paying markets for their produce.

### Forestry

Trees and forests store carbon, clean the air, mitigate water movements, prevent soil erosion, provide habitats for flora and fauna and provide an attractive amenity for the public. The forestry industry is a significant employer in rural communities, providing in the region of 12,000 jobs.

We fully support this sector and will:

- Publish a successor forestry programme to deliver an ambitious afforestation plan reviewing grant and premium rates across all categories in this area, with a particular focus on an increased farmer rate of support.

- Implement the MacKinnon Report and review the forestry appeals process to ensure it is aligned with other comparable appeals processes and ensure the licensing system is sufficiently resourced to clear the existing backlog, ensuring prompt issuing of licences in the future.
- Support the development of on-farm forestry initiatives through the new CAP, aligning agri-environment schemes with climate change objectives and investing further in knowledge transfer.
- Incorporate afforestation into the new CAP to provide incentives for farmers to plant woodland on their farms, acting as a carbon store, helping to promote wildlife corridors and providing a future fuel source for the household.
- Actively promote and support farm forestry/rewilding options that do not impact on agricultural production and support biodiversity and habitat creation. We will incentivise, the option of small-scale (e.g. one hectare) forestry/rewilding.
- Embark on an ambitious programme of afforestation on state-owned lands, building on the Coillte/Bord na Móna initiatives.
- Task Climate Action Regional Offices to work with public bodies to review land available for planting providing feedback on the potential in this area by the end of 2020.
- Institute a state-sponsored national Tree Planting Day and provide communities across the country with trees to plant on this day annually.
- Engage with local authorities and local communities in a radical expansion of urban tree planting and neighbourhood and community forests.
- Promote close to nature-continuous cover forestry systems to ultimately create permanent biodiverse forests containing trees of all ages.
- Encourage the private sector to meet corporate social responsibility or sustainability objectives by investing in native woodlands, building on the Woodland Environmental Fund.
- Promote planting of ‘protection forests’ along rivers and lakes to protect water quality and assist in managing flood risks.
- Provide increased support for the development of agroforestry/silvopasture on Irish farmlands.
- Continue to uphold the objectives of the Forest Consent System, the Bird and Habitats Directive, the catchment management approach of the Water Framework Directive and the Forest Law and Enforcement Governance Trade regulation (FLEGT).
- Invest in schemes that promote recreational forestry and work with Coillte on projects such as Coillte Nature to provide the public with access to recreational forests across the country.
- Expand the NeighbourWood Scheme, providing communities with amenity woodlands for local access, enjoyment and increasing tourism opportunities.
- Ensure Coillte’s remit supports the delivery of climate change commitments and the protection of biodiversity. We are fully committed to the retention of the commercial forests of Coillte in public ownership.

## Animal Health

We will:

- Introduce a TB 2030 Eradication strategy, following on from the work of the TB Forum.

- Monitor emerging health and disease threats and work with Animal Health Ireland to develop new programmes in partnership with farmers, working continuously to make improvements to animal health.
- Commence a 10-year renewal programme of the Regional Laboratory Network. This will bring existing facilities up to date and provide farmers with an enhanced level of customer service and diagnostic support.
- We will fully implement the '*One Health*' Strategy, placing particular focus on the connections between human, animal and environmental health and encouraging the optimal use of animal health products.

### Animal Welfare

We are committed to working consistently to improve animal welfare standards.

We will:

- Ensure the continued robust enforcement of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 and review the sentencing regime underpinning the legislation.
- Immediately prioritise the drafting of legislation for the phasing out of fur-farming, publishing legislation in this area as soon as possible.
- Uphold the EU Pigs Directive.
- Support the development of high-welfare outdoor-reared pig and poultry sector, in addition to existing production systems.
- Ensure robust and consistent enforcement of the Dog Breeding Establishments Act.
- Support a doubling of the ex-gratia funding for animal welfare organisations within two years.
- Promote responsible pet ownership.
- Extend the badger vaccination programme nationwide and end badger culling as soon as possible, consistent with the best scientific and veterinary advice.
- Regulate the breeding, ownership, sale or supply of exotic species.
- Prioritise equine welfare based on a robust traceability system, building on existing inspectorate supports across the country and ensuring a consistent approach to dealing with horse welfare issues across local authorities.
- Develop additional urban horse welfare programmes, working with local authorities, charities and community stakeholders to provide stabling facilities and educational programmes.
- Research potential into the utilisation of dual-purpose breeds, and the viability of 'calf-at-foot' dairy models on Irish dairy farms.

We acknowledge the income pressure that beef farmers are under and the role live exports play in price competition.

Recognising the importance of animal welfare, the new Government will provide additional resources to monitor welfare standards by increasing the veterinary presence available on all live export consignments to third countries. We will vigorously pursue value-enhancing alternative market avenues.

### Horse racing

We are fully committed to the future of the horse racing sector, recognising the contribution made by the sector socially and economically to both urban and rural Ireland. We will work with Horse Racing Ireland in developing the industry over the coming years and will encourage the implementation of climate and biodiversity friendly strategies across the sector. We recognise the exposure of this valuable sector to Brexit and will work with the industry to put in place workable solutions for the movement of horses in a post-Brexit environment. We will continue to invest in the horse racing industry and in essential infrastructure, such as the Irish Equine Centre.

### Greyhound Racing

Future funding of the greyhound sector from the Horse and Greyhound Fund is contingent on a guarantee of welfare standards being upheld on an annual basis. We will ensure strict monitoring takes place of this sector to ensure that the animal welfare commitments made to date are fully implemented. We will insist that funds committed to investment in greyhound welfare and rehoming programmes are delivered. We will fully implement the Greyhound Racing Act 2019, strengthening integrity in the industry and providing for a new system of traceability.

### Horse Sport Ireland

We will continue to support the horse sport sector, recognising the need for increased ambition in this area to exploit the enormous potential of the sector from the perspective of competitive sport, welfare, traceability and breeding standards. The further implementation of *Reaching New Heights*, which underpins the horse sport industry is critical to that endeavour. We will ensure there is greater co-ordination between Government departments on the delivery of this strategy.

### Harness Racing

We will explore the potential development of the harness racing sector.

### Marine

We are committed to prioritising the development of the marine. As an island nation, Ireland has a special relationship with the ocean. Everything must be done to protect marine biodiversity and to secure a sustainable future for the fisheries sector while supporting coastal communities.

We will:

- Develop a new integrated marine sustainable development plan, as a successor to *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth*, focusing on all aspects of the marine, with a greater focus on sustainability and stakeholder engagement and centrally co-ordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach to be implemented over the life of the Government.
- Ensure protection of the interests of the Irish Fishing industry by insisting that a Fisheries Agreement with the UK is concluded as an integral part of an overall EU Free Trade Agreement with the UK.

- Recognise that the critical issue in these negotiations for the Irish industry is continued access to UK waters and quota share and the danger of displacement of the EU fleet into Irish territorial waters.
- Seek EU Commission contingency supports and market disturbance funding for the fisheries sector to mitigate against the impact of COVID-19 and Brexit.
- Ensure that inshore waters continue to be protected for smaller fishing vessels and recreational fishers and that pair trawling will be prohibited inside the six-mile limit.
- Support the inshore fishing fleet in generating greater marketing and promotional capacity by facilitating the establishment of a Producer Organisation for these smaller fishing vessels, thereby providing additional opportunity for the island and coastal communities involved in the inshore sector.
- Aggressively tackle the issue of waste, ghost nets and illegal dumping in the marine environment through rigorous implementation of the Port Reception Facilities Directives and by requiring all Irish fishing trawlers to participate in the Clean Oceans Initiative, ensuring that plastic fished up at sea is brought ashore.
- Continue to invest in coastline communities through the Fisheries Local Area Group (FLAG) programme, providing support for innovative projects to boost economic growth and job creation.
- Invest strategically in harbour infrastructure to attract increased landings into Ireland of sustainably caught fish in our waters, driving the development of the seafood processing sector and the blue economy in coastal communities.
- Work to develop the aquaculture sector in a sustainable way, including shellfish aquaculture using native species, and implement the recommendations of the report of the Independent Aquaculture Licencing Review Group, to ensure that feed products for aquaculture are sourced and produced in the most sustainable manner possible.
- We will progress a national policy on coastal erosion and flooding having regard to climate change.

### Common Fisheries Policy

We are fully committed to the environmental objectives of the CFP, which has introduced measures aimed at sustaining fish stocks, through the ending of discards, quotas based on science and the internationally recognised concept of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY).

We will:

- Actively promote setting annual quotas in line with MSY principles.
- Promote the introduction of constructive technical measures that promote sustainability, decrease by-catch and protect fish stocks for the future.
- Protect Ireland's interests in the future review of the Common Fisheries Policy.
- Work to eliminate illegal fishing and promote a culture of compliance by all EU vessels in our 200-mile zone, in order to protect the fish stocks on which the Irish Fishing industry depends.
- Implement the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) capability review with a view to enhancing governance issues and consider any other measures that may be necessary.
- Implement a fair EU points system in order to protect fish stocks and ensure the release of suspended EU funding.

- Work to retain factory weighing of pelagic fish in the context of negotiations on the new EU control regulation.
- Support the completion of the new Fisheries Control Regulation to increase the effectiveness of existing control measures and agree rules that will ensure a level playing field for all EU vessels. Increasing the level of transparency and access to information in regards to infringements within Irish waters will be key to measuring the effectiveness of the new system.

### Marine Protection Areas

We support the principles and ambition of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and will develop comprehensive legislation for the identification, designation and management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Irish territorial waters. We will realise our outstanding target of 10% under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive as soon as is practical and aim for 30% of marine protected areas by 2030. This will be done on the basis of scientific expertise and in close consultation with all stakeholders, in particular the fishing industry as well as environmental and community representatives. This consultation process will begin in the first 100 days of Government. We will examine the establishment of an offshore maritime area as Ireland's seventh national park. This would form part of the expanded MPA's and allow for a learning experience in the maritime environment.

### Marine Planning

The Government will prioritise the passage of a balanced and Aarhus Convention compliant Marine and Planning and Development Management Bill through the Oireachtas.

We will publish Ireland's first ever marine spatial planning policy setting out a clear vision for the future development of our marine planning system. The development of this policy will involve a full public and stakeholder consultation.

Following completion of this, we will bring forward Ireland's first ever National Marine Planning Framework. This will introduce a planning system for the development of Ireland's maritime area in the same way that the National Planning Framework fulfils this function on land.

These two documents will form the basis for Project Ireland Marine 2040, our long-term overarching strategy to manage Ireland's seas for the benefit of all its people. A marine planning oversight delivery board on the same model as the Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board will be established to provide leadership and oversight to the implementation of these policies.

### Coastal Blue Carbon

We recognise the enormous 'blue carbon' potential that the ocean has to offer in tackling climate change but we appreciate that further scientific research is needed to understand and develop this potential. We will task the Marine Institute with a collaborative EU wide research initiative, aimed at investigating the climate change mitigation potential of blue carbon and working towards a means of creating a validated inventory that will in the future assist the EU in meeting our climate change objectives.

## Broadband

Ensuring access to high quality internet connections for people across Ireland is essential to the development of all parts our country, socially and economically. Facilitating remote working and innovation opportunities is essential in addressing climate change, adapting to an evolving economy and competing internationally.

We will:

- Seek to accelerate the roll out of the National Broadband Plan.
- Work with local authorities to establish designated groups to help facilitate local rollout of the infrastructure.
- Learn from initiatives like the Ludgate Centre in Skibbereen to enable greater public/private cooperation in developing digital hubs and smart working facilities.
- Continue to support the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce.
- Support the development of Broadband Connection Points across the country and the development of digital hubs which can support remote working in as many of the Broadband Connection Points as possible.
- Give the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) greater powers of enforcement with a particular focus on improving competition, innovation and customer service within the communications sector.

## Mission: A New Social Contract

### Social Protection

Our social protection system is there for those who need it most. The COVID-19 Emergency has illustrated the resilience and responsiveness of our system. Hundreds of thousands of people have had their incomes largely protected during the restrictions and thousands will continue to rely on the State for months to come. As this Government moves forward with a new Social Contract with citizens, we must ensure a balanced progressive approach, which provides a safety net to those most severely impacted by COVID-19 while increasing incentives and access to reskilling to enable people to get back working.

In achieving this balance, we will:

- Protect core weekly social welfare rates.
- Recognise the importance of ancillary benefits and eligibility criteria to vulnerable groups.
- As the economy recovers and employment grows, request the Commission on Welfare and Taxation to examine what changes can be made to employer and employee PRSI to improve existing benefits and provide additional.
- Progress to a living wage over the lifetime of the Government.
- Improve jobseeker supports for people aged under 24 over the lifetime of the Government.
- Increase availability of activation schemes including those run by local employment services.

### Pensions

Underpinned by the principles of sustainability, adequacy and fairness, we will make affordable changes to protect not only those approaching pension age but also future generations. To ensure this approach, we will:

- Maintain the State Pension as the bedrock of the Irish pension system.
- Eliminate the requirements of having to sign on and be actively seeking work for those retiring at 65 years.
- Introduce a Total Contributions Approach aligning a person's contributory pension more closely with the contributions they make. This will include a provision for credited contributions, ensuring that people who take time off work to care for loved ones are not disadvantaged.
- Introduce a system to enable people to defer receipt of their state contributory pension on an annual basis to include actuarial increases in payment as soon as practicable.
- Facilitate those without a full social insurance record to increase their retirement provision by choosing to continue making PRSI payments beyond pensionable age.
- Examine options for a pension solution for carers the majority of whom are women, particularly those of incapacitated children in recognition of the enormous value of the work carried out by them.
- Maintain the entitlement for the Free Travel Scheme for all individuals aged 66 and over.

- Work with private bus operators and the National Transport Authority (NTA) so that the Free Travel Scheme is available on all publicly licensed bus routes.

### Auto-enrolment

The new Government will introduce a pension auto-enrolment system. Taking account of the exceptional strain both employers and employees are now under, we will seek to deliver gradually an automatic enrolment scheme based on the following principles:

- Matching contributions will be made by both workers and employers and the State will top up contributions.
- There will be a phased roll-out over a decade of the contribution made by workers.
- There will be an opt-out provision for those who choose to opt out.
- Workers will have a range of retirement savings products to choose from.
- There will be a charges cap imposed on pension providers.

### Low Pay Commission

The Low Pay Commission will be instrumental in ensuring that those who are in low-paid employment are valued. We will be guided by the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission with regard to any future changes in the minimum wage.

### Anti-poverty and social inclusion measures

As we emerge from the COVID pandemic, we must build upon the unity, which was fundamental in our response, to improve outcomes for those who are struggling on low incomes, struggling with caring responsibilities, or having to raise their families alone and those who are living with a disability. Any changes made in social welfare provisions will continue to be gender and equality proofed. We will do this by rigorous implementation of the new social inclusion strategy, *A Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*.

In addition, we will:

- Act to reform our child maintenance system and address key issues such as calculation, facilitation and enforcement, guided by international best practice and in light of the findings of the Murphy review.
- Continue to prioritise and protect supports for lone parents, having regard to the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection's 2017 Report, 'Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland'.
- Work across government to address food poverty in children and ensure no child goes hungry.
- Request the Low Pay Commission to examine Universal Basic Income, informed by a review of previous international pilots, and resulting in a universal basic income pilot in the lifetime of the Government.
- Continue to support the annual Social Inclusion Forum as an important means of promoting engagement between people experiencing poverty and exclusion, the community and voluntary sector and Government.

- Introduce returnships in partnership with employers, to support women who have taken time out of work to raise their families or care for loved ones, to re-enter the labour market through new education, training and personal development programmes.

### Family Carers

Family carers are the backbone of care provision in Ireland. They deserve support and recognition from Government.

We will:

- Review and update the National Carers' Strategy.
- Develop a pension solution for family carers that recognises their important work.
- Extend free GP care to carers in receipt of the Carer's Support Grant.
- Develop a 'Carers Guarantee' proposal that will provide a core basket of services to carers across the country regardless of where they live.

## Equality

Equality between all citizens is a core guiding principle of our republic. Over recent years we have taken major strides in our addressing discrimination against minority and marginalised groups. However, the task of ensuring every individual enjoys this fundamental right remains incomplete. This Government will continue to build on hard won progress to give real meaning to our best values of equality and fairness.

### Immigration and Integration

We will:

- Create new pathways for long-term undocumented people and their dependents meeting specified criteria to regularise their status within 18 months of the formation of the Government, bearing in mind European Union and Common Travel Area commitments.
- Publish a new national action plan against racism.
- Develop and implement a new Migrant Integration Strategy.
- Enact legislation that encompasses relevant EU measures and the UN Protocol against the smuggling and trafficking of migrants.

### Direct Provision

We are committed to ensuring that Ireland provides protection to those seeking refuge from conflict and persecution as is required under international law. While people are awaiting a decision on their international protection application, we will provide accommodation for asylum seekers that has the protection and promotion of human rights at its core.

We agree that the current system needs to change. Therefore, we are committed to a new long-term approach to International Protection. To that end, the outgoing Government appointed an *Expert Group on the Provision of Support, including Accommodation, to Persons in the International Protection Process (Asylum Seekers)* chaired by Catherine Day to consider the issue.

Against this background we are:

- Committed to ending the Direct Provision system and will replace it with a new International Protection accommodation policy centred on a not-for-profit approach.

We will:

- Publish a White Paper by the end of 2020, informed by the recommendations of the *Expert Group*, which will set out how this new system will be structured and the steps to achieving it.
- In the short term, act on interim recommendations from the Chair of the *Expert Group* to improve conditions for asylum seekers currently living in the system. This includes vulnerability assessments, the right to work, the ability to apply for drivers' licences and bank accounts, an independent inspection process, measures to reduce the length of time in processing decisions, mental health services and the training of managers of Direct Provision Centres.
- Implement the measures identified by the *Expert Group* to ensure that international protection applications are dealt with and brought to finality as quickly as possible, while always ensuring fair procedure and a human rights based approach.
- Develop new models of community engagement to ensure that the establishment of new accommodation is done in an inclusive and welcoming fashion.
- Commit to an annualised capital and current investment programme to action these measures.

## LGBTi+

We will:

- Implement the National LGBTi+ and the LGBTi+ Youth Strategy to create a safe, supportive and more inclusive Ireland.
- Legislate to provide for adoptive leave and benefit for male same sex adoptive couples.
- Legislate to ban conversion therapy.
- Create and implement a general health policy for Trans people based on a best practice model for care in line with the World Professional Association of Transgender Healthcare (WPATH) and deliver a framework for the development of National Gender Clinics and Multidisciplinary Teams for children and adults.
- Amend the gender ground in equality legislation to ensure that someone discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity is able to avail of this legislation.
- Introduce a scheme for the expunging of criminal records for gay men convicted of historical offences.

## Travellers and Roma

We will:

- Implement a National Traveller Health Action Plan.
- Review the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021, and ensure that the successor Strategy has a stronger outcomes focused approach. As part of this, develop a comprehensive Traveller and Roma Training, Employment and Enterprise Plan.
- Undertake an independent assessment of the pilot projects aimed at retaining Traveller and Roma children in education.
- Ensure that the housing needs of the Traveller Community are met by local authorities and ensure that existing funding is fully drawn down and utilised.

## Gender Equality

We will:

- Develop and implement a new National Strategy for Women and Girls.
- Respond to each recommendation of the Citizens' Assembly on gender equality.
- Informed by the work of the Citizens' Assembly, consider whether there should be a referendum on Article 41.2 of the constitution.
- Legislate to require publication of the gender pay gap in large companies.
- Expand the Equality Budgeting Programme across government departments and agencies.

## Gender Recognition

We will:

- Remove the need for a person aged 16 and 17 years to have two specialist reports before they can apply for legal gender recognition, by providing for self-declaration, with parental consent and by making mediation available on a voluntary basis. These improvements will include the provision of a gender recognition certificate providing proof of change of name as well as gender. Make any necessary changes to the law to allow legal name change be part of the gender recognition process.
- Commence research to examine arrangements for under children under 16.
- Complete the work of the interdepartmental group tasked with examining legal recognition of non-binary people.
- Ensure Government Departments and public bodies take positive steps, including the use of correct pronouns and where possible making improvements on official forms, to assist non-binary people.

## Socio-Economic inequality

We will examine the introduction of a new ground of discrimination based on socio-economic disadvantaged status to the Employment Equality and Equal Status Acts.

## Disability

The Government believes in delivering health care in a manner which promotes patient empowerment, improves quality of life and increases life expectancy.

Ever since Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities we have signalled to those with a disability that we were now serious about making a difference. A difference that would make things better. The ratification raised awareness of the lived experience of people with disabilities, but we have much more to do.

In doing more we now need to improve the services available through better implementation and by working together across Government in a better way. We want to empower and give those with a disability the ability to choose the supports that most meet their needs.

Reflecting this we will:

- Prioritise early diagnosis interventions and access to services.
- Improve and change services through better implementation and collaboration.
- Strengthen rights through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with a Disability (UNCRPD).

- Raise awareness of the lived experience of people with disabilities.
- Ensure the most effective interventions are provided for each individual to ensure the best outcomes.
- Seek to reduce the waiting times for assessment of need under the Disability Act 2005 through the full year provision of additional therapy posts.
- Fully implement the new standard operating procedure for assessment of needs for all applications.
- Fully complete the establishment of the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0- 18 years) Network Teams.
- Integrate access to mental health supports as part of disability service provision.
- Resource the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, with an emphasis on close collaboration between State agencies and civil society.
- Continue with the successful decongregation programme and complete a further move of more people with disabilities from congregated settings to homes in the community, with the necessary supports.

People with disabilities and their families have been impacted by COVID-19 in many ways, whether from a move to delivering services online, a reduction in services or to feelings of isolation. A renewed focus on how we provide services is needed.

We will:

- Work with all stakeholders to see how services and resources can be delivered.
- Reduce and provide a pathway to eliminate the practice of accommodating young people with serious disabilities in nursing homes.
- Expand and enhance the in-school speech and language pilots to improve the delivery of therapies in schools.
- Ensure students with additional needs get the right assistance, at the right time, building on the learnings from the pilot currently underway and subject to further consultation.
- Work towards implementing the most recent Disability Capacity Review.
- Support the Dialogue Forum working with voluntary organisations to build a stronger working relationship between the State and the voluntary healthcare sector.

### [The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#)

We will enshrine disability rights by finalising the legislation required following Ireland's recent ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

The legislation will:

- Double the target for employment of people with disabilities in the public service to 6%.
- Reform the Mental Health Act 2001.
- Improve protections for people with disabilities against hate crime and hate speech.
- Improve access for people with disabilities to jury service.
- Remove outdated references to 'persons of unsound mind' from the statute book.
- Commence the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 to abolish wardships.
- Develop an implementation plan to coordinate implementation of the UNCRPD.
- Implement a consultation and participation model, in line with the UNCRPD, to facilitate participation by persons with disabilities in the policy development process.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD after the first reporting cycle.

- Work with other parties in the Oireachtas to establish a Joint Oireachtas Committee to assist in monitoring and implementing the provisions in the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

### Raising Awareness and Lived Experience

We will:

- Develop programmes promoting awareness amongst the general public of the lived experience of people with disabilities.
- Facilitate the participation of people with disabilities in cultural and heritage related activities and programmes.
- Work towards physical accessibility to all government departments, local authorities and agencies providing services.
- Include consideration of disability in all housing policy reviews.

### Cost of Disability

We will use the recent research into the cost of disability to individuals and families to properly inform the direction of future policy.

We are committed to the introduction of personalised budgets, improving the provision of services for people with disabilities through a range of options including service brokers and empowering people to choose the supports that most meet their needs. This will be based on the experience of the pilot schemes.

### Employment Supports

We will:

- Promote an awareness and support programme for employers to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities.
- Develop initiatives that improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities living in rural areas, including through remote working options.
- Fast-track the return to Disability or Invalidity Pension for people where employment opportunities do not succeed.
- Fine-tune and expand targeted employment schemes such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS) and the Ability Programme to help more people with disabilities stay in the workforce.
- Commit to the social farming model, recognising the value of offering farming and horticultural work experience to people availing of health and social services, including disability services.
- Conduct an audit of equity of access to further education and training (FET) for those with disabilities.

### Residential and Respite Care

We will provide:

- Additional residential places and new emergency residential placements.
- Additional appropriate residential places for people currently living in respite care as an emergency response to their needs.

- Further intensive transitional support packages for children and young people with complex/high support needs.
- Additional respite nights to people with disabilities.

### Day Services and Supports

We will:

- Work to expand adult day services and supports for adults with physical and sensory disabilities, intellectual disability and autism throughout the country.
- Deliver increased home support and Personal Assistance hours.

### Autism Spectrum Disorders

We will:

- Implement the National Autism Plan and keep it under regular review.
- Ensure that there is effective cross-departmental implementation of the National Autism Plan, reporting to the relevant cabinet committee.
- Implement a programme of awareness-raising to provide a better information resource for children and parents about available supports.
- Deliver a campaign to create awareness of the challenges, needs and experiences of people with autism spectrum disorder.
- Build capacity and competence amongst key professionals working with people with autism, including a national training programme for clinicians.

### Expanding into New Areas

We will:

- Expand the Equality Budgeting Initiative, looking at outcomes of expenditure as they relate to people with disabilities.
- Build on the work already undertaken to ensure that all public transport services are accessible to people with a disability.
- Continue to work with all government departments and their agencies to ensure that a disability perspective is integrated into mainstream policy development.

### Safeguarding vulnerable persons

We will review and improve the national policy document, *Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse, National Policy and Procedures*.

## Children and Family Support

The first five years have a fundamental impact on the type of person we become. A happy and healthy start in life – one that provides children with nurturing influences – is vitally important. This Government is committed to a new social contract with citizens, one that will protect them and their families at different times in their lives.

We also want Ireland's recovery must be one that works for families. We value the work of all parents and ensure that they are supported in their childcare choices, whether that be with childminders, in childcare settings, or in the home.

While there has been significant investment into childcare in recent years and a lot of progress made, cost and access remain a challenge. We will reduce the cost of childcare for parents through investment in the National Childcare Scheme, and we will also examine further options to achieve this. For parents on reduced incomes as a result of COVID-19, targeted subsidies will assist them as they retrain or seek employment. For providers, we recognise the value of Early Education and Childcare for children and we will introduce a long-term sustainable funding model that promotes quality, better outcomes for children and makes a career in childcare more attractive.

As the need for remote and flexible working will continue, we support increased flexibility and choice in childcare to assist parents' changing needs.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the childcare sector and we will continue to support providers and their staff as they re-open. We will reduce the regulatory burden on providers, and we will establish *Childcare Ireland* to assist the sector and deliver long term career paths.

We will strengthen early intervention and family support services through pro-active expansion of services that have strong outcomes for children and their families.

### Supporting Parents

We will

- Extend paid parental leave for parents to allow them spend more time with their baby in their first year.
- Implement the *First 5* strategy for babies, young children and their families which recommends the examination of new funding models for childcare and also outlines new poverty prevention measures.

### Flexible working

**We will:**

- Enable increased remote, flexible and hub working arrangements to support families in their parenting and childcare choices while also supporting enterprise. We will support higher participation of women in the workplace, less commuting and greater regional balance. Such changes will give long term resilience to our economy and society. We will work with the childcare sector to introduce more flexibility in childcare settings.

### Early Years Education and Childcare Provision

**We will:**

- Establish an agency, *Childcare Ireland*, to assist in the expansion of high quality childcare, spearheading leadership, best practice and innovation and professional development in community and private settings. It will also be tasked with developing career paths for childcare staff. *Childcare Ireland* will be responsible for expanding *Sólta*.
- Continue to invest in the National Childcare Scheme reducing costs for parents and introduce greater parental choice and flexibility.
- Reform the childcare system to create one that brings together the best of community and private childcare provision, focused on children's rights, quality outcomes, reducing inequalities, supports staff retention as well as substantially reducing costs to parents. We will do so in consultation with providers, staff and parents.

- Ensure sustainability within the Early Learning and Care and School Age Care sector by fast-tracking the work of the Expert Group considering a new funding model.
- Examine the approach of other European countries to set a cap on parental fees irrespective of income. A policy, legal and economic analysis will be concluded and published in 2020.
- Examine options to increase flexibility within centre-based care as well as options to accelerate access to subsidies for non-relative childminders, a report to be published by year end.
- Continue to support the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme for three to five year olds, and if resources allow, to increase the scope of the scheme.
- Increase the range of after-school services in schools or community hubs to offer a range of education and family-focused measures.
- Support the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee in the childcare sector and the drawing up of an Employment Regulation Order, which would determine minimum rates of pay for childcare workers, as well as terms and conditions of employment.
- Pilot a new apprenticeship model for early years professionals.
- Streamline regulatory requirements whilst continuing to improve quality.
- Ensure a transparent inspection reporting structure for parents and guardians.

### Early intervention and Family Support

We will:

- Fully implement the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) that helps children with additional needs access early education and care settings.
- Expand and enhance the in-school speech and language and occupational therapist pilot, given its success.
- Support the ongoing development of fostering services across the country.
- Expand the successful in-house model of therapeutic services and support to vulnerable children and carers in Tusla Dublin North Central to other areas.
- Continue to invest in community and voluntary family support services and youth work recognising their value in preventing harm and in responding to the needs of vulnerable families.
- Expand access to parenting support programmes that have been proven to be effective.
- Fully implement Tusla's Action Plan on the Recommendations of the HIQA Statutory Investigation into Tusla's Management of Referrals (June 2018).
- Ask the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection to review how children's rights and best interests can be protected in the context of the recognition of parentage in cases of assisted human reproduction and surrogacy.
- Continue funding for the Child Care Law Reporting Project. We will publish and implement a successor to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* and will develop mechanisms, through a new youth strategy, for the voice and views of young people to be part of decision-making at community, county and national levels.

## Mission: Building Stronger and Safer Communities

### Policing

Protecting citizens is the founding duty of the state and policing has a defining role in that basic function. An Garda Síochána has a strong tradition of policing by consent with deep rooted connections in every community that enable it to carry out its work fairly and effectively.

Visible community policing builds strong and safe communities in every part of Ireland. The new Government will ensure that this will be a key part of our Social Contract with Citizens and will place it at the centre of policing policy. The Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing provides a pathway for An Garda Síochána to achieve this.. We will:

- Rapidly implement the *Report of the Commission of the Future of Policing*, while ensuring that there remains a strong and independent public external accountability mechanism for the Garda Commissioner and Garda Leadership Team.
- Continue to train new recruits annually.
- Prioritise visible policing in both rural and urban communities.
- Remove Gardaí from administrative, technical and other non-core duties, to allow them to focus on policing matters.
- Increase the diversity within An Garda Síochána, prioritising the identification and removal of barriers to recruiting and retaining people from diverse and minority backgrounds.
- Introduce a new Policing and Community Safety Bill to redefine the functions of An Garda Síochána.
- Codify the Garda powers for search, arrest and detention.
- Extend the powers governing Garda use of CCTV and Automated Number Plate Recognition to help prevent crime and prosecute those involved in criminal activity.
- Externally review the legal and organisational framework governing community CCTV.
- Continue to support the work of An Garda Síochána in tackling and interrupting organised crime.
- Expand the Dublin North-East Inner City model to other comparative areas experiencing disadvantage.
- Annually renew the provisions of the Offences Against the State Act 1998 and the Criminal Justice (Amendment) Act 2009.
- Support and consolidate the reform and strengthening of the Department of Justice.
- Ensure full implementation of the Parole Act 2019 including the establishment of an independent statutory Parole Board as early as possible.

### White collar crime

Corruption and white collar crime damages our economy, breeds cynicism in our society and is a threat to our international reputation. We will:

- Establish the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) to be a stand-alone statutory body.
- Introduce and implement new anti-corruption and anti-fraud structures, informed by the forthcoming Hamilton Review.
- Legislate to provide for preliminary trial hearings to expedite the administration of justice in white-collar crime cases.
- Amend the Criminal Justice (Corruption Offences) Act 2018 to make the prosecution of white-collar crime more manageable and efficient.

### Courts reform

An independent, impartial and efficient judiciary and courts system is critical to our democracy. We must focus on reforming our family court system to ensure that proceedings involving children are dealt with in a manner which recognises the unique vulnerability and needs of children. It is evident that in areas such as planning law there is a need for greater specialism to enable the more efficient management of cases. The costs associated with the Irish legal system, as well as the time involved in cases, are more expensive and take longer than in peer countries and we will address that. We must make greater use of alternative dispute resolution across all courts. We will:

- Enact a Family Court Bill to create a new dedicated Family Court within the existing court structure and provide for court procedures that support a less adversarial resolution of disputes.
- Build a new Family Law Court building in Dublin and ensure that court facilities across the country are suitable for family law hearings so these hearings can be held separately from other cases.
- Clarify and strengthen contempt of court sanctions for violations on social media.
- Legislate to introduce a statutory offence of perjury, to make this crime easier to prosecute.
- Modernise the law on the administration of oaths in judicial and other proceedings.
- Establish a new Planning and Environmental Law Court managed by specialist judges and on the same basis of the existing Commercial Court model.
- Establish a working group to consider the number of and type of judges required to ensure the efficient administration of justice over the next five years.
- Enact the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill within the first six months of Government. However, we will engage with stakeholders to make appropriate amendments to the current Bill to ensure that it enjoys broad support. These would include ensuring that the Chief Justice is the *ex-officio* chairperson of the body.
- Implement reforms to the administration of civil justice in the State covering matters such as the more efficient and effective deployment of court and judicial resources. This will be guided by the report of the group chaired by the former President of the High Court, Mr. Justice Peter Kelly.
- Independently examine the option of a dedicated system of public defenders.
- Introduce the necessary legislative reforms of the personal insolvency sys.

### Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour causes fear and insecurity to people and communities..We will tackle this by ensuring more visible community policing in line with the Report of the Commission for the Future of Policing .This will significantly reduce anti-social behaviour and help make people feel safer in their communities. We will:

- Set-up a special expert forum on antisocial behaviour, to consider the effectiveness of existing legislation and propose new ways forward including new powers for An Garda Síochána and additional interventions to support parenting of offenders.
- Examine increasing the age limit for the application of the Garda Youth Diversion Programme to 24 years old.
- Implement a new Youth Justice Strategy, drawing on learnings for the Icelandic model and emphasising prevention, early intervention and inter-agency collaboration.
- Criminalise adults who groom children to commit crimes.
- Work with all criminal justice agencies to build capacity to deliver restorative justice, safely and effectively.
- Extend the pilot schemes of the Joint Agency Response to Crime to more areas to target prolific repeat and vulnerable offenders aged 16 -21.
- Enhance powers available to An Garda Síochána to limit the use of scramblers and quads by those engaged in anti-social behaviour and enact legislation to add to those powers if needed.

### Gambling

We will establish a gambling regulator focused on public safety and wellbeing, covering gambling online and in person and the powers to regulate advertising, gambling websites and apps.

### Prisons and Penal Reform

It is essential we have a prison service that provides secure custody for those in prison thereby protecting the public from dangerous criminals, while facilitating the rehabilitation of prisoners to enable their safe return into communities. We will:

- Ratify and implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture within 18 months of the formation of the Government.
- Establish a high-level cross-departmental and cross-agency taskforce to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those imprisoned and primary care support on release.
- Take a comprehensive approach to the development of the next Irish Prison Service's Capital Strategy, ensuring the availability of modern detention facilities with adequate capacity.
- Review the existing functions, powers, appointment procedures and reporting processes for prison visiting committees.
- We will review the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016 to broaden the range of convictions that are considered spent.
- Fully implement the EU Victims of Crime Directive including the full provision of victim liaison officer.
- Establish a Penal Policy Consultative Council to advise on penal policy.

### Hate Crimes

Hate speech and hate crimes have a particularly life long impact on individuals and communities and have no place in our society. We will:

- Introduce Hate Crime legislation within twelve months of the formation of the Government. This legislation will create specific offences to ensure that those who target victims because of their association with a particular identity characteristic are identified as perpetrators of hate crime. This legislation will be on the basis of an aggravated offences model. This legislation will be supported by training across the criminal justice system, as well as victim supports.

- In order to ensure that those who seek to encourage and incite others to hate minority groups can be prosecuted we will revise and update Incitement to Hatred Act 1989, taking account of the public consultation conducted in 2019.

### Domestic and sexual violence

There is an epidemic of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Building on the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, we will work with NGOs and services to:

- Develop the third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence which will place a priority on prevention and reduction and will include a National Preventative Strategy.
- Conduct an immediate audit, to be concluded within nine months of the formation of the Government, of how responsibility for domestic sexual and gender-based violence is segmented across different government agencies and develop proposals on what infrastructure is needed to ensure the issue is dealt with in the most effective manner possible. This audit will be undertaken in conjunction with NGOs and service providers.
- Implement a plan for future refuge space.
- Investigate the provision of paid leave and social protection provision to victims of domestic violence.
- Learn from the UK model, where the crime of coercive control has been successfully prosecuted since 2015. We will invest in a comprehensive training programme for professionals who may have contact with a victim of coercive control, including An Garda Síochána, legal professionals and courts services personnel, to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the nature of this relatively new offence.
- Legislate to introduce Domestic Homicide Reviews.
- Update the Sex Offenders Act 2001 to ensure that convicted sex offenders are effectively managed and monitored.
- Enact the Harassment & Harmful Communications Bill (as amended) in order to outlaw image-based sexual abuse and to prevent abusive sharing of intimate images online.
- Implement the findings of the O'Malley Review of supports for vulnerable witnesses in sexual violence cases to support victims.
- Adopt and implement a comprehensive strategy to combat trafficking of women and girls.

### Victims of crime

We will implement the revised Victims' Charter and establish a system to monitor its implementation.

## Online Safety

We will enact the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill and establish an Online Safety Commissioner. The Online Safety Commissioner will:

- Require online platforms to set out the steps they will take to keep their users safe online and to build safety into the design of their platforms.
- Ensure new Online Safety Codes can combat cyber bullying material and material promoting eating disorders, self-harm and suicide.
- Provide a mechanism for further categories of harmful content to be added following consultation with the Oireachtas.
- Require that services operate effective complaints procedures.
- Ensure that advertising, sponsorship and product placement are not harmful and that they uphold minimum standards.
- Require platforms to have take down measures which are timely and effective.
- Promote positive digital citizenship among children and young people, in conjunction with Webwise and other educational partners, schools, as well as the Ombudsman for Children.
- Develop a research programme led by internationally recognised experts to review the existing and developing literature in relation to (a) the consequences, benefits and potential harms to society and children specifically of digital activity and (b) the concept of duty of care and the public interest in the design of online platforms.

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) will be replaced with a new Media and Online Safety Commission when the legislation is enacted.

We will support digital literacy schemes across the country and will continue to support the Digital Skills for Citizens Scheme.

## Cyber Security

Increasing use of digital technologies brings an associated set of risks and vulnerabilities. As the use of internet connected technologies becomes more integrated into our daily lives, the operation of businesses and the State, these risks will continue to grow.

We will take the necessary actions to protect Ireland against hacking, cybercrime, crypto-jacking, hacktivism and cyber espionage. We will:

- Build the capacity of the National Centre for Cyber Security (NCCS) to protect the public and private sectors against cybercrime on foot of the capacity review currently underway.
- Expand the NCCS's ability to monitor and respond to cyber security incidents and developing threats.
- Implement the National Cyber Security Strategy, recognising the potential and important role of the Defence Forces.
- Increase digital literacy among citizens and businesses to better enable the identification of threats online.
- Develop cyber security capacity in Ireland to better protect citizens, companies and institutions.



## Arts and Culture

The arts are essential to the wellbeing of our society and in bringing communities together. We want to make the arts even more accessible and inclusive to everyone.

We recognise the diversity of artistic and creative activities in Ireland and the significant economic and social value of our creative culture both nationally and internationally.

The COVID-19 crisis has had a very severe impact on the arts sector and we are committed to assisting this sector as we plan our country's economic recovery. As part of the July Stimulus, the Government will set out how we will support the sector towards a sustainable recovery.

Ireland has an international reputation for excellence in the arts. We want to place emphasis on the economic, social and cultural value of our indigenous and exceptionally talented creative community. Arts and culture engender enormous national and local pride.

We will:

- Establish a cross departmental taskforce to develop a clear approach, informed by the views of all stakeholders, to protect and sustain the arts and culture sector through the COVID-19 recovery and beyond. This will be fed into the National Economic Plan.
- Develop a stimulus package to support the sector through COVID-19 and beyond, as economic resources allow.
- Protect the independence of the arts community.
- Support ongoing implementation of the Creative Ireland programme.
- Continue to financially support the work of the Arts Council.
- Support Creative Ireland in their 'Engaging the Public on Climate Change through the Cultural and Creative Sectors' initiative.
- Promote the contribution of women through innovative cultural schemes like the Markievicz Awards, which supports new works of art.
- Support the cultural and creative sector, and in particular the events industry, in a green recovery, assisting them in becoming a more sustainable, low-carbon industry, lowering the associated emissions and developing an indigenous market for climate-friendly solutions for the sector.

### Film/TV /Audio-visual/Digital/Media Production

We will:

- Implement the Audio-visual Action Plan.
- Continue funding for Screen Ireland.
- Work with the relevant government departments to ensure the full implementation of the Audio-visual Media Services Directive (AVMSD).

- Ensure that our tax regime remains supportive and attractive following the success of the Regional Film Development Uplift.
- Development of a Digital Creative Industries Roadmap.
- Work with relevant government departments and external stakeholders to guarantee the protection of intellectual property rights and digital rights for the creative sector and to ensure the full implementation of the new EU Copyright Directive.
- Support the development of new studio space and the upskilling of audio-visual workers.

### Community Arts

We will:

- Develop initiatives enabling the National Cultural Institutions to go on tour to towns across the country.
- Develop innovative support schemes for small local festivals, amateur dramatics and musicals.
- Encourage the next generation of young artists by creating new bursary schemes.
- Consider creating a new National Town of Culture competition.
- Work to ensure that local authorities are sufficiently supported to allow the fulfilment of long-term strategic cultural and arts planning at a local level.
- Expand Creative Schools, ensuring every child in Ireland has access to tuition and participation in art, music, drama and coding. Ensure it continues beyond the life of Creative Ireland and to work with the Department of Education to achieve this.
- Foster further collaboration between local authorities and local arts organisations through Creative Communities.

### Night-Time Culture

Social distancing will have a major impact on night-time culture. We will work with stakeholders from across the night-time culture sector to develop innovative approaches to enable the sector to function and to create a vibrant, diverse and sustainable night-time economy in Ireland.

We will:

- Establish, in the first thirty days of Government a Night-time Economy Taskforce.
- Conduct a full review of the regulations and policy framework governing our night-time culture at national and local level, including the staggering of trading hours for pubs, late bars, clubs and restaurants.
- Modernise our licensing laws and application processes.
- Support the establishment of the Night-Time Culture Mayors proposed for Dublin and Cork and examine the establishment of local committees to advance and improve our night-time entertainment and creative offerings in other urban areas.

## Creative and Cultural Infrastructure

We will:

- Examine 'Agent of Change' initiatives whereby existing cultural spaces have to be taken into account when building.
- Support measures to increase the provision of affordable work spaces for artists and creative practitioners.
- Examine 'meanwhile use' legislation for vacant buildings with a view to its potential application in Ireland.
- Ensure the timely delivery of arts and culture capital investment commitments, including our National Institutions, as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

## Commemoration

Ireland is facing a very complex period as we plan commemorations over the next few years. We will:

- Ensure an inclusive model of commemoration planning, informed by the guidance of the Expert Advisory Group.
- Request the Expert Advisory Group to examine the possibility of annual state commemorations for figures with significant positive contributions to Irish culture and heritage.
- Commit to engaging with the Northern Ireland Executive on the planning and management of commemorations of a cross-community and politically sensitive nature.
- Encourage local authorities to maximise engagement and facilitation with communities in developing commemorative events.

## Irish Language

This Government acknowledges the importance of the Irish language as the first language of the State, as a living language, and as vital component of the heritage of this island. We are determined to increase not only the visibility of our native language, but also its daily use in the community. We want first-language Irish speakers to feel empowered as active citizens and for those without fluency to feel confident enough to use Irish on a regular basis in everyday life, in the workplace and in the community.

We will:

- Adopt a whole-of-government approach to the protection and promotion of the Irish Language, in implementing the 20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 and Action Plan.
- Strengthen and enact the Official Languages Bill by the end of 2020 and include periodic reviews to monitor the overall objective of ensuring 20% of new recruits to the public service are Irish speakers.
- Promote the development of Irish Language Centres in Dublin and across the country for a community-based approach to Irish language promotion.

- Encourage and support Irish speaking communities outside of the Gaeltacht, and develop platforms to increase young people’s engagement with the Irish language (e.g. TG4, Raidió na Gaeltachta, RTÉ, Raidió Rí-Rá).
- Promote the Irish language in workplaces and social settings, through Conradh na Gaeilge and other organisations. Develop a national media campaign in support of this work.
- Expand the ‘Teanga Tí’/ Family Language Scheme and explore the introduction of similar schemes across the country.
- Commit to the protection and preservation of Gaeltacht areas to ensure they remain at the heart of a living language.

### Údarás na Gaeltachta

We will:

- Support the role played by Údarás na Gaeltachta in creating employment, administering the Language Planning Process and carrying out the work of Local Enterprise Offices, the IDA and Enterprise Ireland in Gaeltacht areas by adequately resourcing the organisation.
- Review the organisational and governance structures of Údarás na Gaeltachta, including the selection/election process to the Board.
- Prioritise the work of Údarás na Gaeltachta in strengthening the identity and branding for our Gaeltacht areas under the ‘Gaeltacht na hÉireann’ brand.

### Built Heritage

We will:

- Publish and implement the new all-of-government heritage policy and begin its nationwide implementation.
- Explore multi-annual funding models and ensure adequate funding is made available for the implementation of each County Heritage Plan.
- Continue to support the role of the Heritage Officers in the areas of heritage education, health and wellbeing and citizen science.
- Encourage each local authority to appoint a Conservation and Repurposing Officer.
- Build on community led schemes such as the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund, which provide grant aid to protect and maintain important historic buildings in our local communities.
- Encourage traditional building skills in devising an apprenticeship programme with the sustainable construction sector focusing on heritage disciplines and crafts.
- Expand the Heritage in School Scheme so that more students can enjoy our rich natural cultural heritage.
- Continue with the expansion of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and include modern and industrial buildings.
- Continue to develop and implement a master plan of our National Parks and National Reserves.

- Establish a scheme for all schools, promoting visits to historic OPW sites in Ireland.

## Sport

Across Government, we will take action to encourage and promote people’s personal health, wellbeing and physical activity. Sport and physical activity is central to that. During the pandemic, it was clear that running, cycling and walking became increasingly popular as people wanted to mind their physical and mental health. We will build on this. We will ensure that our interventions in sport complement our efforts to increase active travel and to improve public health and wellbeing.

### Participation

Gender, age, disability, ethnic and socio-economic background must not be barriers to participation.

We will:

- Target overall participation in sport to reach at least 60% of the population by 2027.
- Promote the value of physical activity as part of everyday life, adopting a life-long perspective underpinned by physical literacy.
- Place a strong emphasis on swimming, cycling, walking and running, which are especially suitable for all generations.
- Work with the Local Sport Partnerships to ensure greater roll out of successful initiatives such as ‘Go for Life Games’ or ‘Men on the Move’.
- Work with pre-schools, primary and secondary schools to improve the physical activity habits of all of our children and focus on the period between adolescence and young adulthood.
- Deliver a PE build and modernisation programme so that more schools have indoor facilities for PE and local communities have access and extra amenities available to them.
- Target resources at programmes that seek to address inequalities in sports participation, in particular socio-economic disadvantage. Prioritise increasing female participation in sport as participants, coaches, referees and administrators. We will continue to increase funding year on year for Sport Ireland’s Women in Sports programme.
- We will undertake a review of inclusiveness and participation in all funded sports to ensure that gender, ethnicity and culture are not a barrier to involvement.
- Mandate Sport Ireland to develop a programme of interventions to boost participation levels among people with disabilities.
- Encourage a low-stakes participation approach to underage sport and examine the impact that such an approach has in increasing participation and excellence.
- Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to racism and drugs in amateur and professional sport.

### High Performance

Sport can engender enormous national and local pride when our teams and athletes perform well. It is integral to our culture, identity and history. Our high performance athletes inspire the next generation, reinforcing high standards and motivating children in every community.

We will:

- Publish a High Performance strategy to define Ireland’s direction for at least 12 years, and review it every four years. The strategy will set clear and ambitious medal targets over three Olympic/Paralympic cycles.

- Facilitate efforts to explore business and philanthropic funding of high performance sport to complement State funding.
- Step up State funding to compete with other highly-successful countries of our size, and to facilitate a multi-cycle approach to high performance funding.
- Develop initiatives to increase the level of media coverage, nationally and locally, of women's sport and attendance at women's sport event.

We will complete the development of the Sport National Sports Campus at Abbotstown in line with Project Ireland 2040.

### Improved Capacity and Governance

The public rightly expects all Irish sporting bodies to exhibit strong leadership, ethics and governance throughout their ranks. It is important that all sporting organisations are accountable and that they employ modern working methods.

We will:

- Work with Sport Ireland to ensure all National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) adopt the Governance Code for the Community, Voluntary and Charity Sector by end 2021. The Code brings together good principles of governance for sport, recognising that there is no single model of good governance for the sector.
- Support sporting bodies receiving public funds to develop evaluation tools for their programmes and initiatives..
- Work with sporting clubs to increase volunteer training to focus on issues such as child welfare, disability awareness, first aid, sports administration and governance, and fundraising.
- Continue the Sports Capital Programme for clubs and local authority sportsgrounds and the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF).ies. We will prioritise sports capital investment in areas of historic low levels of participation and deprivation.
- Develop a Sports Technology Innovation fund to encourage research and development of interventions to support participation and excellence.
- Develop a strategy to identify, what type of major sporting events we can and should bid for (in particular those cancelled because of COVID-19), and how these events can be used to increase sporting participation, encourage domestic and international tourism and promote Ireland.

## Community Development, Social Inclusion and Public Participation

We will initiate a new Anti-Poverty, Social Inclusion and Community Development Action Plan framed around the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, underpinning sound community development practices, and reflecting a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on poverty and social inclusion.

This plan will build upon the Department of Rural and Community Development's Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024.

We will also:

- Carry out a comprehensive review of Public Participatory Networks and Local Economic and Community Plans to ensure they are fit for purpose for Climate action and Community Development
- Task every Local Authority/Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) with developing a County Integration Strategy to promote, through a participative process, the inclusion of minorities.
- Support the Community Sponsorship Ireland programme to support the integration of refugees.
- Publish a strategy to support volunteering, including development of comprehensive supporting infrastructure and measures to disseminate best practice.
- Fully implement Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland up to 2024.
- Introduce, on a phased basis, a number of projects similar in approach to Community Development Projects (CDPs).
- Commit to the introduction of an annual small capital grants programme administered through local authorities for the maintenance, improvement and upkeep of community centres.
- Support and enhance the Social Innovation Fund Ireland programme to help secure additional philanthropic funding sources specifically for community-based programmes and projects in the areas of climate justice, rural and community development.
- Update the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Acts 2005-12 to expand the eligibility of projects and programmes under the funding scheme to include biodiversity, environmental awareness and climate change.
- Ensure that Men's and Women's Sheds are properly resourced.
- Refine and build on a range of programmes to support communities including CLÁR, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), Community Service Programme (CSP) and Community Enhancement Programme (CEP).

### Community Call

- We will sustain Community Call as we emerge from COVID-19, and examine the merits of maintaining it on a more permanent footing as a means of linking the wide range of services and supports available at local level and into an overarching cross-departmental group at national level.

### Libraries

- We will support our library network to meet the needs of our ever changing society and implement the public libraries strategy, Our Public Libraries 2022.

### Schools in Rural Ireland

- We will support school owners, when buildings are no longer used as schools, to make them available for community or other purposes, in line with the owners' wishes.

### Social Enterprise

- We will build on Ireland's first ever National Social Enterprise Policy.

## Senior Alerts Scheme

- We will continue to develop and enhance this demand-led scheme and ensure it adapts to changing demographics and technological advancements.

## Charities

- We will update legislative provisions with the Charities Regulator to ensure it has the necessary powers to increase trust and confidence in the management and administration of charities.

## Primary and Post-Primary Education

Education is a cornerstone of society and a driver of social equality. Creating new and viable opportunities for young people and those wishing to re-skill is a civic, social, economic and environmental imperative now more than ever. Education will play a key role in our recovery after COVID-19 and in our ongoing efforts to tackle the climate crisis.

We will continue to develop our education system to meet the needs of all students and to tackle disadvantage from an early age. We will develop innovative and collaborative approaches to ensure that our education system fosters a love of life-long learning, enables stronger communities, cherishes the environment, contributes to the economy and adds to the health and wellbeing of all learners and wider society.

Our approach will be guided by the goals of:

- Improving the learning experience and success of learners.
- Increasing progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage and learners with special educational needs.
- Helping those delivering education to continuously improve.
- Building stronger bridges between education and the wider community.
- Providing better national planning and support services.
- Implementing evidence based policies.

## Striving for Excellence in Education

We are committed to supporting the development of a shared understanding of the value of education, which addresses how education can prepare people of all ages to meet new societal, environmental, technological and economic challenges which face us all. We will:

- Establish a Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education at primary and second level. Develop and embed a Digital Education Strategy, where teachers and students are supported in providing and learning from on-line resources and ensuring that digital literacy forms a part of the primary and post-primary curriculum.
- Use the Digital Education Strategy to engage pupils and students in structuring and shaping their own learning experience and engagement.
- Ensure all graduating teachers maintain high levels of pedagogical and content knowledge in order to provide excellence in teaching and learning experiences for all students.
- Continue to review and reform the primary curriculum.
- Continue to review and reform the post primary curriculums, prioritising elements such as critical thinking, problem solving and continuous assessment so that they feature more centrally.
- Establish a new Education Research and Policy Section within the Department tasked with ensuring that education policy development in Ireland is informed by a strong evidence base, is outcomes focused, and cognisant of best international practices.

- Develop inclusive and age appropriate RSE and SPHE curricula across primary and post-primary levels, including an inclusive programme on LGBTI+ relationships and making appropriate legislative changes if necessary.
- Review the provision, content and delivery of teacher education and professional development, ensuring that the teacher community and professional dialogue is at the heart of teacher learning.
- Establish a new Primary School Healthy Eating education programme.
- Develop a new modern languages in Primary School Initiative.  
Implement a strategy to support gifted and talented students at both Primary and Post-primary levels.

## Investing in High Quality Education

Teachers and pupils are at the heart of our education system. We will adopt an evidence based and outcomes focused approach to our policy interventions that we will make to support our school leaders and teachers in their work.

We will:

- Seek to increase the capitation grant with a view to reducing the reliance on voluntary contributions made to schools.
- Seek to make further progress in reducing pupil teacher ratios in primary schools.
- Provide greater integration of the advisory service of the Schools' Inspectorate with supports such as continuous professional development (CPD), leadership development and specialist support services (e.g. NEPS, NCSE).
- Develop innovative measures to support school leadership and the quality of teaching, informed by data and a focus on student learning and potential.
- Conduct a comprehensive audit and inventory of all school buildings, infrastructure and facilities in the State, and the creation of a database of all school admissions policies.
- Examine a targeted government scholarship scheme to focus on encouraging graduates into subject areas where there is a shortage of post-primary teachers in the profession.
- Place the Minor Works Grant on a permanent footing for schools.
- Continue to recognise the importance of small schools to communities across Ireland.
- Develop Technical Support Service Teams, which will enable innovation in schools and clusters of schools.
- Deliver a programme to build and modernise PE and school sport facilities.
- Commit to a comprehensive review of school forward planning policy, recognising particularly the need for adequate supports for children with special educational needs, and the need to sustain green planning and green construction for schools in the future.
- Expand the Energy Efficiency Upgrade Pilot Programme for Schools.
- Increase funding to the Digital, STEM and Creative and other School Excellence Funds.

## Addressing the Cost of Education

The cost of education remains a barrier to participation and a cause of financial difficulty for many families. We will address this over the next five years.

We will:

- Enact the Student and Parent Charter Bill.

- Commence a free schoolbooks scheme pilot in September 2020 and, if successful review of that pilot, expand the scheme to schools nationwide as resources allow.
- Emphasise the rental and reuse of books to schools and discourage the use of workbooks.
- Provide clear guidelines to schools on cost effective and sustainable practices to decrease the costs for families in relation to school books, uniforms, IT and sport equipment.

## An Inclusive Vision for Education

Inclusion in and access to education is the foundation for a more just and equal society. In welcoming everyone to participate in education, they deserve to be treated fairly. In order to support an inclusive and equal education system we will:

- Support continued investment in our Special Needs Assistants.
- Ensure students get the right assistance at the right time building on the learnings from the pilot currently underway and subject to further consultation.
- Ensure each child with a special educational need has an appropriate school place in line with their constitutional right.
- Further progress the move towards a needs-based, responsive set of state supports for students with special educational needs and expand early intervention teams in schools over the next five years.
- Complete the new DEIS identification model ensuring the extension of DEIS status to schools that are identified as being suitable.
- Provide additional supports for students who are homeless, resident in family hubs, or in direct provision. Further develop access programmes to Higher and Further Education for students from disadvantaged groups, including members of the Traveller Community, those in direct provision and those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.
- Ensure resourcing for students who do not speak English as a first language.
- Improve access to supports for positive mental health in schools.
- Update the National Anti-Bullying Plan to include gender identity bullying.
- Continue to review and expand the roll out of the new Hot School Meals initiative.
- Publish a new literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategy to support learners.
- Introduce a positive action programme to overcome barriers and increase the number of teachers from our migrant communities, in conjunction with the Teaching Council and further education authorities.
- Ensure robust data collection on the use of reduced timetables.
- Ensure that reduced timetables are only used in a manner that is limited, appropriate and absolutely necessary in line with the Department of Education's rules.
- Publish an evidence-based national policy on Initial Teacher Education encouraging further access to teaching from people from minority backgrounds.

## Ensuring plurality and choice in Education

Students of all religions and none should have access to education, regardless of their belief system. The government will continue to expand the plurality of our schools to reflect the full breadth of society. We will:

- Achieve the target of at least 400 multi-denominational primary schools by 2030 to improve parental choice.
- Expand and prioritise the transfer of viable schools to Community National Schools.

- Ensure a curriculum of multiple religious beliefs and ethics is taught as a national curriculum of tolerance and values in all primary schools.
- Work with communities to ensure the provision of clear, non-partisan information on the preparation for, and the consequences of, the divestment process and to respond to queries raised

## Supporting Irish Language and Culture in Education

We will:

- Continue to review and reform the teaching and learning of Irish, and increase the emphasis on spoken Irish in the classroom.
- Work towards doubling the number of young people currently in Irish medium schools.
- Provide a comprehensive policy for the Irish language from pre-primary education to teacher education for all schools.
- Increase supports to An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoilíochta.
- Provide Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcoláiste where there is strong demand.
- Establish and fund an Irish language education School Excellence Fund.
- Task the NCCA to develop an Irish Cultural Studies Junior Cycle level 2 short course which values the heritage, language, nature, biodiversity and culture, including Traveller culture and history, of Ireland and history of the Irish Language in the global landscape.
- Expand the programme in which PE is taught through Irish to every primary school and continue to increase the number of post-primary schools in this programme.

## Supporting School Staff

Teachers and leaders in education need to be supported to continually improve. We will help them to develop their own self-evaluation plan and design and implement initiatives to deliver measurable improvements. In order to support them we will invest in teachers continuous professional development.

## A Sustainable Vision for Getting to School

We will conduct a comprehensive review of the School Transport Scheme, identifying recommendations for the scheme to provide better value and a better service for students including those with special educational needs and examining issues such as the nearest or next nearest school.

## Preparing for Post-COVID Education

The Government will ensure that as it develops reopening plans, students and parents are included, that schools have the time to implement required changes, and that students transitioning between education levels are supported.

The reopening plans will consider detailed protocols for the reopening of all schools, including learnings from other countries, incorporating flexibility for school starting times/operations and the delivery of a Summer Education Programme.

Necessary supports for the Leaving Cert class of 2020 and subsequent years will also be provided. We will seek to ensure that 6<sup>th</sup> class students of 2020 are given an opportunity to mark their departure from primary school communities.

We will prepare detailed contingency plans for further potential school closures while also investing in teacher CPD to support distance and blended learning.

## Higher and Further Education and Research

Investment in education and research is an investment in our future. It is an investment that ensures that Ireland prospers socially and economically, not just today but in the years to come.

Higher and Further Education have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 crisis and we will support the sector through these challenges to ensure that educational opportunities remain and are made more accessible to everyone, particularly the most vulnerable in our society. In addition, we will continue to support our research community to tackle the social and scientific problems posed by COVID-19 now and into the future.

We are committed to addressing the funding challenges in third-level education. We want a Higher and Further Education sector that sees education as a holistic and life-long pursuit. We will continue to build strong connections with other education sectors and wider society, while recognising our global and environmental responsibilities. It is vital we invest in our Higher and Further Education sectors so we can continue to tackle inequality based on race, gender, and socio-economic background. We recognise the potential for our Higher and Further Education institutions to be exemplars regionally, nationally and internationally.

At a time of great economic uncertainty, when so many people fear for their future employment, we will ensure that Higher Education plays a vital role in our recovery. We will equip students with the skills necessary to secure employment, while preparing for the opportunities and challenges posed by a changing economy, the move to a low-carbon future and disruptive technologies, as well as offering retraining and reskilling opportunities to help people into employment.

Despite the challenges of Brexit, we see significant opportunities for collaboration and cooperation on education and research on an all-island basis. We will work with the Northern Irish Executive as well as Higher Education institutions and research bodies across the island.

### Higher Education funding and restructuring

We will:

- Develop a long-term sustainable funding model for Higher Level education in collaboration with the sector and informed by recent and ongoing research and analysis.
- Continue to reform the way our Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operate through their relationship with the Higher Education Authority (HEA) by enhancing performance, financial management, governance and transparency.
- Utilise the system performance framework to drive accountability and improvements in our Higher Education sector.
- Commit to continuing and expanding the important initiatives in the Gender Action Plan towards tackling gender inequality in our education sector. In particular, we will implement the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative.
- The creation of Technological Universities (TUs) is a radical reconfiguration of the Higher Education landscape and will deliver significant advantages to national

priorities in relation to Higher Education access, research-informed teaching and learning excellence, as well as supporting enterprise and regional development. We will support the recently established TUs and work closely with consortia to establish new TUs. In particular, we recognise the urgency attached to the establishment of the TU of the south east of Ireland.

- Review and update the International Education strategy for Ireland recognising the importance of overseas students and academics to our higher education sector.
- Work with all HEIs to develop partnerships throughout the EU to increase access to Horizon 2020 funding and to increase Irish participation in Erasmus+ programmes.

### Further Education and Community Education sectors

We will:

- Value and encourage the role of Further Education and Training.
- Enable a culture of lifelong learning within the workforce, with a focus on increasing lifelong learning rates from 9% currently to 18% by 2025.
- Recognise the role of community education and its vital role in our communities by supporting its schemes and initiatives post COVID-19.
- Enhance back-to-work schemes and initiatives to assist in upskilling those who are seeking new employment opportunities after the crisis.
- Develop a comprehensive Green Further Education and Skills Development Plan ensuring learners are equipped with the environmental awareness and green skills which can drive future change.
- Utilise the Human Capital initiative to deliver a wide range of education and training programmes for jobseekers, to support economic recovery and green skills development.
- Develop and implement a standardised system of accreditation of prior learning taking account of previous education, skills, work experience and engagement in society.
- Review the Back to Education Allowance to ensure it is able to support those unemployed as a result of COVID-19 to access education and training.
- Work with Further and Higher Education institutions to develop new fast track mid-career educational models to meet the rapidly evolving needs of our new economy.
- Ensure the National Skills Council and the Nine Regional Skills Fora are active in feeding into the development of the National Economic Plan, ensuring Ireland's ambition to be a world leader in anticipating and responding to skills needs.
- Expand Springboard throughout Further and Higher Education, offering upskilling in areas of skills shortages to those who want to upskill, to those who are re-entering the workforce or to those who have been made redundant.

## Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships need to be a much larger part of the education landscape in Ireland and play a role in taking us out of the COVID-19 crisis and in taking climate action. We are committed to ensuring apprenticeships are open and accessible to all and are seen as a viable and exciting path for school-leavers.

We will:

- Publish an updated Apprenticeship Action Plan to look at new ways of structuring, funding and promoting apprenticeships.
- Develop a strong pipeline of apprenticeships and traineeships to support our recovery and to provide new career paths for people with different interests and abilities.
- Commit to growing the number of apprenticeships significantly between now and 2025, increasing the total number of new registrations to at least 10,000 per annum.
- Commit to emphasising and building capacity for green apprenticeships through a Green Further Education and Skills Development Plan, as tackling the climate crisis will require a broad range of skills across the construction, energy and natural heritage sectors.
- Expand apprenticeships to new and non-traditional areas and work with employers to create new pathways for young people into sustainable and skilled employment, providing practical groundings which will stand to them as they move through their careers.
- Commit to taking the lead on boosting the availability and uptake of apprenticeships by providing government apprenticeship schemes.
- Prioritise innovation in the structuring of non-traditional apprenticeships in order to make them more appealing and encourage greater uptake by sectors which have not used the apprenticeship model before.
- Improve the pathways between second level and apprenticeship and ensure that apprenticeship are seen as a very attractive career pathway .
- Commit to continuing to increase the participation of women in apprenticeships and skills-based programmes.

## Student supports

We will:

- Maintain student contributions at the current level.
- Review SUSI eligibility and adjacency rates.
- Conduct a review of the SUSI scheme in 2020 following the impact of COVID-19.
- Ensure mental health supports are available for students in Higher and Further Education.
- Provide a range of free, adequate, safe and suitable period products in all educational publicly-funded settings (including schools, colleges and HEIs) to ensure no students are disadvantaged in their education by period poverty.

- Work with HEIs to ensure that more accommodation is built on and off campus using cost rental models and others.
- Address the gap in postgraduate grants.
- Recognise the vital work of the Universities of Sanctuary project and commit that the State will further increase the supports for people in direct provision to access third-level education.
- Continue to support initiatives around student care and welfare on campus dealing with consent, wellbeing, mental health, drug, alcohol and substance abuse.

### Tackling sexual harassment in Higher and Further Education

We will:

- Implement the recommendations of the *Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive – Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions* Report and expand the scope of activities to cover both staff and students.
- Seek to require that all HEIs create a specific action plan around tackling sexual harassment. This should include independent data collection and review of supports for students and staff and reportable actions in Annual Governance Statements.
- Ensure every Higher Education Institution commission a survey for all staff and students on harassment, sexual harassment and bullying, with a view to informing their equality, diversity and inclusion action plans.

### Student Access and Mobility in Higher and Further Education

We will:

- Continue and expand the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education and develop a National Traveller Education Strategy, including a plan to improve access to Higher Education for members of the Traveller Community.
- Seek to expand funding for programmes to engage with students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds from primary school onwards and encourage all HEIs to include work experience components or Pathway to Professions elements in their programmes.
- Support access routes and inclusive education initiatives to learners with intellectual disabilities.
- Examine the creation of a single information portal for school-leavers for both Further Education and Higher Education programmes of study.
- Ensure that post-primary schools should each be linked with at least one Further Education provider to ensure the system is coherent in providing equal opportunities for all students.
- Ensure that all Further Education courses are linked into at least one university course when appropriate, providing a map to students who wish to continue their studies.

- Improve awareness of STEM career paths beyond purely technical careers and examine the scalability of existing pilot projects to encourage diversity in STEM subjects in line with the STEM Education Policy 2017-2026.
- Seek to increase the Fund for Students with Disabilities.
- Formalise the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) scheme across all institutions and make the entrance points visible so students have a clear goal for their studies.

## Adult Literacy

We will:

- Develop and implement a new 10-year strategy for adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills within the first year of the government.

## Research

We understand the vital part played by research as the basis of sound policy-making across government. We will ensure that Ireland is a global leader in research and innovation across the arts, humanities, social sciences and STEM.

We will endeavour to make Ireland a more attractive location as a base for academic research and researchers. We want research based in Ireland to be at the forefront of the next phase of disruptive technologies, leading rather than following the technological revolution while also being a centre for foundational research. We will strive to create an atmosphere in which research in Ireland is mindful of an ever-changing society while also being agile and responsive to the need for innovation in business and industry.

We will:

- Recognise the high-quality research emerging through national funding agencies and programmes, such as SFI, IRC, HRB and PRTL, and continue to support them in engaging in research that addresses societal challenges and advances the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.
- Examine solutions for extensions for researchers who cannot access facilities to complete projects as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Develop challenges-based research funding approaches for all disciplines, so that Irish researchers directly address the major issues facing society in the years ahead.
- Ensure support for foundational and discovery research.
- Increase the number of SFI Research Centres and seek to establish a cross-border research centre, to bring together universities and industry north and south.
- Examine the need for specialist research institutions outside the Higher Education system.
- Develop career pathways for early-career researchers, with starting grant funding rounds to be issued on an annual basis from each of our funding institutions.
- Expand the linkages between research and enterprise, with a particular focus on encouraging collaboration with domestic SMEs.

- Work across third level and research sectors to ensure that the work and contribution of PhD candidates is recognised appropriately.
- Publish a Regional Technology and Clustering Programme to strengthen the links between SMEs and third level education institutes to help drive competitiveness, productivity and innovation in the regions.
- Support Horizon Europe and the establishment of the European Innovation Council to lead financial supports for businesses.
- Support swift agreement at EU institutional and Member State level for the proposed Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme to cover the 2021-2027 period.
- Maintain SFI's presence overseas and as a pillar of trade and investment missions, along with EI and IDA Ireland.
- Propose simplification of the application processes for grant funding from EU-funded research and innovation projects. Work at EU level to promote greater SME take-up of research and innovation funding.



## Mission: A Shared Island

We are committed to working with all communities and traditions on the island to build consensus around a shared future. This consensus will be underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement and by the absolute respect for the principle of consent.

We will:

- Establish a Unit within the Department of An Taoiseach to work towards a consensus on a shared island. This unit will examine the political, social, economic and cultural considerations underpinning a future in which all traditions are mutually respected.
- Prioritise protection of the Peace Process and the all-island economy in the context of the future UK-EU Brexit agreement.
- Ensure that the Northern Ireland deal, New Decade, New Approach is implemented in full. We acknowledge that full implementation of this agreement and its predecessors is crucial, and we will work with others to achieve that goal.
- Continue to utilise the All Island Civic Dialogue as a forum for addressing Brexit-related issues and other challenges arising for the island.
- Enhance, develop and deepen all aspects of north-south cooperation and the all-island economy.
- Work with the Executive and the UK Government to deepen multi-agency cross-border co-operation on crime, including information sharing between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and An Garda Síochána.
- Seek to adopt an all-island approach to national planning frameworks.
- Explore how bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement can ensure there is a joined-up approach to environmental issues on an all-island basis and seek to develop an all-island strategy to tackle climate breakdown and the biodiversity crisis.
- Work with the Northern Ireland Executive to deliver key cross-border infrastructure initiatives, including the A5, the Ulster Canal connection from Clones to Upper Lough Erne, the Narrow Water Bridge, and cross-border greenways, in particular the Sligo-Enniskillen greenway (subject to feasibility).
- Work with the Executive and the UK Government to achieve greater connectivity on the island of Ireland.
- Engage with the UK government and EU to work towards the UK's continued involvement in the North Seas Countries Offshore Grid Initiative and to maintain existing energy security agreements between the two islands.
- Promote an all-island approach to land use planning and river basin management plans to stop cross border pollution.
- Work with the Executive and the UK Government to commit to investment and development opportunities in the North West and Border communities, including third level opportunities for young people from across the region at University of Ulster Magee Campus in Derry.
- Support a north/south programme of research and innovation, including an all-island research hub, through Universities Ireland.
- COVID-19 has reinforced the need to protect public health on the island of Ireland, we will continue to deepen and strengthen north-south health links.
- Work with the Northern Ireland Executive to build on plans to deliver a Youth Development Sail Training project to provide opportunities for interaction and engagement for young people north and south.

- Ensure the Decade of Centenaries is marked in an inclusive, appropriate and sensitive manner.
- Expand the North South School Exchange Programme and support community based cultural institutions in Border areas.
- Support initiatives by civil society, the community sector, and the arts and cultural sector aimed at promoting constructive and inclusive dialogue around the future of the island.
- With the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive, recommence regular meetings of the North South Ministerial Council, starting with an early Plenary Meeting at Head of Government level, during which a reassessment of the work should be undertaken to ensure a strategic approach.
- Expand and develop mechanisms for engagement between the Houses of the Oireachtas, the Northern Irish Assembly, the UK Parliament as well as the devolved assemblies in Wales and Scotland.
- Ensure that each government department maintains strong links with their Northern Ireland counterpart.
- Support delivery of the PEACE IV programme and work with our EU partners and UK Government to secure the necessary funding for an EU PEACE PLUS programme.,

### Legacy

We are committed to working with the UK Government and the political parties in Northern Ireland to address the painful legacy of the Troubles. We will do this as agreed through the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement framework, in order to support wider societal reconciliation, build greater community confidence in policing and meet the legitimate needs of victims and survivors in Northern Ireland and across the island of Ireland

We will engage as a matter of priority with the British Government, including in the framework of the BIIGC, with a view to ensuring access by an independent, international judicial figure to all original documents relating to the Dublin and Monaghan Bombings, as well as the Dublin bombings of 1972 and 1971, the bombing of Kay's Tavern and the murder of Seamus Ludlow – in accordance with the all-party Dáil motions on these matters.

We will also work with the UK Government and the Executive to support the implementation of the Fresh Start Agreement commitments on tackling residual paramilitarism and support the work of the Independent Reporting Commission.

## Brexit

The United Kingdom has left the European Union and the transition period maintaining the status quo will end by default on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Brexit presents the possibility of an additional economic shock at the end of this year.

The implementation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland is a key priority. We will engage closely with the EU-UK Joint Committee and the Specialised Committee to ensure the bedding down of the new arrangements.

We will work to ensure that Ireland keeps its position at the centre of negotiations by:

- Maintaining constant and high-level contacts with the EU Taskforce.
- Maintaining EU solidarity through regular engagement with member states on Brexit and major issues of concern for Ireland whilst taking stock of other EU members concerns.
- Maintaining the good working relationship with the British Government.
- Maintaining and developing the political consensus on Brexit in the Dáil and Seanad.
- Supporting the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK in the strategic interests of Ireland, north and south, and British-Irish relations.

We will defend the interests of Irish agriculture, fisheries, export businesses and the wider economy. The priorities in the negotiations include:

- A tariff free, quota free, trade agreement with strong level playing field provisions, including robust environmental and labour standards.
- Achieving the best possible deal for the Irish fishing industry in relation to access conditions, quota shares and the traditional activity of the EU fleet while insisting that fisheries issues are dealt with as part of an overall trade deal.
- Ambitious transport connectivity including aviation and road haulage rights.
- Strong and deep law enforcement and judicial cooperation.
- Data Adequacy Ruling and Financial Services Equivalence – these are parallel processes to the future relationship negotiations but with substantial linkages. In particular, data exchange has a cross cutting impact on a whole range of areas of future cooperation.
- A single comprehensive agreement covering all aspects of the future relationship with strong governance and dispute resolution provisions.

The full implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement is essential to negotiations on a future trade deal.

We will:

- Actively participate in the Special Committee overseeing the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, including the maintenance and protection of the Single Electricity Market.
- Emphasise the full protection of the Good Friday Agreement including the rights of individuals and North-South Cooperation is fundamental.
- Be guided by the twin objectives of protecting the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the Peace Process, and the protection of the integrity of the Single Market.
- Work with the EU and the UK through the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement to ensure that the provisions of the Protocol on the non-diminution of the rights of individuals will be fully implemented.

- Recognise the importance of the European Convention on Human Rights to the Good Friday Agreement, we will also continue to seek strong commitments to the Convention from the UK Government.

The Government will work to ensure that Ireland is Brexit-ready for all possible outcomes. In the absence of a trade deal, Brexit may be a significant further strain on businesses already struggling with the challenges brought by COVID-19.

We will:

- Work with all sectors to ensure they are prepared for all possible outcomes. The Government will prioritise supports for vulnerable sectors in the context of no trade deal.
- Continue to ensure systems at Dublin and Rosslare Ports and at Dublin Airport are Brexit ready and adapted to take account of COVID-19.
- Work to ensure the essential UK Landbridge remains a viable and efficient route to market for Irish goods.
- Constantly engage with stakeholders.

## British-Irish relations

There is a unique relationship between our two islands which are intertwined socially, economically, politically and culturally. Our common membership of the European Union since 1973 provided a structure for regular engagement which following Brexit is no longer the case. We will strengthen bilateral relations with the UK.

We will:

- Undertake a strategic review of the British-Irish relationship in 2020/21.
- Enhance the role of the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) to strengthen east-west links.
- Develop structures for regular meetings at Heads of Government, Ministerial and Senior Official levels, to take forward agreed programmes of work on matters of practical cooperation.
- Ensure that environmental marine conservation and pollution control measures are protected in bilateral relations.
- Prioritise regular bilateral engagements between the Irish and British governments across all sectors.
- Deepen our relationship with the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.
- Open a new Consulate General in the north of England.
- Ensure the continued effective operation of the Common Travel Area and reciprocal rights between Ireland and Britain across areas such as social protection, education and training and healthcare.

## Mission: At the Heart of Europe and Global Citizenship

This Government will prioritise the protection of human rights, the promotion of democracy and democratic values, climate action and the promotion of peace. We support European integration, international trade, multilateralism and global cooperation.

### Ireland at the heart of Europe

During the lifetime of this Government, we will mark fifty years of Irish membership of the European Union. Membership of the EU has been transformative for Ireland and its people, and we are committed to the European Union, believing that Ireland's interests are best served by active and engaged membership..

We support the European Union's values of cooperation, peace, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We will work with the structures and institutions of the EU to make Europe a just, sustainable and economically competitive continent and to rectify the shortcomings that we recognise.

We believe Europe can be the example of political, social, economic and environmental reform for other parts of the world. At a time of rising protectionism, we will be clear in our support for free trade while insisting on high environmental and labour standards and fair trading practices. We believe that European efforts will lead to political, social, economic and environmental reform around the world.

We will:

- Strengthen our diplomatic and enterprise agency presence across the EU and its neighbourhood.
- Forge alliances with other Member States with which we share common goals and interests.
- Support the European Green Deal and seek to ensure it is central to the EU's economic recovery.
- Work to restore the Single Market's integrity, learning lessons from the response to COVID-19.
- Support the Digital Single Market, ensuring high data protection standards.
- Continue to advocate for the completion of the Single Market for services.
- Focus Ireland and the EU on a more sustainable model of international engagement post COVID-19
- Ensure Ireland's interests and values are reflected in any proposals for EU strategic autonomy in response to COVID-19, such as incentives to produce certain goods within Europe.
- Support new and existing EU trade deals to expand Ireland's export options into new markets.
- Ensure that Ireland's position on trade deals is strongly informed by the need to ensure that all international trade deals support the aims of the Paris Climate Agreement.
- Seek to agree the Multiannual Financial Framework focused on COVID-19 recovery and which sets out an ambitious strategic agenda for Europe, meeting key priorities for Ireland such as climate action, Common Agricultural Policy, Horizon, Erasmus and Interreg.
- Remain committed to the euro and seek to deepen and strengthen economic and monetary union and banking union.
- Improve Ireland's record of compliance with EU Directives, especially in the areas of social and environmental legislation.
- Support initiatives to improve accountability and transparency across European institutions.
- Support the EU Circular Economy Action Plan.

- Work with our EU partners to ensure greater coherence and consistency on actions to tackle climate change and the promotion of biodiversity.
- Work towards ensuring that all Member States fulfil their humanitarian obligations under international law.
- Support work on the Celtic Interconnector, which will link Ireland to Europe's energy grid, increase competition in electricity prices and help Ireland to switch to at least 70% renewable electricity.
- Communicate and promote the EU's work at all levels of society.
- Develop a new strategy to increase the presence of Irish people in the senior ranks of the EU institutions, targeting an increase in the number of young Irish people applying for internships and working with Irish officials and universities on outreach.

### Europe's Wider Neighbourhood

We will:

- Remain pro-enlargement and support the Western Balkan countries in particular to progress along the accession path.
- Strengthen our engagement with the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe as a vital European-wide institution.
- Oppose any annexation of territory taken by force, such as in the Crimean Peninsula, in line with international law and the UN Charter.
- Continue to contribute to the humanitarian efforts in Syria and Yemen and strongly support the work of the UN Special Representatives.
- Support EU and UN efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Libya and build a better future for the Libyan people.
- Support the right of self-determination of the people of Western Sahara and support UN efforts to reach a definitive political solution.
- Work to build a more intensive and meaningful EU-Africa partnership to deal effectively with our shared challenges and build a two-way investment between the two continents.
- Work with our EU colleagues and the international community to deal with the underlying causes of the migrant crisis across the Middle East and North Africa and improve conditions for refugees in camps, including the release of further EU funding for this purpose.
- Build our relationships with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority and remain active in the Middle East Peace Process. Ireland's longstanding support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will remain an integral aspect of our foreign policy and we will continue to build consensus at EU level to take a more proactive approach in supporting a negotiated two-state solution and lasting peace process.
- Build on ongoing efforts to lead the EU to oppose any annexation or plans to apply Israeli sovereignty over territory in the West Bank, which is part of the occupied Palestinian territory. We would regard this as a breach of international law.
- Honour our commitment to recognise the State of Palestine as part of a lasting settlement of the conflict, or in advance of that, when we believe doing so will progress efforts to reach a two-state solution or protect Palestinian territory.
- Reaffirm our commitment to fund the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNWRA), supporting key projects in education and energy.
- [Occupied Territories Bill]

## An island at the centre of the world

Ireland must be ambitious, visible and active in promoting the interests of our nation on the international stage. Having regard to available resources, we will seek to continue to implement Global Ireland 2025 and its ambition to double our global footprint.

We will:

- Strongly advocate for democracy and democratic values, the rule of law, multilateralism, climate action and free trade.
- Advance Ireland's economic and trading interests in multilateral contexts, including the World Trade Organisation and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Secure greater support for a rules-based world trading environment benefitting Ireland's exporters and supporting inward FDI while increasing opportunities for our enterprises and people.
- Ensure that our environmental and human rights objectives and our obligations under international agreements and treaties are central to the work of our embassies.
- Deepen our engagement with international financial institutions to ensure our voice is heard on global economic and international development issues.
- Publish whole-of-government strategies covering Latin America and other parts of the globe to complement the newly-published AsiaPacific, US & Canada and Africa strategies.
- Support international efforts to achieve a democratic solution to the crisis in Venezuela.
- Develop the 'Ireland House' model, bringing all State agencies and government departments based abroad together under one roof to encourage joined-up thinking.
- Reduce the carbon footprint of our foreign affairs activity. This will involve more teleconferencing and the close measurement of the Department's worldwide carbon footprint.
- Continue to ensure that all requests for overflights or landing by military or state aircraft are guided by Ireland's policy of military neutrality.
- Ensure all aircraft requesting permission to avail of facilities at Shannon and other Irish airports adhere to strict conditions and that all military or state aircraft are unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives. Any exemptions should be dealt with in an open and transparent way. The State retains its right to undertake spotchecks on commercial/civil flights should it be deemed necessary.

## Supporting the work of the United Nations

Membership of the UN is a cornerstone of Irish foreign policy. At a time of ever more complex global threats which respect no international boundaries, including climate change and pandemics, only coordinated international action and collaboration will bring about solutions.

We will:

- Champion support for multilateralism and a fair, rules-based international order at a time when multilateralism has been weakened.
- Ensure that Ireland leverages its position within the UN to promote international co-operation in the management of climate related security challenges and to build on our strength of conflict resolution.
- Support the institutions of the UN in their critical work including in support of democratisation, human rights, conflict resolution, disarmament, global health, climate action, trade, nutrition, sustainable food production and education, the rule of law,

peacekeeping and the protection of women in peacekeeping and specifically the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

- Work to ensure the sustainable management of debt for developing countries.
- Continue to work towards the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals aimed at ending poverty, reducing inequality and tackling climate change.
- Deepen Ireland's relationships with Small Island Developing States, some of which face existential threats from climate change.

### Relationship with the United States

The relationship between Ireland and the United States is of unique significance on an economic, social, historical and political level.

We will:

- Strengthen our diplomatic, cultural and economic relationship with the US at all levels, recognising the unique significance of the transatlantic relationship between us.
- Act as a bridge in the transatlantic relationship between the EU and US.

### Strengthening our relationship with the diaspora

We will:

- Hold a referendum on extending the franchise at presidential elections to Irish citizens living outside the State.
- Publish a new diaspora policy in 2020.
- Prioritise the Emigrant Support Programme, ensuring that the most vulnerable members of our overseas communities are supported.
- Work to establish pathways for legal migration by Irish citizens to the US, continuing to support the E3 Visa Bill, and recognising the impact of COVID-19 on transatlantic travel.
- Seek solutions for undocumented Irish citizens in the US to regularise their status.
- Develop educational and work opportunities in Ireland for third and fourth generation Irish diaspora.
- Support those who wish to return to Ireland and address barriers facing returning emigrants.

### Overseas Development Assistance

As serious as the economic implications of COVID-19 are in Ireland, they do not compare to the potential impacts of the virus in the global south. We therefore believe that now is the time to reinforce our ambition in the area of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Ireland's ODA programme is an essential element of our overall foreign policy and national presence overseas, enabling Ireland to respond to complex human needs and humanitarian crises around the world.

We will:

- Make annual, sustainable progress, ultimately achieving the UN target of 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2030. We will set a monetary expenditure floor on the basis of 2019, to be calculated over a rolling current three-year average.
- Continue to provide multi-annual funding for humanitarian action and work to develop flexible approaches where humanitarian and development needs meet.
- Ensure that all Irish aid is spent in a way that is in full compliance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- Implement the target in *A Better World* to double the overall percentage of our development assistance that counts as climate finance.

- Ensure that aid remains untied to trade.
- Ensure that the levels and use of ODA should be subject to strict monitoring and accountability regulations across all sectors.
- Create a unit within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade dedicated to working on Ireland's response to the global climate crisis and tasked with devising a strategy to scale up Ireland's climate finance contributions.
- Expand the scope of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Evaluation and Audit Unit to manage and coordinate evidence, knowledge and learning from development policy and programming and to improve the overall monitoring of ODA spend.
- Support those countries that are poorest and most vulnerable to climate shocks and ensure climate change is included as a core theme in strategy development in the countries where Ireland has a significant development cooperation programme.

### Human Rights and Business

Ireland is committed to the promotion of human rights through business practices.

We will:

- Complete the review of the implementation of the Business and Human Rights Action Plan by the end of this year.
- Ensure that the Action Plan is further developed to review whether there is a need for greater emphasis on mandatory due diligence.
- Revise *Ireland Connected*, Ireland's trade and investment strategy, to include the promotion of human rights and environmental protection as key goals.
- Rigorously scrutinise all applications for export licences for military equipment and dual-use items on a case-by-case basis and provide as much information as possible on the countries and companies involved.

## Defence

Irish people take great pride in our Permanent Defence Forces and the men and women who serve this country with pride and distinction. Since first deploying, the Defence Forces have the longest unbroken record of overseas service with the United Nations of any country, during this time the nature of conflict has presented new challenges. We will continue this proud record and ensure that the Defence Forces are suitably resourced to partake in such service recognising the new challenges facing the global community.

Peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts are at the core of the international reputation of the Defence Forces. With climate change becoming an increasing security threat across the world and a significant factor in the incidences of war, famine, forced migration and disaster management, we recognise the vital role the Defence Forces have in addressing these challenges.

## Commission on the Defence Forces

In order to meet the medium and longer term defence requirements of the State an independent Commission will be established. This Commission will undertake a comprehensive review which will include the following matters:

- Arrangements for the effective defence of the country at land and sea.

- Structures for governance, joint command and control structures.
- The brigade structure.
- Pay and allowances and composition of the Defence Forces.
- Recruitment, retention and career progression.
- The contribution of the Reserve Defence Forces, including its legislation and Defence Forces regulations governing it and whether specialists from the RDF should be able to serve overseas.

The Commission will contain a wide variety of expertise such as management, human resources, academia, law, public service, as well as members with external military expertise from countries similar in size to Ireland and also from states that like Ireland are non-aligned militarily.

We will consult widely on the terms of reference for the Commission which will be established by end of 2020 with a mandate to report within twelve months.

The outcome of this review will remain grounded in a policy of active military neutrality and participative multilateralism through the United Nations and European Union.

Upon completion of the Commission's work, a permanent pay review body will be established, reflecting the unique nature of military service in the context of the public service. All recommendations by the Commission or the successor body and their implementation must be consistent with national public sector wage policy.

## Overseas operations and international co-operation

The Government will ensure that all overseas operations will be carried out in line with our position of military neutrality and will be subject to a triple lock of UN, Government and Dáil Éireann approval.

Ireland's participation in PESCO projects will be maintained on an 'opt-in' basis, with contributions being entirely voluntary. Any projects undertaken within PESCO will be approved by Cabinet and Dáil Éireann.

The Government will not partake in projects which are not compatible with our policy of active military neutrality and non-membership of military alliances.

Within the context of the European Peace Facility Ireland will not be part of decision making or funding for lethal force weapons for non-peacekeeping purposes.

### Additional actions

We will:

- Support the establishment of centres for retired members of the Defence Forces.
- Develop a new Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training in the Curragh.
- Ensure that all enlisted members of the Defence Forces have the same access to healthcare as officers do currently.
- Amend the Organisation of Working Time Act bringing the Defence Forces within the scope of its provisions.



## Mission: Reforming and Reimagining our Public Life

### Local Government

The new Government is committed to making local government stronger, more accountable and more responsive to the communities it serves. We want to ensure that people have a role in shaping the economic and social development of their own area with participation in local government actively encouraged and facilitated.

Now is an important opportunity to further strengthen the relationship between citizens, councillors and councils.

In particular, we want to give towns a strong voice at the heart of local authority decision making. It is now more important than ever that development of our towns is done sustainably, economically and in line with climate action goals.

We will:

- Consider the expected Institute of Public Administration review of municipal districts with a view to strengthening local democracy and to identify local needs and initiatives needed to strengthen and grow our communities, villages and towns in a sustainable manner. This review will examine the addition of directly elected, democratic bodies in such areas and below the municipal district level.
  - Examine ways to further streamline the commercial rates system post COVID-19.
  - Build the capacity of local authorities to lead locally and engage citizens on climate change and biodiversity.
  - Pass legislation to allow the first directly elected mayor in Limerick to be elected in 2021. We will support the first directly elected mayor with a financial package to deliver upon their mandate.
  - Allow for plebiscites to be held in 2024 in any local authority that wishes to have a directly elected mayor. Demand will be demonstrated at the request of the local authority or by way of a petition from 20% of registered voters.
  - Where directly elected mayors are being established, we will transfer powers from the city and county managers to mayors directly elected by the people for a five-year term.
  - Establish in 2021 a Citizens' Assembly in 2021 to consider the type of directly elected mayor and local government structures best suited for Dublin.
  - Examine devolving more powers to the local authorities through the legislative process to strengthen and enhance local democracy.
  - Provide tailored and appropriate training to local authority members.
  - Implement the Moorhead Report on the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected members within twelve months.
  - Enable councillors to access research and training to support them in their duties. Require each council to publish an annual statement of accounts to all homeowners and ratepayers giving a breakdown of how revenue was collected and how it was spent.

- Enable Local Authorities to lead and collaborate on a ‘Town Centres First’ type approach to regenerate our towns and villages.
- Review participatory structures to enhance statutory Part VIII processes.
- Carry out a comprehensive review of PPNs and LECs to ensure they are fit for purpose for climate action and community development.
- Incentivise local authorities to bring forward pilot participatory budgeting projects.
- Mandate the establishment of climate action SPCs in each local authority.
- Consider the introduction of an alternate/substitute candidate list to cover parental and caring leave, long-term illness leave, resignation, career breaks and death in office.
- Review and modernise of key performance indicators for local government learning from metrics used in other jurisdictions.
- We will seek to encourage the provision of public cultural and creative spaces as part of local development plans.
- We will develop a scheme between local authorities and Irish Water to provide drinking water fountains nationwide.
- Local authorities will have regard to the National Planning Framework and alignment to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) when drafting development plans.
- We will enhance local government environmental enforcement capacity.

### **Greater diversity and gender equality in Local Government**

There is a need for greater diversity and gender equality in local government, in particular where there are far too few women involved in elected politics. We are determined to change this.

We will introduce practical measures that will encourage more women to stand in local elections in 2024. This will likely increase the number of women elected to the Oireachtas in the future.

We will:

- Empower local authorities to encourage improved gender and ethnic mix in local elections.
- Require local authorities to be more flexible with meeting times and to use remote working technologies and flexible work practices to support councillors with parental or caring responsibilities, including childcare and reduced travel times and absences from work.
- Examine further mechanisms informed by best practice internationally to encourage political parties to select more women for the 2024 local elections.
- Consider the recommendations of the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI) report on ‘Women beyond the Dáil, More Women in Local Government’ with a view to reporting in 2021.

## Political and public service reform

This Government will ensure that the State becomes closer and more responsive to citizens and their needs. We will ensure public services are efficient, understandable and as transparent as possible. We will protect and enhance democracy through a series of political and public service reforms and use our Global Ireland programme to promote democratic values worldwide.

### Electoral reform

We will:

- Establish an Electoral Commission to provide independent oversight of elections and referendums, to inform the public about elections and referendums, to update and maintain the electoral register and to conduct elections. We will ensure that this Commission is in place by the end of 2021.
- Empower the Electoral Commission to regulate online political advertising in the public interest and introduce a consistent regime relating to political advertising across all media.
- Mandate the new Electoral Commission to examine the use of postal voting, with a view to expanding its provision.
- Task the new Electoral Commission will examine the issue of the use of posters at elections and referendums within 12 months of its establishment and consult on placing limitations on the number of posters that can be used or fixing certain locations for their use. The Government will legislate for its recommendations in advance of the 2024 Local Elections.
- Complete the modernisation process for voter registration, involving:
  - The simplification of forms and the registration process, including an online option.
  - A rolling (continuously updated) Electoral Register.
  - A single, national Electoral Register Database.
  - A move to a system of identity verification, using one's PPSN.
- Reform and consolidate the Ethics in Public Office legislation.
- Review our electoral laws and the conduct of politics in Ireland currently, to ensure that donations and resources from non-citizens outside of the State are not being utilised to influence our elections and political process. We will legislate to prevent this if necessary.
- Examine replacing by-elections with an alternate list system.
- Establish a fund to support political and electoral research by academics and researchers.
- Note the Institute of Public Administration review on strengthening local democracy and the review of the governance of Údaras na Gaeltachta.

### Oireachtas Reform

We will work with other parties in the Oireachtas to:

- Expand the role of the Parliamentary Budget Office to independently audit the cost of individual tax and spending measures contained in political parties' budget submissions and general election manifestos, their overall dynamic impact and to assess their broader economic impact.
- Continue to ensure that Oireachtas Committee chairs are allocated according to the D'Hondt system.
- Introduce a new system to register Oireachtas attendance and to protect the integrity of the expenses system.

- Ensure funding to Independents under the Leaders' Allowance is fully vouched and audited as it is for political parties.
- Fully respond to the ruling in the Kerins' Supreme Court case and make appropriate changes.
- Review the Dáil Business Committee with a view to introducing the D'Hondt system.
- Encourage the use of Irish as a working language of the Oireachtas.
- Expand Oireachtas Committees' research resources.
- Support the work of the Oireachtas Women's Parliamentary Caucus.
- Develop supports and alternatives for members of the Oireachtas to take parental leave.

### Constitutional Reform

We will hold referendums on housing and the extension of the franchise at presidential elections to Irish citizens living outside the State.

Informed by the work of the Citizens' Assembly, we will hold a referendum on Article 41.2 of the Constitution.

We will refer the issue of the environment, including water, and its place in the Constitution to a relevant Joint Oireachtas Committee for consideration.

### Participation

We will:

- Act on the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, seeking to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in the workplace, politics and public life.
- Ensure a comprehensive national consultation with young people as to how better their voice can be heard and the issues that they want their Government to focus on for their future. We will develop a new National Strategy on Children and Young people's Participation in Decision-making 2021-2025.
- Increase funding to political parties to support youth, gender and diversity programmes.
- Examine the Scottish experience of reducing the voting age to 17 in order to draw conclusions.
- Examine the time limitation on people who are temporarily living outside of the State to remain on the voting register.
- Establish a Youth Assembly, with various modules including ones for rural and urban young people. This Youth Assembly will consider issues of importance to young people and their future such as climate action, digitalisation, social media and communications, mental health and wellbeing.

### Public Sector Reform

We will:

- Introduce a plain language requirement on all public service communication so people can understand information the first time they read or hear it. Using plain language saves time and money and reduces mistakes and complaints. We will consult with NALA.
- Extend the lobbying register so that the lobbying of senior officials in bodies like the Central Bank of Ireland, Comreg, the NTA and the HSE which have significant policymaking or development functions will need to be reported on the same basis as central and local government.

- Use the opportunity of the European Union consideration of reforms to European wide whistleblowing provisions to review, update and reform our whistleblowing legislation to ensure that it remains as effective as possible.
- Introduce targets to increase the proportion of public and civil servants from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- Expand the remit of the Office of the Ombudsman to consider clinical decisions in health and social care complaints.
- Continue and re-invigorate participation by the public sector in Open Government Partnership.
- Further develop the integration of digital services in government and the creation of a single digital unit to drive more public services online.
- Seek to cut bureaucracy for SMEs and support the SME Test across government to assess the potential for less stringent requirements and simplification of regulatory adherence.
- Strengthen evaluation of government departments' performance by making programme reviews more systematic, covering multi-year cycles and focusing on SMART performance indicators.
- Create a strategic policy unit for the complex data analysis, programme evaluation and policy development within each department charged with delivery in such core areas.
- Introduce a more open budgetary process, less dominated by 'existing level of service' with small incremental additions each year, but focused on major public goals and proven policy performance.
- Work with the public service to promote structures for talent development and further encourage the recruitment of talent from outside.
- Mandate public sector employers, colleges and other public bodies to move to 20% home and remote working in 2021 and provide incentives for private sector employers to do likewise.
- Establish a policy innovation office within the public service, primarily staffed by expertise seconded from academia, the NGO and private sector, as well as other national governments and institutions, to take a challenge based approach to the major issues facing the country. We can learn in particular from COVID-19 cross government response.
- Prioritise cross-public service collaboration to enhance the whole of government strategic ownership and delivery of public policy priorities.
- Provide for a paid internship programme within government departments, targeted at migrant communities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## Social Dialogue

The Government recognises the importance of regular and open engagement with all sectors of society. This is particularly important as we steer our way out of the pandemic, rebuild our economy and support communities that have been severely impacted by COVID-19.

We will:

- Establish a unit in the Department of Taoiseach to coordinate social dialogue. It will create new models of sectoral engagement.
- Utilise public consultations, citizens' assemblies and strengthen current mechanisms such as the National Economic Dialogue and the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF).
- Ensure in all our engagements that the role of the Oireachtas and Government in policy formation is fully respected.

## Media

A vibrant, diverse and independent media is essential to our democracy and cultural development. The sector is undergoing fundamental change and as a result there are significant challenges to be faced in order to ensure that we have that vibrant, diverse and independent media at local, regional and national level.

Those challenges have been brought sharply into focus by the COVID-19 crisis. In facing that challenge, we will:

- Bring together all policy functions relating to broadcast media, print media and online media into a single media division within a government department.
- Expand the remit of the Public Service Broadcasting Commission to become a Future of Media Commission and to consider the future of print, broadcast and online media in a platform agnostic fashion. It will report within 9 months on the necessary measures that need to be taken to ensure there is a vibrant, independent public service media for the next generation. The current funding model for public service broadcasting is inefficient and the Commission will publish recommendations.
- Enact the Broadcasting Bill by the end of the year to ensure that we can support our local community radio stations and independent national, regional and local broadcasters in the important work that they do.
- Review and reform defamation laws to ensure a balanced approach to the right to freedom of expression, the right to protection of good name and reputation, and the right of access to justice.
- Recognise the important role of Irish public service broadcasting in Irish life and the ongoing restructuring efforts at RTÉ in the context of a changing media environment.
- Support Irish language broadcasting across TG4, Raidió na Gaeltachta and other platforms.

## Advertising

We will move away from the current self-regulating regime for advertising and require the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) to take a more active enforcement role. We will also direct the CCPC to focus on ensuring that there is full disclosure in relation to partnerships, sponsorships and other advertising relationships between media influencers and brands, and that the obligations on social media influencers and the consequences for non-compliance are clearly set out and enforced.

## Regulation

We recognise the domestic and international importance of data protection in Ireland. We will support the Data Protection Commission to ensure that Ireland delivers on its responsibilities under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).



