



THE CHOICE FOR CHANGE

General Election
Manifesto 2024



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**Time to Change
the Government!**



Introduction

The Choice for Change

In this General Election, you have a clear choice. A choice between the disappointments and failures of the past or a future of hope and change with a government that cares about you and has the detailed plans to deliver for you, your family, your community and for Ireland.

This election is an opportunity to elect a government that acts in the interest of ordinary people. That builds homes. That transforms health services. That delivers affordable childcare. That gives young people the opportunity to build their future here in Ireland.

For workers, we would strengthen workers' rights; **abolish the USC for those on the average wage**; deliver the right to retire on a state pension at the age of 65; increase the minimum wage; and commence the largest house building programme in the history of the state. We would put an end to the waste of taxpayers' money.

For families, we would enable parents to care for their babies in the first year of life if that is their preference; **deliver €10 a day childcare; end the means test for the Carer's Allowance and bring homeownership back within reach of working people**.

For young people, we would **make housing affordable to rent and to buy**; revolutionise youth mental health for those aged under 25 and abolish student fees.

For communities, we would **ensure access to GP services and dental services**; increase the capacity of health services to tackle waiting lists and the A&E crisis; invest €1bn of the Apple Tax money into working class communities that bore the brunt of austerity; commence the largest Garda recruitment drive in the history of the state and support rural communities, including securing the future of the family farm.

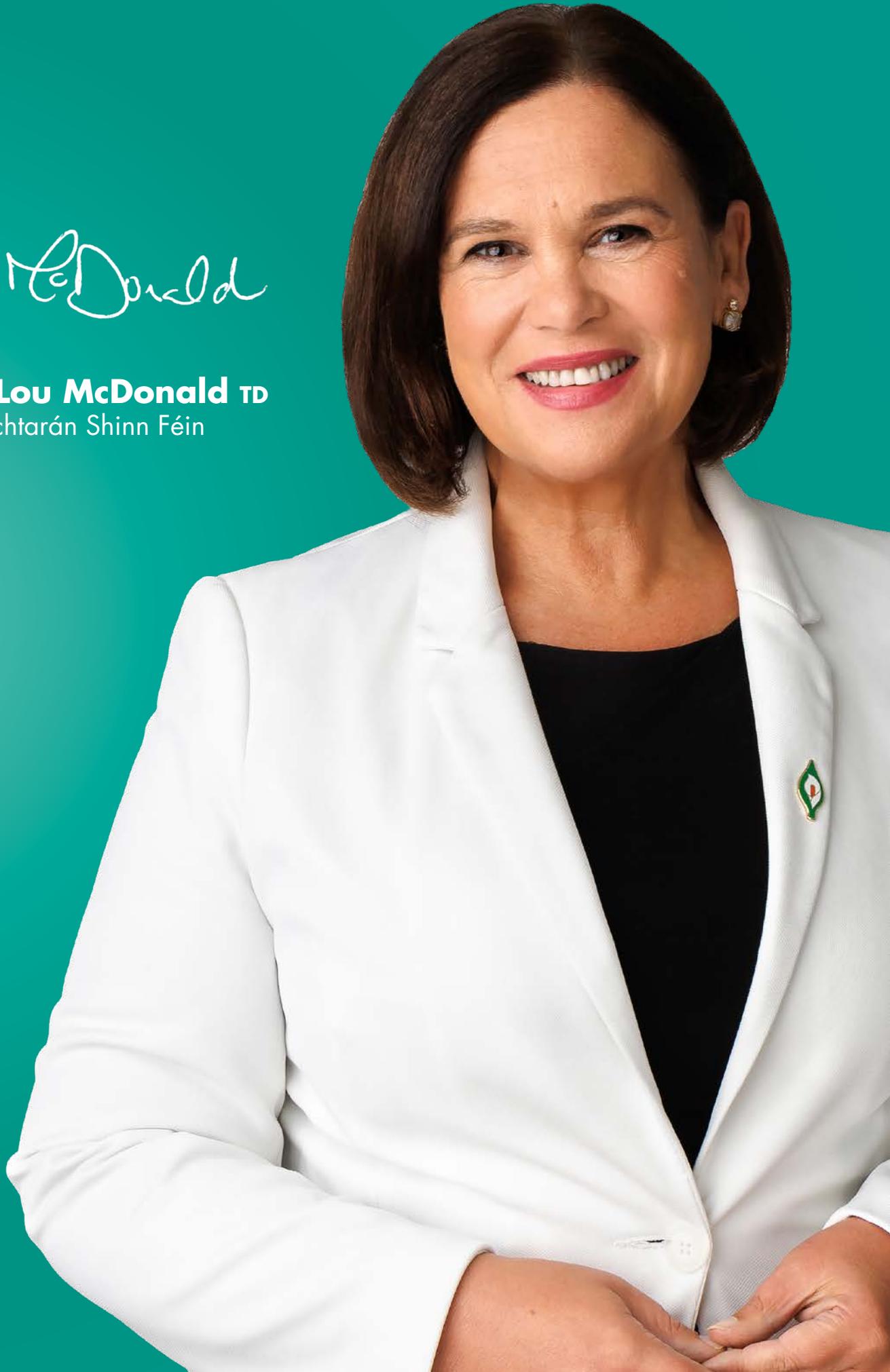
For Ireland, we would **deliver a plan to achieve a United Ireland**; be the strongest government that there has been to support the Irish language and Gaeltacht communities; protect our neutrality; ensure we play a positive role in peace and conflict resolution across the globe, including as a leading voice to end the genocide against the Palestinian People. We would manage our borders better and more fairly through the creation of an Immigration Management Agency, and we would stand up for Irish interests in the European Union.

For our planet, we would ensure that **Ireland meets our climate targets in a way that is fair** including targeting the carbon output of the wealthy; establishing a nature restoration fund; establishing a new €2.5bn Renewable Energy Investment Fund and overhauling the national retrofit programme so that every ordinary household can afford to access retrofitting.

Every election is a choice. But, in this election you will have a real opportunity, for the first time in the history of the state, after more than 100 years, to vote for real change. For new people with new ideas. For clear plans. For a team that is ready to deliver from day one.

Mary Lou McDonald

Mary Lou McDonald TD
Uachtarán Shinn Féin



Réamhrá

An rogha chun athrú a bhaint amach

Tá rogha shoiléir agat san olltoighchán seo - rogha idir díomá agus cliseadh na laethanta atá thart, agus todhchaí gheal dóchais faoi cheannas rialtais a bhfuil suim aige ionat agus a bhfuil na pleananna mionsonraithe leagtha amach aige chun an fód a sheasamh duit féin, do do theaghlaich, do do phobal agus d'Éirinn.

Is deis é an toghchán seo rialtas a thoghadh a ghníomhóidh ar son leas na ngnáthdhaoine, a thógfaidh tithe, a athróidh seirbhísí sláinte, a chuirfidh cúram páistí ar phraghas réasúnta ar fáil, agus a thabharfaidh deis do dhaoine óga na tíre seo saol maith a bheith acu in Éirinn.

D'oibrithe, neartóidh muid cearta oibrithe; **cuirfidh muid deireadh leis an MSU dóibh siúd atá ar an meánphá**; soláthróidh muid an ceart chun dul ar scor ar phinsean stáit ag aois 65; méadóidh muid an t-íospáh; agus cuirfidh muid túis leis an gclár tógála tithe is mó i stair an stáit. Cuirfidh muid deireadh le cur amú airgead na gcáiníocóirí.

Do theaghlaigh, tabharfaidh muid deis do thuismitheoirí aire a thabhairt dá bpáistí sa chéad bhliain den saol más é sin a rogha; **cuirfidh muid cúram páistí €10 in aghaidh an lae ar fáil; cuirfidh muid deireadh leis an tástáil acmhainne do Liúntas do Chúramóirí agus cinnteoidh muid go mbeidh daoine atá ag obair in ann a bheith ina n-úinéirí tí.**

Do dhaoine óga, cuirfidh muid **tithíocht inacmhainne ar fáil le glacadh ar cíos agus le ceannach**; athróidh muid meabhairshláinte na n-óg as éadan dóibh siúd atá faoi 25 bliain d'aois agus cuirfidh muid deireadh le táillí mac léinn.

Do phobail, cinnteoidh muid **fáil ar sheirbhísí dochtúirí teaghlaigh agus ar sheirbhísí fiaclóireachta**; méadóidh muid cumas na seirbhísí sláinte chun dul i ngleic le liostaí feithimh agus le géarchéim T&É; infheisteoidh muid €1 bhilliún d'airgead Cánach Apple i bpobail aicme oibre atá thíos le ganntanas airgid; cuirfidh muid túis leis an bhfeachtas earcaíochta is mó de chuid an Gharda Síochána i stair an stáit agus tacóidh muid le pobail tuaithe, lena n-áirítear todhchaí na feirme teaghlaigh a chinntíú.

D'Éirinn, beidh muid ag brú **pleananna chun cinn d'Éire Aontaithe a bhaint amach**; beidh muid ar an rialtas is láidre le tacú le pobal na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta riabhach; cosnóidh muid ár neodracht; cinnteoidh muid go mbeidh ról dearfach againn i síocháin agus réiteach coimhlinte ar fud an domhain, lena n-áirítear mar ghuth ceannasach chun deireadh a chur leis an gcinedhíothú i gcoinne mhuintir na Palaistíne. Déanfaidh muid ár dteorainn a bhainistiú ar bhealach níos fearr agus níos cothroime trí Ghníomhaireacht Bainistíochta Inimirce a chruthú agus seasfaidh muid le leasanna na hÉireann san Aontas Eorpach.

Don domhan, cinnteoidh muid go gcomhlíonfaidh Éire spriocanna aeráide ar bhealach atá cothrom, lena n-áirítear díriú ar aschur carbón lucht an rachmais; ciste athchóirithe dúlra a bhunú; ciste nua infheistíochta fuinnimh in-athnuaithe dar luach €2.5 billiún a bhunú agus an clár náisiúnta iarfheistithe a athchóiriú ionas go mbeidh sé d'acmhainn ag gach gnáth-theaghlaich teacht a bheith acu ar iarfheistiú.

Rogha a bhíonn i ngach toghchán. Sa toghchán seo, áfach, beidh deis cheart agat, den chéad uair i stair an stáit tar éis breis is céad bliain, vóta a chaitheamh ar son fiorathruithe. Do dhaoine nua a bhfuil smaointe nua acu, do phleananna soiléire, agus d'fhoireann atá réidh chun an fód a sheasamh ón gcéad lá.

HOUSING TITHÍOCHT

Sinn Féin's alternative housing plan, *A Home Of Your Own*, sets out how we would fix the housing crisis. The plan is comprehensive, detailed and fully costed.

In government we would deliver the biggest social and affordable building programme in the history of the state. We would deliver homes that ordinary workers and families can actually afford, to buy and rent.

Our plan sets out how, in government, we can deliver affordable homes, through our local authorities and approved housing bodies, at prices to purchase from €250,000 and to rent at an average of €1,000 per month and if possible, even lower.

We would double the number of new social homes delivered compared to the last government, slashing council waiting lists and ending long-term homelessness.

We would increase the delivery of genuinely affordable homes tenfold, bringing home ownership back into reach for ordinary people.

Our plan sets out how we can activate the private residential development sector to build more homes for people to buy, including first-time buyers, at more moderated prices.

Affordable housing is the solution to much more than the housing crisis. It is also key to solving the recruitment crisis in vital public services such as hospitals, schools, public transport, the Gardaí, and across the wider economy.

After 14 years of Fine Gael in government, workers and families cannot afford to rent, and they cannot afford to buy. The inadequate number of homes that are being built are being snapped up by investors or sold at prices first-time buyers simply cannot afford. Home ownership has collapsed.

The difference between Sinn Féin and the government parties is that we would deliver homes that people can afford. We would take on the vulture funds, the big landlords and the vested interests that are making the housing crisis worse.

NEW HOMES IN SNN FÉIN'S HOUSING PLAN

The report of the Housing Commission, published in May 2024, identified how many new homes need to be delivered between now and 2037.

To both keep pace with projected future need and address the existing pent-up shortage of homes, that resulted from years of disastrous Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael housing policy, approximately 300,000 homes must be delivered over the next five years.

Sinn Féin has long contended that the government's housing targets were too low. The Housing Commission Report vindicates our position.

If elected to government, Sinn Féin would deliver the number of homes that are needed.

It is also important that these homes are actually affordable for ordinary people. This means a well-balanced housing market, with the right proportion of social housing, affordable purchase and affordable rental, alongside a well-regulated private market.

As set out in Sinn Féin's housing plan, we would deliver 300,000 new homes between 2025 and 2029.

This would include 125,000 public homes (social, affordable purchase and affordable rental) 115,000 private market homes for working people to buy. And a further 60,000 homes for private rent and self-build.

A Sinn Féin government would continue delivery into 2030, bringing the total to 370,000 homes over six years including a further 31,500 public homes in 2030.

SINN FÉIN'S PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAMME 2025-2029

As set out in our Housing Plan *A Home of Your Own*, our public housing programme would deliver 125,000 new public homes by 2029.

Of these, almost 75,000 would be social housing, 25,000 would be homes for affordable rent, and 25,000 would be homes for affordable purchase.

That's 75,000 social homes for people who have been waiting on housing lists, getting by in insecure, private rental accommodation with the support of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) or the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), living in over-crowded houses with multiple generations under one roof or in emergency accommodation.

That's 25,000 affordable rental homes for people who might be trying to save for a deposit and for people forced to pay sky-high rents in insecure private rental accommodation because they fall short of qualifying for social housing.

That's 25,000 affordable homes for people to purchase who are currently locked out of owning their own home because house prices are simply too high.

Sinn Féin Housing Plan	Number of new homes by 2029	By 2030
Social rental	75,000	93,500
Affordable rental	25,000	31,500
Affordable purchase	25,000	31,500
Private purchase	115,000	140,500
Private rental and self build	60,000	73,000
Total	300,000	370,000

A Sinn Féin government would continue this delivery into 2030 with a further 31,500 public homes in 2030 including 18,500 social homes, 6,500 affordable homes for purchase and 6,500 affordable homes to rent.

DELIVERING AND FUNDING OUR HOUSING PLAN

Sinn Féin's comprehensive and fully costed policy document, published in September 2024, *A Home Of Your Own*, sets out in detail how we would deliver our housing plan.

In summary, to accelerate the delivery of our historic public housing programme we would reform and resource the planning system.

We would overhaul the public spending code to remove unnecessary stages that are causing approval delays, while continuing to safeguard value for money.

We would streamline procurement by replacing single project tendering with the introduction of a range of multi-annual framework agreements. This would cut down on the number of tender processes that are required – speeding up delivery of our programme and giving greater certainty to builders and developers which would entice more to focus their activity on the residential sector.

We would make greater use of new building technologies and of vacant and derelict properties – all of which would be faster and more sustainable for the climate.

Delivering 125,000 public homes over five years would cost an average of €7.4bn per year. This would be funded through a combination of exchequer funding to local authorities and AHBs, and borrowing from the Housing Finance Agency and other lenders.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Delivering more than 300,000 homes over the next five years including 125,000 social and affordable homes
- ➔ Continuing delivery into 2030 with a further 31,500 public homes
- ➔ Holding a referendum to enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution
- ➔ Reforming and resourcing the planning system, overhauling the public spending code and procurement practice to speed up delivery
- ➔ Lowering carbon emissions by maximising use of new building technologies and through greater use of vacant and derelict homes
- ➔ Ending long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough by 2030
- ➔ Transforming the Land Development Agency into an Active Land Management Agency to ensure an adequate pipeline of land to deliver our ambitious public housing programme
- ➔ Ending wasteful and inflationary schemes such as Croí Conaithe Cities, the First Home Scheme and the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund
- ➔ Supporting small- and medium-sized builders and developers to deliver more good quality homes for people to buy through the provision of low cost finance, efficient site servicing and more timely planning
- ➔ Phasing out Help to Buy over five years as we ramp-up the delivery of affordable homes
- ➔ Publishing revised planning guidelines for rural, Gaeltacht and Island communities

- ➔ Delivering 100% redress to all those homeowners impacted by building defects and defective building materials through an end-to-end scheme
- ➔ Investing in and reforming the planning and building control systems, providing an additional €50m as set out in *A Home Of Your Own*

You can read the full details of Sinn Féin's alternative housing plan *A Home Of Your Own* including all of our commitments on housing at housing.sinnfein.ie

WATER

The delivery of drinking water and wastewater services is essential to the delivery of our ambitious public and private housing programme. Delivering an average of 60,000 new homes a year will require increased investment in Uisce Éireann's capital programme to deliver these services.

Sinn Féin believes that drinking water and wastewater services should be provided on the basis of need and not as a commercial product. Water services must be and remain a public service.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Holding a referendum to enshrine the public ownership of the water and wastewater system and water utility in the Constitution
- ➔ Undertaking a comprehensive review of Uisce Éireann's capital programme to ensure it can meet the needs of our ambitious housing plan
- ➔ Increasing investment in the delivery of water and wastewater services by at least an additional €1.5bn over five years
- ➔ Ensuring greater transparency and accountability from Uisce Éireann through formal reporting mechanisms to Local Authorities and the Oireachtas
- ➔ Restructuring the utility as a non-commercial semi-state company
- ➔ Ensuring a continued footprint of water services in Local Authority offices and depots







HEALTH

SLÁINTE

Sinn Féin has the plan, vision and determination to deal with the big challenges in healthcare. We published *A Prescription for Change: Sinn Féin's plan to deliver healthcare when you need it* in October 2024. This is one of the most ambitious plans ever produced by a political party, containing 350+ specific policy commitments to demonstrate that the problems are not intractable, can be solved and will be solved with a change of government. Given the opportunity, a Sinn Féin-led government would transform healthcare.

Our plan sets out in detail how we would deliver better access to healthcare when you need it, improve access to a GP when you need one, reduce waiting lists, tackle wasteful spending and end the crisis in our emergency departments.

We have worked closely with healthcare workers, patients, parents, advocates, researchers, officials, executives, and other key stakeholders and policymakers to develop a plan that is realistic, practical, and deliverable, but which is also ambitious. We consider ambition as a minimum standard when it comes to the health of the people of Ireland.

The government has normalised failure in healthcare. They accept that patients on trolleys, children waiting for treatment in pain, and long health waiting lists are now the standard. Their failures leave us with a health service in perpetual crisis.

We would work across the 32 counties to develop a first-class, all-Ireland National Health System that learns from the best and worst in both jurisdictions and across Europe. Our vision for an Irish NHS would deliver a publicly funded healthcare system for Ireland, which recognises physical and mental health as a human right.

A Sinn Féin Taoiseach would appoint a Minister for Health and Social Care to be the driver of the reforms set out in this manifesto and in our standalone health plan *A Prescription for Change*.

Our vision focuses on two main areas: Access to Services and Investing Wisely.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

Sinn Féin's five key priorities in Health and Social Care are:

1. Take Big Bold Steps towards Universal Healthcare
2. Upgrade and Expand Local Health Services
3. Drive Major Reform of Hospital Care
4. Revolutionise Youth Mental Health
5. Deliver a Rights-Based Approach to Disability Services

TAKING BIG BOLD STEPS TOWARDS UNIVERSAL HEALTHCARE

Sinn Féin would take big bold steps to deliver universal healthcare by providing free prescription medicines for all households, upgrading every GP visit card to a full medical card, providing full medical card cover to all workers up to the median income, and abolishing prescription and car-parking charges. In the first 100 days, Sinn Féin would legislate for free prescription medicines and for medical card entitlements for all up to the median income and deliver this over five years. We would deliver a *Healthcare for All* Act to commit the state to full public health cover by 2035. This bundle would cost €1bn in additional current expenditure.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Delivering free prescription medicines for all households, abolishing prescription charges for medical card holders and deliver median-income medical cards
- ➔ Enacting Healthcare for All legislation to set the path to full public health cover by 2035

UPGRADING AND EXPANDING LOCAL HEALTH SERVICES

A Sinn Féin government would deliver on the commitment of *Sláintecare* to deliver the right care in the right place at the right time. This would be achieved by upgrading and expanding local health services with a landmark public GP contract, hiring public dentists, delivering a Pharmacy First model for minor ailments and ramping up home and community-based care. Our comprehensive plan covers essential measures to reform home care, expand GP and primary care, deliver community neuro-rehabilitation teams and reduce pressure on hospitals. This bundle would cost €852m in additional current expenditure.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Developing a landmark public GP contract, employing 250 public GPs, improving out-of-hours and urgent care and increasing GP training capacity by 60%
- ➔ Hiring public dentists and dental care teams to target school screening for children and medical card holders and increasing dental training places by 32%
- ➔ Delivering a Pharmacy First model for common conditions and the provision of health information and advice, with an expanded and integrated role for pharmacists in primary care
- ➔ Pursuing a ‘home first’ approach to care, develop a modern home care scheme and prioritise public home care delivery of five million additional home care hours

DRIVING MAJOR REFORM OF HOSPITAL CARE

A Sinn Féin government would set a zero-tolerance approach to hospital trolleys and overcrowding as a target for all hospitals. To achieve this, we would deliver 5,000 new hospital beds by 2031. That's 4,000 additional acute beds for the system and 1,000 existing unsafe beds replaced e.g. beds in wards replaced by beds in single rooms. We would also invest in diagnostic capacity, theatre space and aligned discharge capacity in the community and accelerate the delivery of public-only elective hospitals. This would be underpinned with community care reform, including 2,000 community step-down, nursing care and social inclusion beds and legislation for safe staffing levels. This bundle would cost €1.584bn in additional current expenditure.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Delivering 5,000 hospital beds by 2031, including replacing 1,000 unsafe beds
- Delivering 2,000 community beds, including 1,200 short and long-stay residential care, nursing and rehabilitation beds, and deliver full regional community neuro-rehabilitation networks

REVOLUTIONISING MENTAL HEALTH

A Sinn Féin government would not tolerate an understaffed and under-resourced mental health service. At the heart of Sinn Féin's plan is a new Child and Youth Mental Health Service to replace CAMHS, which would provide integrated early intervention services for children and young people to the age of 25, expand access to Jigsaw and primary care mental health services, deliver universal counselling, fund the full complement of inpatient and intellectual disability CAMHS teams and deliver twenty more early intervention in psychosis teams. The bundle would cost €250m in additional current expenditure.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Implementing Sinn Féin's €250m Mental Health Action Plan to deliver comprehensive early intervention, primary, community and acute mental health services, particularly for young people.

DELIVERING A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DISABILITY SERVICES

A Sinn Féin government would implement an unprecedented 10-year investment programme to deliver a rights-based approach to disability services. This would provide for unmet and future need and fund accessible therapies, respite services, residential care and de-congregation, personal assistance services, home support hours, day services and access to specialist and mainstream community services. For the first five years, this bundle would cost €829m in additional current expenditure and €659m additional capital.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Developing a workforce plan to fully staff Children's Disability Network Teams and conduct an evidence-based and independent review of the service delivery model and end pay disparities for core service providers
- ➔ Doubling the number of Personal Assistance hours over a term of government, providing an additional 1.5 million disability home care hours, providing over 3,000 additional residential places, delivering on de-congregation commitments, significantly expanding day services and doubling investment in respite services over the term of government
- ➔ Developing a common, compliant and efficient process for assessment of need under the Disability Act
- ➔ Reviewing the Disability Act 2005 and EPSEN Act 2004, ensuring the state is compliant with existing disability and equality legislation, and working systematically towards full compliance with the UNCRPD

NATIONAL STRATEGIES

Our ambitious plan for health and social care also includes, but is not limited to, women's health, children's services, national strategies, all-island planning, public health, social care, disabilities, older people, chronic disease management, gender and sexual health, prevention and health promotion. This bundle would cost €502m in additional current expenditure. We have provided a standalone funding programme for addiction and recovery, which would cost an additional €150m in current expenditure.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Implementing our five-year Community Addiction and Recovery Strategy, returning funding to historic high levels for local and regional drug and alcohol taskforces and initiating an unprecedented investment in community addiction and recovery inpatient capacity

- ➔ Developing a life-course structured care programme in women's health to improve screening, primary, community and acute services that are tailored to every stage of a woman's life, including free access to HRT and contraception
- ➔ Implementing an extensive set of policies to support Health Promotion and Prevention and embed a prevention approach across strategies for cancer, cardiovascular disease and more
- ➔ Providing multi-annual funding certainty for the cancer strategy, cardiovascular health, diabetes, rare diseases and other strategic improvement programmes
- ➔ Investment in a model 3 hospital with a second emergency department for the Midwest.
- ➔ Developing a No Child Left Behind health waiting list strategy to improve paediatric orthopaedic and urology services, expanding dental screening in schools, revolutionising children and youth mental health services and improve children's disability services

WORKFORCE PLANNING

Workforce planning is one of the key enablers of delivering our plan. The health element of our workforce plan, excluding Higher Education, would cost €229m in additional current expenditure. This would increase clinical and specialist training places and support an expansion of clinical specialist and advanced practice staffing. We would double health undergraduate places, and we have accounted for this in our Further Education budget. We estimate that our plan would need 40,000 full-time health and social care workers.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Giving a job guarantee to Irish health graduates and lead a campaign to engage healthcare workers who left the health services or who left Ireland and implement the changes they need to see
- ➔ Planning to recruit 40,000 healthcare workers over five years, and maximising domestic training, attracting Irish workers home, reactivation and international recruitment to achieve this as part of a funded multiannual workforce plan
- ➔ Doubling CAO entry places for medicine, nursing and health and social care courses and significantly expanding access to medicine for domestic students and expanding the Free Fees Initiative to graduate-entry medicine

INVESTING WISELY

The Health Service needs real reform. We are proposing a total package of new measures valued at €5.4bn. This would be funded through €3.6bn in additional current expenditure for the Department of Health, €829m in additional current expenditure for the Department of Disability and €1bn in savings and efficiencies by 2030. This is exclusive of additional funding for existing levels of service, which must be evidence-based and account for year-to-year cost pressures such as inflation, demographics and pay increases.

This built-in savings target of at least €1bn requires a reprofiling of baseline expenditure totalling 4% of the current health budget. We would set rising targets averaging €200m in savings each year for five years. In the context of significant additional investment in new technology and more sustainable care systems, including the increase of public healthcare staff and capacity which would enable a reduction of reliance on more expensive agency workers and private sector provision, we believe these are at the lower end of what can be achieved.

A Sinn Féin government would seek to achieve the maximum savings possible but for the purposes of our funding plan, we are setting a minimum target of €1bn to part-fund our additional measures. This is a necessary adjustment to ensure the sustainability of the health budget into the future. No funding plan would be credible without a sustainable savings target.

Sinn Féin would deliver a €15bn health capital investment programme over the next term of government. We would use €2bn from the Apple Tax Money as well as funding that has been committed under the National Development Plan to immediately provide funding certainty for 5,000 acute hospital beds. This ambitious and future-focused capital programme includes estimates for four new elective hospitals, the new maternity hospital, surgical and diagnostic hubs, new primary care centres and community facilities, 5,000 hospital beds, theatre capacity, nursing homes, equipment, machinery, ambulance fleet and other significant and minor infrastructure works. It also includes estimates to maintain existing stock, advance climate action and meet regulatory standards. We would specifically ringfence €2bn for a Digital Transformation Fund.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Targeting €1bn in savings and efficiencies across the health service, including major reductions in agency spending, reliance on overtime and management consultants
- ➔ Delivering four new elective-only public hospitals and regional surgical centres to tackle waiting lists and implement our Comhliosta integrated waiting list reform
- ➔ Investing €2bn in digital transformation to bring the health service into the 21st century

You can read the full details of Sinn Féin's alternative health plan *A Prescription for Change* including all of our commitments on health at health.sinnfein.ie



COST OF LIVING

COSTAS

MAIREACHTÁLA

ABOLISHING THE USC

The so-called Universal Social Charge or USC is a tax on income. It is a legacy of Fianna Fáil crashing the economy.

You pay the USC if your gross income is more than €13,000 per year. Once your income is over this limit, you pay the relevant rate of USC on all your income (with limited exemptions).

Sinn Féin's flagship tax proposal is to abolish the USC on the first €45,000 of everybody's income.

This proposal would benefit all workers, and would result in take-home pay of more than €1,100 extra a year for average workers.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Removing USC for all workers on the first €45,000 of their income at a cost of €1.84 billion

€10 PER DAY CHILDCARE

Sinn Féin is committed to an early years model of childcare that is affordable, high quality, accessible and inclusive. A model that focusses on the early mental and physical development of the child, enables parents to work and contributes to a vibrant, healthier society and wider economy.

Delivering affordable childcare, and more of it, over the next five years is a key priority for Sinn Féin. Further action must be taken to ease the burden of fees for families, to increase the availability of childcare spaces and options and to ensure proper pay for thousands of early years professionals.

Sinn Féin is committed to conducting a full review of Core Funding based on data collected by the Department of Children to examine its distribution to providers.

Sinn Féin remains committed to a public model of Childcare. In government, we would establish an expert group with international expertise, input from the sector itself on what options would be achievable to deliver a public model of childcare over the longer-term. We would establish this group in the first 100 days in office.

AFFORDABILITY

Parents in Ireland pay among the highest costs for childcare in the OECD, with some paying up to almost €1,500 a month. Such high fees are unsustainable, and create barriers to using formal childcare, to female labour market participation and to improving child poverty rates. Taking a lead from Denmark, Sweden and parts of Canada, Sinn Féin is determined to deliver childcare to parents for €10 a day.

Whether your child is being minded in a creche or by a childminder – you would pay no more than €10 per day for their care under our childcare plan.

Sinn Féin would deliver €10 a day childcare by giving subsidies to providers which bridge the gap between the actual costs of care and the €10 cap on the fees a parent can be charged per child. Therefore, if your provider is charging €40 a day for childcare, the state would provide a subsidy of €30 to bring the amount you pay to €10. This means that if you have a child who attends childcare full-time, five days a week, you would go from paying an average of €800 per month to paying €200 per month.

For service providers, access to funding would be subject to the agreement of parental fee controls – a mechanism that has been in effect in this sector effectively since the onset of Covid-19.

CAPACITY

In government, Sinn Féin would also address the lack of capacity in the childcare sector. One part of the solution to this issue is by dealing with the recruitment and retention crisis.

Early years professionals must be acknowledged and respected with decent pay that reflects their educational attainment and continuous professional development. The sector is losing highly qualified staff to better paid and more secure careers. Sinn Féin would provide public funding of €53.8m for the increase of the hourly wage of childcare workers of €1.50 initially. Our five-year expenditure plan would allow for the outcomes of sectoral negotiations to be funded in subsequent years of our term in government.

Addressing low pay and creating attractive careers in the sector is critical to expanding the capacity of the sector when it comes to making childcare spaces available to parents.

Our proposed investment provides for approximately 250,000 children. Currently, childcare for just 182,000 children is supported, to varying degrees, by the existing NCS scheme.

Sinn Féin would also initiate a review into the current and potential pathways into the early years sector, to ensure that no avoidable barriers to education are preventing individuals from becoming early years educators.

Sinn Féin would also commit to a feasibility study into the greater use of the social enterprise model in providing childcare services. The social enterprise model is one which sees communities provide a range of services through multiple uses of community centres and vacant/underused buildings. These shared community hubs often share the burden of the costs of energy, rent and insurance, for example, and any profits are reinvested into the provision of services. There are examples of such providers in Ireland, who provide high quality early learning and care, afterschool care, and full-day childcare. This model has proven to be important in rural areas, particularly where it may not be economically viable for childcare providers to set up a standalone service.

A feasibility study would allow us to identify community centres and potentially vacant/derelict/underused buildings across Ireland which have the capacity and/or the desire to incorporate a childcare service into their business model. Real-world business plans for three types of social enterprises to add a childcare service would also be developed. The results of the study would be then shared nationwide.

CHILDMINDERS

Childcare capacity would be increased by extending subsidies for childminders. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) has shown the main effect of the existing subsidy structure is a shift in demand from childminders and other informal childcare providers, to creches or formal childcare providers, despite parent's preference for the former.

Sinn Féin proposes to include childminders in the €10 a day childcare scheme, with €240m set aside for this. In our first year of government, childminders registered under Tusla would be included in the scheme.

We would also engage with stakeholders, including the regulator Tusla, to ensure a fair balance is struck between the registration process for childminders, and the health and safety of children. This would allow for remaining childminders to be included in the scheme from our second year of government onwards.

AIM

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) has successfully enabled many young children with disabilities to be included in the ECCE programme. This has promoted inclusivity within pre-school settings.

Sinn Féin would examine the extension of AIM beyond just ECCE hours in pursuit of equal opportunities for all children to receive early years and school-age care. It would also support parents and carers in their careers.

We commit to a review of AIMS for younger ages outside of ECCE programme. This review would need input from different Departments, experts, health professionals, childcare professionals and families.

FLEXIBILITY AND CHOICE FOR PARENTS OF INFANTS – PARENT'S BENEFIT

Maternity Benefit is currently available for 26 weeks, Paternity Leave is available for two weeks and Parent's Benefit for nine weeks. Separate to our proposed investment in childcare itself, Sinn Féin would invest over €100 million to ensure that 52 weeks of leave is covered. This means that children can be with a parent for the first year of their life. Both lone parents and two-parent families would have access to the necessary number of weeks of benefits for the first 52 weeks of the child's life to be covered by a parent.

The extension of maternity leave and benefit would also help ease the pressure on capacity in the childcare sector.

Item	Cost
€10 fee cap centre-based care & TUSLA-registered childminders	€104.6 million
€10 fee cap for remaining childminders	€240.4 million
Total for €10 a day measure	€345 million
Initial Pay Increase – centre-based childcare workers	€53.8 million
Contingency Fund (allowing for further pay increases, core funding increases, and capacity growth)	€210 million
Total Additional Childcare Investment	€608.8 million
Extending Parents Leave and Benefit	€112 million

*Funding is in addition to that which has been pre-committed to maintain Existing Levels of Service and as part of the NDP.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Introducing €10 per day childcare
- ➔ Increasing the number of available childcare spaces
- ➔ Full review of Core Funding, with financial provision to allow for an increase
- ➔ Increasing the wages of early years educators by €1.50 per hour in our first year of government, with money allocated for future increases as a result of sectoral negotiations
- ➔ Supporting the expansion of the use of the Social Enterprise Model to provide childcare services
- ➔ Reviewing the AIMS scheme with a view to expanding it outside of the ECCE
- ➔ Extending benefits so that a parent can care for their baby in their first year of life if that is their choice

You can read the full details of Sinn Féin's alternative childcare plan *€10 a day Childcare for All* at childcare.sinnfein.ie

REDUCING THE COST OF ESSENTIALS

The cost-of-living crisis is not over. While the rate of inflation has reduced, prices have not come down.

Workers are worse off in real terms than when this government came to power. Pensioners, carers, people with disabilities are all worse off today than four years ago. Wages and core social supports have not kept pace with inflation.

Rents, mortgage costs, food, petrol/diesel and energy bills are all leaving workers and families worse off.

This impacts the wider economy as people cut back on other goods and services. When people have no money in their pockets, the local economy struggles.

Sinn Féin would act to protect households and the economy from the cost-of-living crisis.

In government Sinn Féin would ensure, through a reduction in excise duty, that petrol and diesel prices will remain lower than currently planned. We will also reverse the last two increases imposed by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael during 2025. And we will ensure that all future planned carbon tax increases do not proceed and no increases in excise duty also during the five year term. We will ensure workers are supported and not punished for traveling to their job.

Another group Sinn Féin will support is renters. We will protect renters by banning rent increases for three years. This will give renters certainty in the short term while we build thousands of affordable homes. It will also ensure that the rent credit provided by Sinn Féin will not be eaten up by increased rents but will actually put a month's rent back in your pocket – not the landlords'.

Sinn Féin would also ensure that mortgage-payers are properly supported by introducing our own temporary mortgage relief scheme for two years that will support far more homeowners than the government's current scheme which is due to end next year.

In Ireland, we pay the highest electricity prices in the EU. This at a time when wholesale energy prices are at a 2-year low.

The Government parties, the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and energy companies blame hedging strategies for the sustained high prices but, in truth, there is no oversight whatsoever of these strategies. Sinn Féin would act to ensure there is transparency and accountability in the energy market. We would empower the CRU to monitor hedging practices and to tackle anti-competitive practices.

Free education is a myth. Sinn Féin would reduce the annual Back to School costs faced by parents by phasing out so-called 'voluntary contributions.'

We have a plan to expand school transport by 100,000 additional seats, extend hot meals to more schools and provide free schoolbooks for senior cycle. We would also increase funding for the free schoolbooks scheme in primary schools so that top-up payments are no longer sought from parents.

When household budgets come under pressure, parents can find themselves forced to cut back on children's afterschool activities. Sinn Féin believes that every child should have the opportunity to participate in afterschool activities whether sporting, musical or creative.

The insurance companies have been charging motorists and small businesses rip-off insurance prices for too long even as the industry bolsters profit margins. Since 2020 the insurance industry has recorded sky-high profits while paying out large dividends to shareholders.

At the same time, small businesses and voluntary groups are struggling to find affordable insurance as they continue to be hit with rip-off prices.

Sinn Féin have campaigned hard to see reforms delivered. But the government has allowed these reforms to turn into profits for insurance companies rather than delivering savings for policy holders. Sinn Féin has published legislation which would hold these companies to account in passing on the savings from these reforms to customers. The government has blocked our Bill on several occasions.

Nowhere is the need for this legislation more evident than public liability insurance that covers businesses, sports, community and voluntary organisations, who continue to see their premiums increase. This drives up the cost of doing business and the cost of goods and services.

Despite the cost and number of claims falling since the pandemic, car insurance prices have risen by more than six percent since 2022.

The government has completely failed to ensure that insurance companies pass on the benefit to customers. This has a damaging effect on local communities and economies.

A Sinn Féin government would also prioritise encouraging more companies into the Irish market.

Sinn Féin have designed a package of measures to alleviate the pressure on households. Selected measures are listed below which would put €3bn back into ordinary workers' and families' pockets.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Putting one month's rent back into renters' pockets with a minimum payment of €1,000 for each adult renter and banning rent increases for three years
- ➔ Providing temporary and targeted Mortgage Interest Relief, with a maximum annual benefit per household of €1,250
- ➔ Delivering free prescription medicines for all households, abolishing prescription charges for medical card holders, delivering median-income medical cards and phasing out hospital parking charges
- ➔ Not proceeding with the annual increases to carbon tax that have been scheduled by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party
- ➔ Reverse the two most recent hikes to excise duty on petrol and diesel for 12 months and offsetting the toll increases that are due in 2025

- ➔ Empowering the CRU to better tackle anti-competitive practices in the energy sector
- ➔ Introducing a new Activity Card scheme providing €130 worth of free afterschool sport, arts and cultural activities for every child
- ➔ Tackling Back to School costs ,including so-called voluntary contributions
- ➔ Abolishing student fees within three years commencing with a reduction of €1,500
- ➔ Legislating to ensure the insurance industry must report to the Central Bank detailing how they have or haven't passed on savings from reforms to customers
- ➔ Using this information to hold insurance companies to account and ensure reduced cost in the sector translate to lower premiums for customers

A UNITED IRELAND: ‘A PLAN FOR REUNIFICATION’

ATHAONTÚ AGUS ÉIRE
AMHÁIN: ‘PLEAN LE
HAGHAIDH AONTAITHE’

Irish Unity would be a key objective in government, for Sinn Féin.

We have a defined 'Plan for Unity'.

It would drive constitutional, legislative and political change.

Sinn Féin will take the following practical steps:

- We would commence planning for and actively working toward the holding, by the end of this decade, of the referendums on Irish reunification provided for in the Good Friday Agreement.
- Produce a government 'Green Paper' in the first 100 days setting out our vision for a New and United Ireland
- Establish a 'Reunification and One Ireland' unit within the Department of An Taoiseach
- Appoint a Minister of State for Reunification and One Ireland
- Initiate a diplomatic offensive to promote Irish unity through the many international forums and bodies of which the Irish government is a member, including the United Nations, the European Union
- Establish a joint Oireachtas Committee on reunification and future constitutional change
- Begin the necessary planning and preparation for unity by establishing a Citizens' Assembly or Assemblies on our constitutional future
- Hold a referendum within the lifetime of the next Dáil for a referendum on voting rights in Presidential elections for the people of the North and of the diaspora
- Continue the work of the North South Ministerial Council in maximising the benefits for all citizens. And where possible expand in areas such as education, health, All-Ireland economy and of mutual interest and benefit
- Give MPs from the North speaking rights in the Oireachtas
- Maximise the benefits of the all-island economy to ensure prosperity and growth, delivering social, environmental and economic benefits improving the lives of people across the island
- Prepare for an Irish National Health Service

The conversation on Irish Unity and future constitutional change is now centre stage.

It has become a mainstream topic of conversation among citizens regardless of background or tradition.

The Sinn Féin Commission on the Future of Ireland has held People's Assemblies and sectorial meetings across the island of Ireland.

It is actively promoting the need for citizens to have their say in future constitutional change and the shape of the new Ireland.

A United Ireland: 'A Plan for Reunification'

We have also encouraged the Diaspora to have their say through similar gatherings.

There is unprecedented cross-party political consensus on the need to plan and prepare for Irish unity. Important sections of international opinion recognise that the potential for constitutional change is now on the political horizon.

During his visit to Ireland several weeks ago, the South African Deputy President became the first significant global leader to publicly endorse the achievement of Irish unity.

Economists, business organisations and academic researchers are all extensively modelling the economic opportunities and changes that would derive from a new constitutional settlement.

The Shared Island Unit is an important project that is contributing to this work.

The General Election Survey 2024 report confirmed in recent weeks that the proportion of people in the North supporting the union with Britain in recent elections is now below 50% of the population while the numbers positively looking at Irish Unity has increased by five points.

When the voting pattern for those under 25 is examined, those supporting Irish Unity is equal (47%) to those in favour of retaining the link with Britain.

In the Assembly election of 2022, Sinn Féin emerged as the largest party in the Assembly and Michelle O'Neill became First Minister.

In the local government election last year in the North, the pro-unity vote was greater than the pro-union vote.

In addition, the all-Ireland economy provides a significant opportunity for growth, new businesses and jobs.

There is an obligation on the British and Irish governments to deepen the conversation about unity, to acknowledge that change is in motion and to accept that working together to accommodate that change is the way forward.

This means having a mature, confident and pragmatic approach to managing constitutional change between Dublin and London.

Twenty-six years ago, a generation of courageous peacemakers came together and achieved what many thought impossible - The Good Friday Agreement - a peaceful and democratic alternative to conflict and an opportunity to design a better future for everyone in the North, across Ireland and between these islands.

The achievement of the Good Friday Agreement was a watershed moment in our political relationship. Both the British and Irish governments have a responsibility to work together for the good of the people as co-guarantors of peace, reconciliation and the realisation of a new future.

Sinn Féin in government North and South would strengthen and enhance this process.

It is by working in the spirit of friendship that we will together write a new and successful chapter in British-Irish relations.

Part of this new chapter must be the realisation that constitutional change in Ireland is coming, and that preparation and planning is now critical.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Good Friday Agreement which has representatives of all the major parties in the Dáil, pointed the way forward in July.

It called on the Irish government to begin planning for Unity.

It stated that there '*are no insurmountable economic or financial barriers to unification. That the economic success of a new Ireland is in our own hands. What is needed now is detailed and ambitious preparations.*'

It concluded that: 'Preparation for referenda on Irish unification will be a historic task. The Committee calls for preparation to begin immediately.'

Generational change is happening in Ireland, and what we do now is what counts.

The future will be defined by how we rise to the challenges and how we seize the opportunities. We need a mature and respectful conversation about constitutional change.

It is a conversation that should be approached with optimism, ambition and a real sense of opportunity. The conversation must be inclusive. It must recognise that people hold different and competing views about the future.

The reunification of Ireland presents the single greatest opportunity to unlock the potential of our island, to deliver prosperity for all.

Let us commit to a conversation that is thoughtful, measured, and above all, respectful.

Ultimately, it is the people who will decide their future as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement.

But it is our responsibility to ensure that this decision is made through an informed and respectful process.

Sinn Féin in government would make the reunification of our partitioned island a key priority.





ACCOUNTABILITY, CIVIL SERVICE AND POLITICAL REFORM

FREAGRACHT,
STÁTSEIRBHÍS AGUS
ATHCHÓIRIÚ
POLAITÍOCHTA

CIVIL AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM

Public services are the bedrock of our society and the workers delivering those services must be respected and valued. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have failed to deliver the quality of public services that people have a right to expect.

We would reform the civil service to ensure that there is greater accountability at all levels. We believe that the highest-paid civil servants should be held to the highest standards of accountability.

A Sinn Féin government would work to end the outsourcing of public sector jobs. Long-term value for money is best achieved by ensuring expertise is developed and maintained within the public sector. The over-reliance on outsourcing to generalist consultants leads to the loss of expertise and the weakening of the public sector; resulting in a vicious cycle where the public sector becomes ever more reliant on outsourcing and consultants.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Investing in quality public services and reducing the reliance on outsourcing
- ➔ Carrying out a comprehensive spending review to examine the scope for savings within baseline expenditure focusing on the growing reliance on outsourcing
- ➔ Expanding the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) to reduce the reliance on private sector consultants for economic and value-for-money analysis
- ➔ Delivering fair pay for public sector workers through Public Sector Pay Agreements
- ➔ Ensuring flexibility for grade and sector-specific agreements
- ➔ Delivering parity of pensions in future public sector pay agreements
- ➔ Legislating to make senior civil servants directly accountable to their Minister and subject to all standard disciplinary measures
- ➔ Expanding professional development opportunities at all levels
- ➔ Reducing the salary top-ups of An Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Ministers and Ministers of state by 50 percent, and using these savings to invest in frontline public services

ACCOUNTABILITY

Sinn Féin would institute a range of measures to improve accountability at all levels of government to protect the integrity of public administration and ensure it serves the people of Ireland. We would put fairness, effectiveness and accountability at the heart of government.

The Ombudsman is central to holding the state's institutions and agencies to account directly by its citizens. The Office of the Ombudsman oversees complaints made against public service bodies and is complemented by several sector-specific Ombudsman. A Sinn Féin government would expand the remit and powers of the Ombudsman, including remedial action where wrongdoing is established.

We would expand the remit of the administrative actions reviewable by the Ombudsman, including those of An Bord Pleanála. We would establish a dedicated Equality Ombudsman – similar to the Swedish office (including DSGBV) - and an Ombudsman for Public Procurement. We would expand the resourcing of the Ombudsman to enable them to carry out their functions in light of their increasing caseload and an expanded remit. Given the significance of the Ombudsman's independence, we would ensure their appointment is open and transparent by facilitating a confirmation hearing before an Oireachtas committee.

Corruption and maladministration in public office must be more robustly tackled. We would empower, resource and bulk-up the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO) and place it in a new independent Standards and Anti-Corruption Commission that has the mandate and powers necessary to investigate and sanction corruption, wrongdoing and breaches of standards. This commission would be vested with a range of investigative and remedial powers that its predecessor lacked. The limitation of SIPO's investigative capacity to complaints made in writing effectively constrains the number of complaints made, as recognised by the Mahon Tribunal, and represents an undue hindrance to tackling maladministration. The new anti-corruption body would be conferred with the power to initiate its own investigations and to act on the basis of complaints made anonymously. We would expand the scope of reviewable acts and where wrongdoing is established, the new Commission may recommend and where appropriate, compel remedial action or sanctions.

We would ensure the membership of the Standards and Anti-Corruption Commission is independent from political administration by removing participation of the clerks of the Dáil and Seanad. The decision of SIPO not to investigate the leaking of sensitive information by former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar highlighted the scope for political bias by virtue of SIPO's membership. The decision not to investigate was made by a majority of three votes to two, with the chairman and the clerks of the Dáil opposing an investigation and the ombudsman and C&AG in favour – this decision was ultimately quashed by the High Court for its inadequate reasoning. We would bring forward new ethics legislation to simplify, strengthen and implement uniform standards in public office. Oireachtas members should also be required to disclose their liabilities above a certain threshold, excluding the private home.

Transparent access to information is a fundamental mechanism for ensuring accountability in public administration. The Information Commissioner - responsible for reviewing decisions taken by public bodies on Freedom of Information requests - has acknowledged the tenuous use of exemptions to refuse requests by public bodies. We would extend the remit of FOI legislation and oblige government departments and other public bodies to provide accurate information and data when requested by Oireachtas members and other public representatives.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Bulking-up SIPO and placing it in a new Standards and Anti-Corruption Commission that has the power and resources to initiate investigations independently, and to investigate and take cases against former elected representatives in relation to abuses committed during their tenure
- ➔ Expanding the role, remit and powers of the Ombudsman
- ➔ Extending the remit of FOI legislation and obliging public bodies to provide accurate information
- ➔ Requiring Oireachtas members to disclose their liabilities above a certain threshold, excluding the private home

PROTECT PUBLIC INVESTMENT AND FINANCES

We would ensure that public finances are protected from mismanagement, exploitation, and economic crime. International cases of private consultants using confidential government data to benefit corporate clients and bid-rigging on major capital projects have not prompted a response from previous Irish governments in relation to state contracts.

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) estimates that the state could be losing hundreds of millions a year due to bid-rigging. It has been calling for adequate powers and resources to collect and analyse all public procurement data in a systematic way to detect and deter bid-rigging.

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has a role to play in supporting CCPC investigations. Resource constraints currently mean the DPP can only provide early legal advice in a small number of the biggest cases of economic crime.

Scandals at RTÉ and the FAI and other organisations have damaged public trust. Too often, private auditors have failed to provide adequate protection for public funding in commercial public bodies or organisations in receipt of public funding. The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) should have greater powers and oversight of all organisations in receipt of public funding.

Revenue and the Tax Appeals Commission must also be strengthened to ensure they are adequately equipped to ensure compliance. Tackling the pervasive practice of bogus self-employment and strengthening the Tax Appeals Commission to deal with the scale and complexity of cases are priorities.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Legislating to ensure the CCPC has access to procurement data to detect and analyse anti-competitive behaviour within our public procurement system
- ➔ Restructuring the CCPC to reflect the importance of the organisation's role in protecting public money from bid-rigging cartel practices
- ➔ Hiring additional CCPC officers for analysing, surveillance, and enforcement, revenue inspectors to increase onsite business inspections by Revenue in relation to bogus self-employment and commissioners to adequately defend tax appeal cases – at a cost of €4m this investment would pay the taxpayer dividends

POLITICAL REFORM

Sinn Féin supports real political reform which puts the interests of citizens first, rather than those of the golden circles and elite in Irish society.

In previous Oireachtas terms, public confidence in the political system was significantly undermined by serious issues around ethical conduct and transparency, including unethical expenses claims, voting when not in attendance, clocking in when not present, and wasteful spending of taxpayer money on a bicycle shed.

The Oireachtas lacks any serious political oversight, scrutiny or democratic accountability expected of the parliament. This has created the urgent need for fundamental and meaningful political reform of both our political culture and the political system.

Sinn Féin supports dismantling the golden circle and bringing about real political reform with openness and accountability at the heart of politics.

It is about delivering a fundamental change in how our political system delivers for everyone.

Sinn Féin in government would not tolerate such abuse of political power and our proposals set out to restore confidence in politics and ensure that those in power are working for the people and not for money or the vested interests of the golden circle establishment.

Priorities for the Dáil

- ➔ Ending the unvouched expenses system currently operating, making all expenses payments open to public scrutiny and examination, ending all additional allowances for TDs who chair Oireachtas Committees, and reducing excessive pension payments to Taoisigh, Ministers and top civil servants
- ➔ Conducting a thorough review of the Dáil Business Committee Schedule, with a focus on optimising the timing of certain agenda items and commencement times to provide greater certainty and sustainability for staff and TDs
- ➔ Considering continued and wider use of remote sittings and virtual attendance to increase visibility and accessibility of government and parliamentary proceedings, including potential sittings outside of Dublin and better community outreach
- ➔ Developing educational outreach programs that bring the workings of the Dáil to schools and community centres
- ➔ Overhauling voter registration by automatically registering voters as soon as they become eligible to vote and using PPS numbers to avoid fraud. This would be complemented by an information and education programme in all schools to ensure students are aware they are registered and how to go about exercising their vote
- ➔ Building incrementally on the gender quota in Dáil elections towards 50% and ensuring at least 30% of Ministers and Junior Ministers are female in line with gender quotas

Priorities for the Seanad

- Holding elections to the Seanad on the same day as Dáil elections
- Ensuring a wide representation of Senators from across society
- Opening up election to the Seanad to all members of the public and ensuring 50% of its make-up is through popular vote
- Ensuring gender quotas are also met in the Seanad, working towards a 50/50 representation
- Implementing the previously commissioned Manning Report in full

The Office of President

- Reducing the term of the Office of the President from the current seven years to five years, matching the term of a sitting Oireachtas
- Making the office subject to freedom of information requests and available to Oireachtas committees to examine spending, procedures and operations
- Opening voting in presidential elections to citizens across the island of Ireland and our diaspora

Irish Unity

- Delivering speaking rights for elected representatives from the North
- Establishing a joint Oireachtas Committee on reunification and future constitutional change
- Facilitating the participation of MLAs and MPs from the North of Ireland in Special Joint Committees with 'standing invitee' status

Priorities for Good Governance Reforms

- Removing participation of the clerks of the Dáil and Seanad from their central roles in SIPO to making it more independent from the political administration
- Obliging government departments and other public bodies to provide accurate information and data when requested by Oireachtas members and other public representatives and extend the remit of FOI legislation

ECONOMIC AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FORBAIRT GHEILLEAGRACH AGUS RÉIGIÚNACH

In the past five years, the Irish economy has suffered several shocks, and each of these crises put exceptional pressure on workers and businesses. The government has had chances to rebuild the economy since the last general election, and it has failed to do so in a fair and balanced manner.

Sinn Féin believes that it is not too late to seize this generational opportunity. Ireland has a unique economy, the nature of which means it contains many strengths, but also harbours worrying weaknesses. Sinn Féin wants to reinforce and grow sectors of strength while rectifying and transforming weak sectors and left-behind regions.

However, to support the surge in economic activity we believe is possible, particularly through the development of the regions, the right policies must be administered.

We have developed ambitious enterprise policies and committed to substantial investment into infrastructure. This would lead to employment, sufficient housing levels, accessible healthcare, affordable childcare, reliable and well-connected public transport, and quality broadband. These investments would expand the productive capacity of the regional economies and of the overall domestic economy. This is vital to avoid economic stagnation.

ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

Since the implementation of the First Programme for Economic Expansion in 1958, Irish industrial strategy has focused heavily on foreign direct investment and growing our export markets.

This strategy has been very successful, however, recent developments in global taxation strategy have weakened the tax strategy developed by IDA Ireland, and Ireland's ability to compete in a changing world economy has been hindered by a failure to deliver the right set of enabling conditions.

Sinn Féin would continue to invest in bodies like the IDA and Enterprise Ireland, and provide certainty in terms of tax and enabling conditions to continue to attract investment from abroad. But it is vital that this investment now be directed into key knowledge-intensive sectors such as cleantech/renewables and artificial intelligence.

Of equal importance is that investment is directed across the country. Sinn Féin will strive to create new wealth and employment in urban centres but also in the regions, which would reduce the pressure currently being put on Dublin, for example. This pressure is embodied by the significantly higher cost of living and housing/rent in the capital.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Continuing to secure a flow of high-impact American FDI and projects
- ➔ Securing FDI from new markets, with a specific focus on Europe, Middle East, and Asia
- ➔ Creating the conditions to secure FDI in key knowledge-intensive sectors
- ➔ Maximising the impact of FDI across the state and ensure investments help advance regional development

- ➔ Delivering the right set of enabling conditions to support FDI including capital infrastructure projects in terms of energy costs and energy security, water infrastructure, renewable energy provision, to guarantee Ireland's competitiveness and a steady pipeline of world class talent

DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES

Ireland's economic base is unique compared to our European peers. The state went from an agrarian economy to an export and FDI-based economy, without the substantial development of an indigenous industrial base. Sinn Féin would pursue a multi-pronged industrial strategy to grow our domestic-oriented sector, which still accounts for some 90% of employment in the state.

The government's failure to develop and grow a robust and productive indigenous industrial base of micro businesses, SMEs, and family businesses in high quality, high wage, and high productivity sectors has contributed to a distorted and unbalanced economy. This was epitomised by the 'EU Regional Competitiveness Index', with the Southern Region of Ireland ranking 90th out of 234 countries and the Northern and Western Region ranking 113th.

In order to achieve the scale and ambition Sinn Féin has for entrepreneurship, microbusinesses, SMEs, and family businesses, we believe the state economic agencies, namely Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices, need to be expanded. However, we also need greater usage and funding for MFI and SCBI funding schemes so that small businesses can access flexible credit.

As well as providing the proper financial conditions for businesses throughout Ireland, Sinn Féin believes there are structures which would aid in the development of community driven businesses in the regions. One such structure is that of the workers' co-operative. Workers' co-operatives are a business structure that have seen the successful development of many previously lagging regions across Europe – the most famous example being the region of Emilia-Romagna in Italy.

Sinn Féin is confident that this model would bring long-term employment to rural Ireland, with the people and communities of rural Ireland central to their development and success. For that reason, €2m a year would be allocated to the unit for seed funding and training/supports.

The workers' cooperative model would work hand-in-hand with the model of Community Wealth Building that Sinn Féin would establish. Community Wealth Building aims to build wealth and opportunity from the ground up, within the local community itself, and ensures that wealth is then recirculated in the local economy. Sinn Féin would allocate €1m per year to a Community Wealth Building Fund to assist local authorities in the development and implementation of Community Wealth Building strategies.

The reduced rate of VAT was withdrawn by government from the entire Hospitality sector. While the hotel sub-sector did not require this support it was badly needed by other business such as cafes, restaurants and hairdressers. A Sinn Féin government would re-introduce 9% VAT for those businesses that need it.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Establishing 'Mol Gnó', a new Irish Enterprise Agency, focused on scaling existing Irish businesses and on being a strong agency for non-export focused start-up and established companies. It would have an annual budget of almost €10m and capital of €18m for grants over the term
- A three-year PRSI rebate scheme that would target more than €640 million in total at businesses who are hardest hit by increases in the minimum wage.
- Scaling Irish SMEs through increased credit access and vital infrastructure, i.e. water, energy, transport and housing
- Better access to microfinance
- Expanding Ireland's exporting base
- Supporting the expansion of workers' cooperative and community wealth building structures.
- Introduce a reduced 9% rate of VAT for parts of the Hospitality sector at a cost of €605m

WORKERS' RIGHTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Workers need a government that is on their side. For far too long, workers and their rights have been an add-on or an afterthought. Sinn Féin believes that it is time for workers and workers' rights to be front and centre of the political agenda.

We have seen a decline in work conditions, living standards, and real incomes, alongside the marginalisation of trade unions and workplace democracy. Sinn Féin believes it is time for workers and their rights to be at the forefront of the political agenda. We advocate stronger protections and the right to organise.

Sinn Féin believes that giving workers the tools to bargain for themselves will lead to better lives. We would work in partnership with trade unions to modernise industrial relations and ensure workers' voices are heard. Key to this is legislating for the Right to Organise, ensuring workers have access to unions and information about their rights from day one on the job.

A society where workers are protected through legislation and collective organisation is one where care and community thrive. Sinn Féin believes that a strong trade union movement is essential for economic productivity and fair distribution of growth benefits and would provide for increased resources for the Workplace Relations Commission and the Health and Safety Authority, and for the legislative right to collectively bargain through recognised trade unions.

A significant step for workers is to bring the minimum wage to the Living Wage, and Sinn Féin would begin this by increasing the minimum wage by €1.10 per hour in 2025.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Delivering a legal right to collective bargaining
- Ensuring trade unions have a right to organise

- ➔ Trade union recognition and workplace right of access
- ➔ Ensuring workers have access to information on their rights and how to contact the relevant union
- ➔ Outlawing the blacklisting of trade unionists
- ➔ Outlawing bogus self-employment
- ➔ Legislating to address the practice of tactical insolvencies
- ➔ Increasing the minimum wage by €1.10 per hour in 2025
- ➔ Protecting workers from undue workplace surveillance
- ➔ Increasing funding for the Workplace Relations Commission
- ➔ Increasing funding for the Health and Safety Authority
- ➔ Establishing a Workers' Co-operatives Unit within the Department of Enterprise, inclusive of support fund
- ➔ Ensuring the Unfair Dismissals Act is updated to include an effective deterrent for employers
- ➔ Abolishing mandatory retirement and delivering the right to retire on a state pension at 65 years
- ➔ Delivering the remote working code of practice
- ➔ Support persons with disabilities to participate in employment, by increasing investment in the Wage Subsidy scheme and rolling-out career supports for young people with disabilities across the country based on the Walk PEER model at a combined cost of €16m annually.

PUBLIC CAPITAL PROJECTS

Capital projects can be the difference between economic growth or stagnation, a region developing or a region being left behind. Delivery is required in housing, healthcare, transport, flood defences, community centres and many other areas.

Too often, under the current government, major capital projects run far over budget. This puts pressure on the public finances and sucks resources away from other badly needed projects. The National Children's Hospital is on course to become the most expensive hospital ever built and lessons have not been learnt. The Department of Public Expenditure has no role in reviewing large capital projects. This has been replaced by a private consultant-led external assurance process. In the absence of a central role for the Department of Public Expenditure, each government department is left to deliver large capital projects alone. Sinn Féin would improve how public investment spending is governed and capital projects are overseen.

In recent years, we have seen the re-emergence of reliance on controversial Public Private Partnerships and the expansion of a private ownership model of public service infrastructure. Primary Care Centres and Technological Universities are both being developed in this manner. These models cost more in the long run and are unjustified at a time when the state has the resources to invest in public infrastructure.

Despite the use of developer-led models and run-away costs in badly managed projects the government has still failed to meet its own target outlined in the National Development Plan of investing 5% of GNI* in capital projects on average. The underinvestment is approximately €7.6bn over four years (2021-2024). Projects are quietly delayed due to a lack of investment.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Ramping-up capital investment to 6% of GNI*
- Developing increased expertise in the Department of Public Expenditure under the National Investment Office to avoid delays and overruns on large capital projects
- Giving the National Investment Office a clear oversight and assurance role in all major capital projects
- Move away from the use of controversial PPP contracts for public infrastructure
- Investing €250m over the term of government to progressively reduce OPW reliance on leasing contracts through site purchases.
- Assessing all capital expenditure on the criteria of addressing regional imbalances.

TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

An increase in economic activity and employment opportunities is not possible no matter how much support the state offers without the elimination of the infrastructural deficits throughout the country.

That is why Sinn Féin would invest in the development of the regions – to ensure the economy can continue to grow. Economic activity is concentrated in urban centres such as Dublin, and the biggest obstacle to growth at this juncture is a lack of infrastructure. Sinn Féin believes the prudent course of action is the development of regions and the elimination of these infrastructural deficits.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Transport is an important aspect of this infrastructure, and our policies would target public transport as we believe it is vital to ensure that every region of Ireland is connected. Adequate transport infrastructure makes it more viable for people to live and for businesses to operate.

In the West of Ireland, a major rail network along the Atlantic corridor has been absent for far too long. Sinn Féin would commit to finally delivering the Western Rail Corridor (WRC). Sinn Féin would restore the WRC all the way to Collooney (Sligo), which would then connect to the Sligo-Dublin rail line, and we would bring the reopening of the Navan rail line forward. These projects would be additional to the commitment made to the Metro North programme as well as commuter rails in Cork and other urban centres.

The party would also accelerate the Connecting Ireland (Local Link) rural bus scheme. These projects would see a substantial improvement in the connectedness of the West of Ireland, and we believe public transport will be vital for the region's economic expansion.

Greater investment is required to make public transport a more reliable and more affordable option for people. For that purpose Sinn Féin propose to increase the annual allocation of PSO funding by €126 million.

Public transport should also be accessible. As the public and private transport sector has grown through the years, passenger numbers have continued to grow. However, we have seen many difficulties continue to face people with disabilities when utilising parts of our public transport service. Sinn Féin believes in equality of access for all. Sinn Féin would deliver a €102m capital programme to make all public transport wheelchair accessible.

Finally, Sinn Féin would deliver for Dublin. We would prioritise progressing the Metrolink project.

Public transport will play a major role in the development of our regions. Rebalancing the economy means that people must be able to work, live and commute from all over the country, and that is why Sinn Féin is determined to deliver on these major projects.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Supplementing existing and pre-committed funding with an additional investment of €136m current and €422m capital in public transport
- ➔ Progressing the Western Rail Corridor
- ➔ Progressing the Navan Rail Line
- ➔ Investing in the expansion of Connecting Ireland (Local Link) bus schemes
- ➔ Reducing fares on public transport
- ➔ Making public transport accessible for all
- ➔ Progressing the Metrolink project

PRIVATE TRANSPORT

Sinn Féin is also aware of the need for many to drive particularly those who live in rural areas. For those people, the maintenance and improvement of our roads is of great importance. We have seen an increase in road fatalities and while poor maintenance of roads is not the only cause, it is a factor. With respect to regional development, the quality and connectivity of our road network remains important for economic development. For these reasons, Sinn Féin would provide an additional €200m beyond NDP pre-commitments for the maintenance and improvement of the road network, with a particular focus on local and regional roads.

Sinn Féin would also offset the increase in toll costs. Amid a cost-of-living crisis, people with no alternative means of transport are being targeted, as they must use their cars and these toll roads. To give workers and families a break, a Sinn Féin Transport Minister would offset the increase in toll costs in 2025 and would explore renegotiating the toll road contracts to secure better value for the public.

The National Development Plan 2030 was delivered to much fanfare in the early lifetime of the last government, however, despite the announcements of funding and commitments made on delivery, many projects have been deferred or paused. Many of the projects which have been deferred include vital bypasses and upgrade works – such as those required on the N17 and N20.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Delivering upgrade and bypass projects including a 50/50 funding commitment to the A5/N2 upgrade, upgrading the N17 and prioritising the N20 bypass
- ➔ Increasing the road safety and maintenance budget
- ➔ Hiring additional testers for the NCT and NDLS services to ensure timely and effective access to car and driver testing at an annual cost of nearly €3m
- ➔ Providing €7m additional Capital funding for the Safe Routes to School programme

AVIATION AND PORTS SECTOR

The development of the regions can also be targeted through ambition in the growth of our aviation and ports sector. Dublin Airport is hugely successful but has long been at capacity.

As an island, air travel is important to our economy and tourism sector. The passenger cap at Dublin airport should be lifted.

Emphasis on developing routes to airports other than Dublin Airport, such as Cork, Shannon and Knock Airports, will also be a key priority to deliver new routes for our island. This would also have the effect of providing a substantial economic boost in these areas and the surrounding areas.

As an island nation, we need to invest wisely in our ports and the infrastructure around them to ensure sustainable growth. While our ports sector is currently self-sufficient and profitable, it is a sector that must be supported through government policy to ensure it can continue to grow.

Investment in our ports presents a unique opportunity to develop offshore wind as part of our national energy strategy, which would be a primary focus of a Sinn Féin government. The value of being self-sufficient with regard to energy has been laid bare in the last number of years as international energy prices soared. The investment in our ports and a plan for offshore wind energy would be a guardrail against future inflation.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Development of regional airports
- ➔ Providing funding of at least €80m from our proposed Renewable Energy Investment Fund to kickstart investment in ports for offshore wind

CONNECTING DIGITAL IRELAND

Improvements in our online connectivity and increased digitalisation will also be vital to continued economic growth. The National Broadband plan must be accelerated so that rural areas can get the service they need to grow. In the modern world, businesses and households need broadband to operate and live.

However, we must also be aware of the risks posed by technology, which is why cyber-security is essential moving forward.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Investment in cyber security to prevent further cyberattacks
- ➔ Improvements in speed of the National Broadband rollout
- ➔ Continued support for employee-led restructuring in An Post

FLOOD DEFENCES

In recent years, we have seen homes and businesses flooded in areas across Ireland. These floods have caused substantial damage to families, employers and employees. We know that as sea levels rise, and extreme weather events become more common due to climate change. For these reasons, Sinn Féin would provide an additional €20m annually for the improvement of flood defences so that families and businesses can be protected from such events.

This funding would be used for infrastructural defences such as flood barriers, levees, embankments, and pump stations, but also for natural methods of flood prevention, such as river restoration and reconnecting of flood plains.

There has also been a gap in cover with regard to insurance for flooding recognised by the Central Bank, where many homes and businesses cannot get insurance because of the risk to their property given its location. Sinn Féin would tackle this issue by examining legislation surrounding the assessment of risk for certain locations that have been subject to flooding but have had flood defence works carried out. In this instance, insurers should provide cover to families and businesses.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Providing €100m in additional capital funding to the OPW to tackle flood defences
- ➔ Examine legislation regarding the assessment of risk in areas where flooding has occurred, with a possible requirement on insurers to provide cover when flood defence works have been completed

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AS A DRIVER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The state is the biggest buyer in the economy, spending more than €20bn annually on goods and services. The spending power of procurement can play a role in supporting policy objectives and drive economic development.

A well-functioning procurement system is efficient and allows for speedy delivery while ensuring value for public money. Compliance by state bodies with public procurement rules is vital to ensure value for money. Sinn Féin would empower the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) to play the role it was intended to as a real central hub of procurement expertise and regulation. We would establish a Public Procurement Ombudsman to guard against unfair practices and support SME participation.

The use of Social Clauses in procurement contracts offers a highly effective way to drive positive change supporting educational opportunities like apprenticeships, raise environmental and labour standards, as well as increasing the participation of marginalized groups and SMEs.

Sinn Féin would build local wealth and regeneration in communities and regions by leveraging the use of procurement and investment from local anchor institutions such as Technology Universities and hospitals, encouraging them to buy from local supply chains.

The ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people has encouraged local authorities' interest in ethical public procurement which would restrict access to public contracts for companies involved in human rights violation. Guidance and support must be provided to contracting authorities on how this can be incorporated within existing procurement law.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Adopting a 'mission-orientated' approach to procurement spending, which coordinates spending to achieve policy objectives
- ➔ Improving data collection, analysis and review of social clause use in public contracts
- ➔ Adopting a Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach to regional development
- ➔ Providing guidance to contracting authorities on Ethical Public Procurement
- ➔ Making the creation of apprenticeships and educational opportunities mandatory for contracts for capital works projects above a certain threshold
- ➔ Adequate resources and training for procurement officers and councillors in local authorities regarding the procurement process
- ➔ Placing the OGP on a statutory footing with an expanded mandate to act as a real central hub for public procurement and play more of a regulatory role
- ➔ Placing the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) statutory footing and expand its role
- ➔ Establishing of Public Procurement Ombudsman that support SME participation by acting as an adjudicator for disputes between contractors and the contracting authorities

BANKING SECTOR AND CREDIT UNIONS

Banks play a critical role in delivering the financial, economic and social needs of households, communities, businesses and wider society. This includes the provision of credit, the stewardship of savings, processing payments and channelling cash through the economy.

The Irish retail banking services sector has undergone dramatic change in the past decade.

In the past, the banking sector played a role in the economic crash following poor regulation, an arrogant banking class and reckless government. The Government used taxpayers' money to bail them out at a cost of €64bn and at great social and economic cost.

The Tracker Mortgage Scandal and the banks response to that begs the question of the extent to which banking culture has changed.

The relatively small number of retail banks operating in Ireland gives them too much power relative to customers. As such, there is a need for great regulation to protect customers including access to cash and ease when switching.

Sinn Féin will increase and maintain the banking levy over the term of government to ensure the banks make a greater collective contribution to the Irish economy and society.

We also believe the state should hold onto its current share holding in AIB with no further sales of shares.

Credit unions are another vital part of our credit system. Without credit unions, many families and communities would be unable to borrow or invest. Our credit unions are a national asset that should be supported to grow and develop. Sinn Féin would continue to work with the credit union sector with the aim of broadening their services and delivering greater competition within the financial services sector.

Sinn Féin Priorities include:

- ➔ Increasing and maintaining the banking levy at €400 million
- ➔ Ending the corporation tax break for the bailed-out banks. In 2014, Fine Gael allowed retail banks to write off 100% of their historic losses against future profits to reduce their tax liability
 - Sinn Féin would reduce this to 50%
- ➔ Introducing legislation to establish a Whistleblower Programme in the banking and financial services sector to incentivise the reporting of wrongdoing with the banking sector
- ➔ Retaining the state's shares in AIB
- ➔ Reforming the Switching Code to make it easier for consumers to switch banking providers
- ➔ Protecting mortgage customers by strengthening and giving full legal effect to the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears and Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process
- ➔ Mandating the Central Bank to review differential pricing practices in the mortgage market with a focus on discrimination between new and existing mortgage customers

- Protecting cash usage by requiring banks to provide cash services within communities and retailers to accept cash payments
- Introducing legislation for the full regulation of ATM operators including the capping of fees and charges for ATM withdrawals
- Maintaining the Credit Union Industry funding levy at 0% over the term of government
- Reforming Central Bank governance structures of Credit Unions
- Full review and reform of credit union regulatory framework

TOURISM

Tourism has an important part to play in sustainable regional development, in terms of job creation and the development of local communities. It helps to sustain our cultural and natural heritage and provides revenue to fund facilities and infrastructure enjoyed by visitors and residents alike.

Tourism is particularly important in areas that have been starved of other economic growth, e.g. rural areas along the western seaboard. There is still work to be done in some parts of the country to stimulate tourism, however, especially in the midlands and border regions.

To ensure a strong and sustainable industry, a holistic all-island approach is required. This should focus on regionally balanced investment particularly in areas that do not currently have a strong tourism offering or industry.

Sustainability, respect for our natural and built heritage, and quality jobs with good pay and working conditions should be central to a healthy tourism sector.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Pursuing increased cooperation between Tourism NI and Fáilte Ireland to cultivate tourism, particularly in border areas, with potential projects including the expansion of Ireland's Ancient East to include northern areas, for example the Mourne Mountains in Co Down, and the expansion of the Wild Atlantic Way to include coastal counties in the North of Ireland
- Increasing funding by €5m for Tourism Ireland to promote the island of Ireland internationally and for Fáilte Ireland to fund tourism development on the ground. This funding would be focused on areas with the greatest need with a focus on sustainability and digitisation for smaller businesses and groups
- Introduce a reduced 9% rate of VAT for the non-accommodation Hospitality sector at a cost €605 million.
- Reintroduction of hospitality JLCs to ensure workers in these sectors have access to fair pay and conditions
- Specific supports in terms of developing Gaeltacht tourism to stimulate employment and local industry

GAELTACHT

The revival of the Irish language depends on the survival of the Gaeltacht, and Sinn Féin recognises that the Gaeltacht is in crisis.

For the second Census in a row, the number of daily Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht has fallen, and just one in five Gaeltacht families are raising their children through Irish. Language planning efforts are not receiving the support they require from state services, and Irish speaking workers and families are being pushed out of the Gaeltacht due to restrictions stopping them building a home on their own land and a lack of social and affordable housing in Gaeltacht areas, all of which puts the viability of Irish as a spoken community language at risk.

Local authorities, Údarás na Gaeltachta and local communities agree that a lack of infrastructure is seriously restricting opportunities for development and housing in the Gaeltacht. A comprehensive plan to address the infrastructure deficit across Gaeltacht areas must be developed and implemented as a matter of urgency, with strong cooperation between Údarás and other state bodies like Uisce Éireann to resolve specific problems in terms of water and sewage, broadband, transport links and childcare facilities, if we are to create conditions allowing the delivery of social and affordable housing to meet the needs of Gaeltacht communities, and to enable the investment and job creation upon which workers and families depend to live and thrive in these communities.

The growing capital funding gap between our development agencies IDA Ireland and Údarás which has gone from 3:1 in 2009 to 11:1 in 2022 needs to be tackled to ensure fairness for the Gaeltacht.

When Sinn Féin published our own policy on Gaeltacht Housing and Planning in June 2022, guidelines on the issue promised by Minister for Housing Darragh O'Brien were already overdue. As of October 2024, we were still waiting, and local authorities have made clear they need these guidelines before making provision for Gaeltacht needs in their planning decisions. We were also promised that democratic elections, a key achievement of the Gaeltacht Civil Rights Movement scrapped by Fine Gael in 2012, would be restored to the Board of Údarás na Gaeltachta in time for the local elections in June 2024. This was yet another broken promise.

By contrast with this inaction by Ministers, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gaeilge, the Gaeltacht and the Irish Speaking Community, under the leadership of Cathaoirleach Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD of Sinn Féin, has been actively developing solutions to these issues in partnership with Gaeltacht communities – travelling to meet with Gaeltacht people and organisations in Conamara, Donegal and South Kerry – and producing more than 20 comprehensive reports and hundreds of recommendations on a range of issues including planning, education, Údarás elections, and the crisis in the Gaeltacht Summer College sector that has seen a 30% drop in mná tí since 2017, yet another Gaeltacht crisis Minister Catherine Martin says does not exist.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Engaging with Gaeltacht communities to develop a legally binding Charter of the Irish Language in the Gaeltacht, modelled on Québec, to safeguard their right to civil administration and public services through Irish
- ➔ Delivering additional funding to Údarás na Gaeltachta of €38.2m current cumulatively and €24m capital over and above what has been pre-committed to:
 - ▶ Tackle the Gaeltacht housing crisis with capital investment and grant schemes for Irish speakers to live, work, and raise families in the Gaeltacht,
 - ▶ Support Gaeltacht cooperatives, community development and community halls, and
 - ▶ Develop the infrastructure necessary to support housing and attract investment to Gaeltacht areas, with a focus on developing the Gaeltacht as a hub for offshore renewables
 - ▶ Provide extra funding for language planning efforts in each Gaeltacht Language Planning Area, and for each Gaeltacht Service Town.
- ➔ Implementing Sinn Féin's *Dírit, Dea-Chleachtas, Daonlathas don Ghaeltacht* proposals for restructuring and restoring elections to Údarás na Gaeltachta with a fully-elected board with new powers to intervene in state policies affecting the Gaeltacht, and with every separate Gaeltacht area and the islands represented.
- ➔ Implementing Sinn Féin's *Ag Pleanáil don Athchóiriú* 10-point policy on housing and planning in the Gaeltacht, including:
 - ▶ Language impact assessments on proposed developments,
 - ▶ CEFRL B2+ as the competency standard in the case of language conditions,
 - ▶ Recognition of Gaeltacht settlement patterns, and
 - ▶ Providing social and affordable housing for Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht,
- ➔ Enshrining the needs of Gaeltacht communities at every level of the planning process, with a distinct Gaeltacht Population and Housing Plan for every Gaeltacht Language Planning Area, and drafting Gaeltacht planning guidelines with a view to undertaking a meaningful public consultation and having the agreed guidelines enacted within 12 months
- ➔ Exempting the sale of second homes in Gaeltacht areas from stamp duty if they are sold as family homes to Irish speakers, Gaeltacht residents or to bodies such as Údarás na Gaeltachta or approved housing bodies for the purpose of renting to Irish speakers on the local housing list
- ➔ Developing a specific scheme for local authorities and public bodies to expedite the construction of necessary sewage and water infrastructure for Gaeltacht communities.
- ➔ Restoring the Irish Speakers Scheme at €500 per year per child, aged three to 18, raised through Irish in the Gaeltacht at a cost of €2.1m.
- ➔ Delivering a Rescue Package of €2.85m for the Gaeltacht Summer College Sector, including restoring the capitation grant for the colleges themselves, increasing the Irish Learners Scheme for Mná Tí, an allocation for scholarship funding to support DEIS schools, disadvantaged students and students from the Six Counties to attend a summer college.

Sinn Féin has an ambitious plan to restore balance to the Irish economy. We want to build on the economic progress made by creating new wealth and opportunities through regional development. Our objective is to create a domestic SME sector which is sustainable and rooted in communities in every corner of the country, to ensure high-skilled employment is attainable in all regions, and that there is sufficient infrastructure and services across the island. This would allow pressure on our urban centres to ease, which would benefit these areas also.

A Sinn Féin government would bring employment to the regions so that no one is forced to leave their home in search of a career, and we would ensure that those who wish to live in rural Ireland are given the infrastructure and services they need. A large element of this is transport but also housing, water, energy, childcare and healthcare. We have laid out our plans to deliver across these areas. It is Sinn Féin's firm belief that this approach would see rural Ireland finally get the investment and support it needs to reach its full potential.





EDUCATION OIDEACHAS

Education is one of the fundamental public services provided by the state to its citizens. A good and broad education can be transformational. The sole focus of education should never be just to serve the needs of the economy. It should be to develop the potential, skills, ability and creativity of all students regardless of their differing aptitudes and abilities enabling all students to reach their potential, helping every student find their own path in life.

Sinn Féin will ensure we have an education system that gets the basics right. That all children have equal access to the education. That education is free. That every school and institute of education has the teachers, the resources and the facilities they need. That children with special education needs get the services they need and deserve. That more children can get a bus to school. So that tax payers money goes where it is needed in our education system, we will phase out state subsidies for private schools.

We will also transform how Irish is taught in our schools and will increase access to Irish medium education. And develop a new strategy to support existing and emerging demand for increased diversification of patronage in schools including state, co-educational, multi-denominational and community schools based on the provision of high quality and inclusive education.

As part of our commitment to free education we will abolish third level student fees, lifting a huge burden from hard pressed students and their parents. We will also ensure that students have access to affordable accommodation.

REDUCING THE COST OF EDUCATION

Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring education is free. It is expensive from primary level right up to third level. A back to school survey published by the Irish League of Credit Unions in 2023 saw parents having to fork out, on average, €1,086 to get their children ready for primary school and €1,401 to send them to secondary school.

The government has failed to adequately fund schools. These decisions place inexcusable financial pressure on schools and families every year. Parents are put to the pin of their collar trying to organise uniforms, shoes, devices, PE sports costs, 'voluntary contributions', and much more.

The grand announcement by government two years ago of free schoolbooks in primary schools failed to materialise in full. The per pupil grant allocated by government was too low and was subsequently reduced further so in many schools, parents continue to cover the difference. The current government cannot be trusted to deliver its own promises.

A Sinn Féin government is needed to deliver education that is truly affordable for all.

In government, Sinn Féin would adequately invest in both our education system and our young people with a range of measures abolishing and reducing costs spanning primary school through to secondary, higher and further education.

Sinn Féin will end so called Voluntary Contributions. The demand for such contributions from parents not only goes against the principle of free education, it also stigmatised those parents who cannot afford to pay and denies opportunities to their children.

Our proposed Affordable School Uniform Bill would introduce measures to ensure schools make uniforms affordable and it would give power to the Ombudsman for Children to investigate and make recommendations in that regard.

A child's early experiences can have lifelong impacts. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that everyone starts off on an equal footing. That everyone has equal access to the necessary tools and resources required to increase their ability to reach their full potential.

The following priorities, which would reduce the cost of education for parents, amount to an investment of €372m over and above what has been pre-committed.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Ending schools' reliance on so-called voluntary contributions by increasing annual core capitation funding and the ancillary services grant to schools by €150m and legislating to end the contributions
- ➔ Expanding the hot school meals scheme to all primary schools and commencing rollout to secondary schools
- ➔ Increasing the School Book Grant from €80 to €110 for primary school children and extending the scheme to senior cycle in secondary schools from September 2025
- ➔ Introducing a scheme to alleviate the cost of digital devices faced by parents commencing with DEIS secondary schools and increasing ICT grants for primary and secondary schools
- ➔ Providing an additional €10 per child for every school library

PRIORITISING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Sinn Féin recognises that children with special educational needs face unfair and unnecessary challenges trying to access appropriate education. From assessments to school places, SNAs to the Summer Programme there has been a propensity from government to react to crises, rather than adequately plan for the future. This must change.

The Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) was introduced 20 years ago in 2004. Some of its provisions have still not been commenced by government including the right to an assessment, the right to an independent appeals process, the right to an individual educational plan, and the delivery of education services on foot of this plan.

Sinn Féin's proposed Education (Inclusion of Persons) Bill would amend the EPSEN Act to require the NCSE and the Department of Education to properly forecast and plan for the number of school places needed for children with special educational needs.

We would also bring forward and enact a new rights-based Education Bill and allocate the resources necessary to implement it through increased Education, Health and Disability Budgets. This legislation would make it mandatory for the Department's Inspectorate to report on the implementation of

Individual Education Plans for children with special educational needs. We would also provide for a robust appeals mechanism to allow parents and schools appeal decisions on the allocation of resources.

The role of the Special Education Teacher within the school setting is fundamental to ensuring all children can prosper within their educational environment. We recognise this support and the support provided by SNAs are critical for children with special educational needs to access and participate in education.

Sinn Féin recognises the vital role Educational Psychologists play in ensuring every child has access to the supports and resources they need to gain the most from the education experience. We would increase funding for educational psychologists. This would reduce waiting times for schools and ensure they are better equipped to assess and manage the additional needs of all students.

Sinn Féin understands that the summer months can be very long and difficult for some children with special needs and their families as routines are disrupted, behavioural difficulties can deteriorate, social isolation can increase, and the structure and respite afforded by school to the child and their family is lost.

We want to alleviate parents' stress and ensure that children with SEN and children considered most at risk of educational disadvantage are not put in a position that would potentially cause them to regress in any way. We believe that steps must be taken to ensure that there is more school based Summer Programme provision in the future.

Children who are exceptionally able have their own set of additional educational needs that are currently not being met. These academic high achievers have too few opportunities to advance on their potential facing cost and geographical barriers.

Smaller class sizes are important for all children to reach their educational potential and critically so for those with special educational needs.

Sinn Féin would invest an additional €583.7m current (including demographics and new measures) and €60m capital to deliver on our Special Education Needs priorities.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Providing for a reduction to the pupil teacher ratio with a focus on the most overcrowded classrooms
- ➔ Providing the NCSE with greater powers to ensure that sufficient, appropriate school places and classes are provided, and the needs of children are met alongside robust appeals mechanisms
- ➔ Recruiting additional educational psychologists along with greater administrative support to make better use of their time
- ➔ Providing funding for the recruitment of 1,000 additional Special Education Teachers and 1,300 additional SNAs on average per annum

- ➔ Modernising and ensuring the needs of the individual students are at the centre of reform of the reasonable accommodation scheme with respect to state exams
- ➔ Utilising the network of Technological Universities to increase the provision of courses for gifted children like the programme provided by DCU's Centre for Talented Youth
- ➔ Ensuring the latest approaches to special education are included in initial teacher training and during continuing professional development
- ➔ Ensuring data on educational outcomes for people of the deaf and hard-hearing community and people with SEN is collated and progression reviewed
- ➔ Improving and reversing cuts to the Summer Programme
- ➔ Revising the allocation of special education teaching hours to include complex needs
- ➔ introduce Irish Sign Language as a leaving certificate subject in 2025
- ➔ introduce systems to monitor the academic attainment of children who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired to better ensure these pupils are not left fall behind

TACKLING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Economic inequality remains at the core of educational inequality.

All taxpayers are subsidising private fee-paying schools to the tune of more than €130m per annum despite these schools being the preserve of families who can afford the annual fees of up to €10,000. Sinn Féin in government would phase out this subsidy and redirect the funding into public schools where all children, regardless of socio-economic background, can benefit.

Sinn Féin would also introduce a DEIS+ scheme to tackle educational disadvantage. By building on the City Connects Pilot Project in the North East Inner City where a Co-ordinator works with school staff to identify the needs of every child and optimise the services and resources available to them.

Our young people have experienced profound difficulties in recent years, in particular lengthy lockdowns during Covid, recognising the increased challenges children and young people face, Sinn Féin would invest in the provision of more guidance counsellors.

Sinn Féin in government would reinstate the committee charged with advising the Minister and the Department for Education on key policy initiatives that addressed educational disadvantage to provide research and direction around increased child poverty rates and problems faced by minority groups such as Travellers and homeless children in accessing education.

Reviewing the current funding model and service provision of the School Completion Programme which provides valuable assistance to children through and after school with a view to expanding the scheme into areas of identified need.

Sinn Féin would invest almost €12m of annually recurring funding and €34m of capital to tackle educational disadvantage, all over and above pre-committed funding.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Introducing a DEIS+ scheme to target additional resources at the DEIS schools with the greatest level of need by building on the City Connects pilot project
- Phasing out the subsidies to private schools over the term of government saving €131m
- Increasing the minor works grant ceiling
- Increasing the number of guidance counsellors by 10%
- Increasing investment in the School Completion Programme
- Expanding the Creative Schools programme to deliver a Creative Plan for all schools,
- Develop a comprehensive policy for the Arts in Education, in partnership with artists, schools, and communities
- Ensuring grants and funding are allocated and paid in a timely manner

TACKLING STAFFING SHORTAGES IN SCHOOLS

Sinn Féin recognises the role that our teachers have in our society and we value the enormous contribution they make to the future of our children. There is an unprecedented level of teacher shortages in Ireland at present that requires urgent action.

Schools report being forced to drop subjects as a result of the teacher recruitment and retention crisis. The shortfall in the number of teachers is compromising schools' ability to meet pupils' needs. School principals, teachers, students and parents feel abandoned by government and their inaction to address this.

A Sinn Féin government would tackle existing barriers preventing people from entering the teaching profession including establishing additional pathways into the profession. We would facilitate professionals who would consider using their professional knowledge in a teaching career creating professional entry routes that are accessible to all.

Many teachers are working in temporary or part-time jobs with concerns around low pay and lack of job security. It is unsustainable for teachers to exist on fractions of a job. Sinn Féin would review teacher contracts and ensure that all teachers are given the opportunity to achieve their career potential.

Many recent graduates are currently teaching abroad. Sinn Féin are committed to establishing a scheme which recognizes this experience should these teachers choose to return home.

Sinn Féin in government would undertake a comprehensive review of the Professional Master of Education (PME) course as currently structured. Frequently, this is cited as a major barrier both in cost and duration.

Sinn Féin believes that through negotiation and engagement, barriers such as teacher transfers and the quantity of training places in state universities can be overcome and commit to doing so.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Comprehensive review of the PME
- ➔ Ensuring full-time, permanent posts are more quickly available to teachers and greater opportunities for career progression including through the restoration of posts of responsibility at a cost of €10m
- ➔ Awarding full incremental credit for experience teaching abroad in jurisdictions like Australia and Dubai where the equivalence of experience can be demonstrated at a cost of €1.3m
- ➔ Addressing the housing crisis by building affordable homes for people to purchase and rent, putting one month's rent back in renters' pockets and banning rent increases for three years

SCHOOL TRANSPORT

In government, Sinn Féin would reform and expand the school transport system to provide an additional 100,000 pupils with transport services and deliver lasting changes in our transport system. We would provide more families with a convenient, safe and affordable method of transport for their children to school, while also helping to lower our emissions and to reduce traffic congestion.

The current school transport system is plagued with under capacity and uncertainty. Each year, families face school transport chaos and confusion over government's failure to plan, with many pupils left to know they have no place on a school bus weeks or even days before being back in school. This must change.

Our proposals, set out in our policy document *Reforming and Expanding our School Transport System*, would see the phased expansion of eligibility in terms of distance and nearest schools' criteria so that more pupils would qualify for school transport services, including those who currently fall short of meeting requirements and rely on the annual uncertainty of concessionary tickets. This would ensure fairer access to the school transport scheme. We would reform and expand the school transport system while maintaining current payment rates to ensure affordability for families.

We are also committed to providing the investment needed to cater for the projected need for school transport services by children with Special Educational Needs.

Sinn Féin would allocate an additional €250m to transform the school transport system and deliver these priorities.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Reducing the distance criteria to 1km for primary and 2km for secondary school pupils
- ➔ Facilitating routes for pupils to a school other than their nearest school where sufficient demand exists
- ➔ Delivering 100,000 additional places on school transport by 2030

IRISH LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

Sinn Féin recognises that a culture shift is needed in the Department of Education when it comes to both the teaching of Irish and Irish-medium education. This would be a priority for Sinn Féin in government, moving from a position where the Department has presided over a decline in the percentage of students in Irish medium schools towards a commitment not only to cater for the demand for Irish medium education, but to actively encourage its growth.

While 23% of parents would choose Irish-medium schooling for their child, thanks to an undersupply of places, just 6% of primary school pupils outside the Gaeltacht are in a Gaelscoil, and the situation is worse at second-level with fewer than 3% in a Gaelcholáiste. Large swathes of the country, including 11 of the 26 Counties, have no Irish medium school at second level.

The current government has done untold damage by scrapping the Foundation Level option at Junior Cert and by expanding the criteria for exemptions to the point that they have exploded from just 2.5% in 1999 to over 12% in 2022, the majority of whom still study a foreign language. Instead, greater efforts should be made to tailor the teaching of Irish to the needs of students.

To achieve the target of 20% of public service recruits from 2030 being bilingual, as well as to serve the needs of Gaeltacht communities, Irish speakers and EU institutions, it is vital that our education system adapts to meet and grow demand in the Irish medium sector with quality teaching. The standard of teaching of Irish in schools remains a concern, with the Department of Education's Chief Inspector in 2022 highlighting that teaching compared unfavourably with the teaching of other core subjects.

Sinn Féin would invest an additional €7.1m of current and €5.6m of Capital funding over and above what has been pre-committed to Irish Medium Education.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Appointing a Junior Minister in the Department of Education to oversee delivery of the aims and objectives of *More than just the way it's taught*, Sinn Féin's national policy for Irish in Education
- ➔ Developing and implementing an evidence-based state policy on Irish in Education from naíonra through to third level rooted in the principle of not only meeting but growing demand for Irish-medium schooling and treating access to Irish medium education as a right
- ➔ Setting progressively increasing targets for attendance at Irish Medium schools in the 26 Counties, including:
 - ▶ At primary level by doubling provision within a decade and working towards a quarter of overall provision by 2045, and
 - ▶ At post-primary level, with a view to ensuring the demand naturally created from the growth at primary level is accounted for, starting with an increase to match the 6% currently at Gaelscoileanna within a decade, and working towards an aim of delivering a Gaelcholáiste in every county

- ➔ Amending the selection process for patrons at second level to prioritise delivery of Irish medium Gaelcholáistí where none exists to meet demand from Gaelscoileanna
- ➔ Establishing a unit within the Department of Education to facilitate the transition of English medium schools to Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí to meet existing demand for Irish medium schools
- ➔ Restoring the Irish Medium and Gaeltacht Teaching Allowances
- ➔ Creating a dedicated Capital Fund for Irish Medium Schools to address the inadequate accommodation that disproportionately affects Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí
- ➔ Keeping Foundation Level at Leaving Cert, and restoring it at Junior Cert, to ensure every child has the opportunity to study Irish, irrespective of their standard, even if they attend an Irish medium school
- ➔ Increase focus on spoken Irish at Junior Cert by introducing an oral exam worth at least 40% of the overall mark
- ➔ Replacing the current framework for exemptions from Irish with an entirely new inclusive approach to second language learning tailored to the needs of all students, in consultation with pupils, past and present, parents, educators, experts and groups representing people with learning difficulties, special educational needs and immigrant students
- ➔ Developing a national strategy for improving both teaching quality and number of teachers competent to teach Irish and at Irish medium schools as part of a common All-Ireland pool
- ➔ Ensuring the free Irish classes a Sinn Féin government would provide adults cater to parents with little to no Irish who wish to support their children through Irish medium education
- ➔ Expand scholarships to Gaeltacht Summer Colleges, and set a goal that in future every student of Irish medium education would have the opportunity to attend

FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

According to a report published by the CSO in 2022, Ireland has one of the highest levels of third or tertiary level education qualifications amongst 25-34 year olds in the European Union (62% vs 41% EU average). However, the sector is currently facing significant challenges.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ The Free Fee scheme now exists in name only, with the Student Contribution Charge at €3,000
- ➔ The increasing cost of third level education for parents and students
- ➔ The crisis of student accommodation, which is forcing students into long commutes, requiring individuals to often pay substantial sums on rent, and forcing others to decline or drop out of courses
- ➔ The sector's core funding deficit and recruitment restrictions (Employment Control Framework)

- The use of precarious employment contracts in the sector and the lack of a viable career path for many academic researchers
- The need to increase the numbers of people training in certain professions - doctors and qualified tradespeople to deal with the health and housing crises, for example

COST OF THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION

As a core principle we believe that third level education is a public good which should be accessible to all. The introduction of the Free Fee Initiative in 1996/97 was a landmark progressive public policy achievement. However, austerity saw the return of fees through the introduction of a Student Contribution Charge (currently at €3,000). This has been a major burden for students and parents and coupled with rising housing costs and lack of accommodation, it is now serving as a barrier for many would-be students.

Sinn Féin would invest €338m to reduce the cost of third level education for students and their families.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Completely phasing out student fees (the contribution charge) within three years starting by halving them in 2025
- Increasing SUSI grants by 15% (adjacent and non-adjacent)
- Expanding the availability of SUSI for qualifying Postgraduate students
- Extending the free fees initiative (up to €10,000) for Graduate Entry Medicine

SECTORAL CORE FUNDING DEFICIT

The Higher Education sector is suffering from a major core funding deficit, currently just over €200m. As a result, universities have tried to compensate by bringing in additional revenues by charging extremely high accommodation fees. Again, this places the burden of the funding deficit on the backs of parents and students.

Sinn Féin would ensure that the National Training Fund (NTF) fulfils its purpose of being used to fund further and higher education and training.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Closing the core funding gap
- Making better use of the National Training Fund

SECTORAL STAFFING LEVELS AND PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

The Employment Control Framework which places recruitment limitations on the sector. Despite the IUA, representative trade unions and the institutions themselves calling for its removal, remarkably, it remains in place. This has seen Ireland drop to second worst in the OECD in terms of staff-to-student ratios, just behind Colombia – a country that is significantly poorer than Ireland. In Ireland there is one staff member to every 23 students, compared to the OECD average of one to 17.

This has placed huge stress on those working in the sector. It has also required the institutions as employers to use a whole host of short-term, insecure contractual arrangements to get around the framework. A recent study carried out by TASC on behalf of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) found that 36% of respondents identified as precariously employed.

This has had a detrimental impact on individuals' career and life progression. At a time when the government is talking about making Ireland a hub for research and development, many of those academic researchers are being driven out of academia or moving to third level institutions abroad.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Removing the Employment Control Framework to allow universities greater flexibility to determine their own staffing requirements
- ➔ Ending precarious employment and the use of short-term insecure contracts
- ➔ Developing a new career pathway progression and additional employment rights for early career researchers, such as access to maternity leave and the WRC for dispute resolution

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

The high cost of student accommodation has forced many students into long commutes. According to the latest Census figures (2023) 17% of students were now spending more than one hour commuting to college. Notwithstanding the clear environmental implications, at the individual level this is forcing some students to defer courses, choose unsuitable courses or even drop out. The current government approach to student housing relies on three strands of delivery: purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA), the Rent-a-Room scheme and tax credits for the private rental sector.

PBSA is mostly provided by private providers (investment funds) and third level institutions. In the case of the former, the approach mirrors the wider Build to Rent (BTR) sector, in that it involves providing generous tax incentives to investment funds that in turn provide unnecessarily high-spec and costly accommodation, which places upward pressure on rents in surrounding accommodation.

Often starting at rates of €1,000 a month, they also can have requirements where the room must be rented for a year. This is despite the academic year only lasting 8-9 months whereby students would generally return home during the summer holidays. This is a major cost for parents and students, and which has created more upward pressure on rents in a market which is already poorly designed with inbuilt inflationary schemes.

For on-campus PBSA, many third level institutions have planning for student accommodation but have not been able to proceed with construction due to the financial viability issues. Higher interest rates and poorly thought-out building regulations which require unreasonably hi-spec design, such as en suite bathrooms, add to the costs of construction and have stymied delivery. There has also been a lack of focus on the issue from the Department of Further and Higher Education.

The second strand of the government's approach relies on the Rent-a-Room scheme involving homeowners renting out a room (student digs) in return for a tax credit (up to €14,000). There is almost zero regulation for this part of the rental sector meaning those renting rooms do not have access to the likes of a: notice period, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) for dispute resolution, the rent pressure zones (RPZs), rights of privacy or reasonable use of facilities.

We recognise that the Rent-a-Room Scheme is important in providing students with accommodation, however, we cannot allow a situation where a significant tax subsidy does not come with obligations and protections for renters. These would not be the same protections a normal tenant receives but they would provide some form of regulation and protection to renters in this part of the rental sector.

The third strand has involved the introduction of a Student Renters Tax Credit which is currently valued at €1,000 which is less than a month's rent for many. Additionally, PhD researchers have been excluded from the credit despite accommodation costs being one of their largest outgoings.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Allocating €300m capital expenditure to the sector in order to fast-track those PBSA projects for which planning has been granted but are yet to proceed
- ➔ Amending regulations to move away from the overly high-spec requirements to more communal and cost-effective requirements
- ➔ Progressing our Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill (2023) which would give those in student digs much greater protections
- ➔ All student and PhD researchers in private rented accommodation would be entitled to benefit from Sinn Féin's refundable tax credit equivalent to one month's rent back in their pockets

APPRENTICESHIPS

Sinn Féin recognise the importance of increasing the number of people completing apprenticeships to ensure we have the required number of qualified tradespeople to address the housing crisis. Sinn Féin would ensure they are attracted and supported throughout their training.

We are acutely aware of the financial barriers that many apprentices face when trying to complete their training. They often earn sub minimum wage rates and must pay registration fees. Although they can qualify for certain allowances, these are often insufficient especially in the context of the cost-of-living crisis.

Sinn Féin would abolish fees for apprentices and extend state supports by increasing the rate of allowances for craft apprentices. Not only would this make it easier for those in training, it would also make it a more attractive option for young people finishing secondary education. Additionally, employers need supports to continue to increase employment of higher numbers of apprentices. We would also provide local authorities with funding to hire more apprentices.

There are issues that must be addressed about the number of instructors for craft apprenticeships. There are not enough instructors, and it is taking far longer than it should to complete apprenticeships as a result. The significant differential between pay from work in the classroom and work on-site is one reason for this which Sinn Féin would address. We propose introducing a special allowance to be paid to instructors for craft apprenticeships. This would make it more financially viable for experienced tradespeople to enter the education system and work as instructors.

Sinn Féin would invest €96.3m additional annual funding to make becoming an apprentice an attractive career path thereby increasing apprentice numbers and the size of the construction workforce.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Abolishing apprenticeship fees
- ➔ Extending the state support for allowances for craft apprentices by increasing the rates by 50%
- ➔ Introducing a special allowance valued at €10,000 for craft apprenticeship instructors.
- ➔ Providing local authorities with funding to recruit 1,500 craft apprentices

DISABILITY AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUND ACCESS

Sinn Féin has a long and proud tradition of supporting those with disabilities to better access education through additional supports and our alternative budgets have provided costed proposals in relation to this.

We also have a long history of trying to encourage those from marginalised and disadvantaged groups to enter further and higher education.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Extending the “Fund for Students” with a Disability (FSD) across Further Education and Training, so that it applies to all FET courses, not just PLCs at a cost of an additional €5m
- ➔ Providing a Bursary to assist Traveller and Roma students and Care Leavers

NORTH SOUTH MOBILITY AND CO-OPERATION

Sinn Féin have placed a strong focus on North South mobility in higher education as an all-island approach to the sector has great potential. We have been at the forefront of work done in the Oireachtas Education Committee to boost cross border projects. We welcomed the recent announcement that Ulster University (Magee campus) would significantly increase the number of places for students coming from the South in courses (e.g. healthcare) where we need to drastically expand public sector capacity.

We see great potential arising from cross border co-operation between our universities North and South and in government this would be a focus of Sinn Féin.

We would increase the funding to the North South Research Programme which sits within the Shared Island Unit of the Department of An Taoiseach. We would like to expand the remit of the SIU to begin planning for delivery of higher ed on an all-island basis. This would include addressing issues in different assessment structures for students entering third level - A levels and leaving cert are very different so there are issues gaining entry to universities in the South if you are from the North and vice versa.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Additional funding of €8m each year for the North South Research Programme.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE IN HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION

We want to see the continued development of teaching and use of the Irish language in the sector. As outlined in the 20-year strategy for the Irish language, 20% of recruits to the public sector must be competent in the Irish language by 2030. To meet these commitments, there must be a focus and growth on Irish in the third level sector. In line with this, we are proposing to develop a policy on Irish in third level education as part of a comprehensive policy on Irish in education at all levels.

Sinn Féin would double Irish Medium Education funding at third level.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Increasing both the range and uptake of Irish medium courses at third level
- ➔ Training students across academic disciplines and third level institutions to be competent to work in Irish and meet the educational and skills needs of Gaeltacht communities, Irish speakers nationwide, EU institutions, and the 20% public service recruitment target by 2030
- ➔ Exploring options for establishing a standalone or inter-institutional Irish Medium university campus in the Gaeltacht and developing strict criteria for designating existing institutions as 'bilingual'



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AGRICULTURE AND FISHING

TALMHAÍOCHT AGUS IASCAIREACHT

The family farm is at the heart of rural communities, intertwined with the people in those communities and a cornerstone of rural economies. This has been the case for generations and should be the role that family farms play for generations to come.

The farming community has faced significant challenges in recent years, from rising costs and market volatility to questions around viability for family farms and generational renewal. There has also been much discussion around adjusting and diversifying farming practices. This is not only in response to discourse around sustainability, but also regarding the continuous U-turns that successive governments have made on agricultural policy.

Farmers have consistently adapted and come up with solutions year after year, and we know they are able and ready to meet challenges and harness opportunities. Sinn Féin believes that, at a time when much is being asked of them, it is crucial that we support our family farmers to deliver and to thrive into the future.

Our approach is underpinned by engagement with the farming community and the intention to represent the views, needs and experiences of our family farmers. With the right engagement and appropriate supports, the future of our family farms can be secured for many generations to come.

INCREASING INCOMES ON FAMILY FARMS

Successive governments have continued to allow our family farms to be squeezed, with input costs rising considerably in recent years and average farm incomes dropping. Illustrating this, a 2023 report from Teagasc projected that the overall average farm income in 2023 dropped by 44% and that 25% of farms were 'vulnerable' with regard to farm viability in 2022.

Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring farm incomes are secured and that supports are available to ensure the future of family farms for generations to come. We would therefore establish a Commission on the Future of the Family Farm, composed of stakeholders and experts, tasked with bringing forward proposals aimed at allowing our farms not just to survive, but to thrive into the future.

Key sectors in Irish agriculture, such as suckler beef and sheep farmers, have not received the supports they need from this government. The government's Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme (SCEP), is overly complex and leaves significant numbers of farmers ineligible or reluctant to take up the scheme. In government, Sinn Féin wants to support our suckler farmers through a dedicated and streamlined financial package, with Suckler Payments of up to €350 per cow/calf pair, tiered by herd size.

We also recognise the ongoing pressure the sheep farming sector has been facing, with little assistance from government. Lamb and mutton prices are subject to extreme volatility. Wool, once a valuable commodity, became an expense as the price yielded covered shearing only without profit. In government, Sinn Féin would increase the Sheep Improvement Scheme and national sheep welfare scheme payments to €40 per ewe and increase funding for the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme by €75 million, a crucial support for farmers in peripheral areas and offshore islands. We would also champion the development of a domestic wool industry, as a key native industry that has great potential to provide an additional source of income for sheep farmers.

We recognise the great potential of the tillage and horticulture sectors in progressing food security in Ireland and supporting our climate action targets. For example, the Climate Action Plan commits to increasing the area of tillage to 400,000ha. However, the government has repeatedly failed to harness that potential and support the tillage sector to meet those targets. Sinn Féin would support tillage and horticulture farmers.

With regard to CAP, the government agreed to an EU budget deal that is bad for Ireland and bad for Irish farmers. During a period when Ireland will be contributing a net €2.5bn approx. annually to the EU, the portion of that budget allocated to the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) has been reduced to just 30% from 37% in the last round and from 73% in 1985. While this government have been forced to increase co-financing to make up for the bad deal they agreed to, the fact remains that when inflation is accounted for the CAP funding available to Irish farmers has been much less than in previous years. This is at a time when farmers are being asked to do much more. In government, Sinn Féin would advocate for a higher CAP and look to reverse the continuous cuts to the CAP budget.

Sinn Féin has also consistently stood against the proposed regressive Mercosur Deal, which would put both our farmers and our environment in a weaker and more vulnerable position if passed. We want to ensure that any EU free trade agreement protects and supports Irish farmers and makes sure they are not undercut by producers elsewhere in the globe.

In order to help increase incomes on family farms Sinn Féin would increase annual funding for the relevant schemes by €263m.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Establishing a Commission on the Future of the Family Farm to bring forward proposals aimed at supporting our family farms into the future
- ➔ Delivering for beef farmers by providing an enhanced and simplified suckler payment of up to €350 per calf/cow
- ➔ Assisting sheep farmers by increasing the Sheep Improvement Scheme and national sheep welfare scheme payments to €40 per ewe, advocating for a strong Irish wool sector
- ➔ Investing adequately in Areas of Natural Constraint
- ➔ Increasing income disregards in the Farm Assist Scheme
- ➔ Increasing investment in the Tillage Incentive Scheme and in the horticulture sector
- ➔ Seeking a fairer CAP for family farmers and reversal of the continuous cuts to CAP funding
- ➔ Ensuring EU free trade agreements protect and support Irish farmers

FAIR PRICES AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE AGRI-FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

The dominance of processors and retailers has meant that Irish farmers often do not receive a fair price for their produce. These low prices are not passed onto consumers, instead they boost the profits of major processors and retailers. This is a longstanding issue which has been left unchecked by successive governments. The use of arbitrary rules and penalties, the growing use of factory-owned feed lots, and the lack of transparency in the sector means that farmers are forced to take prices rather than being able to engage in the setting of prices.

As a priority, Sinn Féin want to see the newly-established Agri-Food Regulator (An Rialálaí Agraibhia) equipped with powers to initiate investigations into unfair trading practices and cartel-like behaviour and enforce market transparency. The new regulator currently does not have the remit to address anti-competitive practices in the agri-food supply chain.

We would also resource and enhance the role of farmer producer groups to negotiate and secure contract pricing from processors and supermarkets when entering into an arrangement to produce food. This would better ensure farmers attain a fair price for their produce.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Equipping the Agri-Food regulator with the powers to investigate and challenge cartel-like behaviour from the food processing sector
- ➔ Addressing anti-competitive practices by identifying the extent of profits within the agri-food supply chain and collecting the data necessary to ensure that a fair share of profit returns to primary producers
- ➔ To enhance farm producer groups status and examine mechanisms for contract pricing to deliver a fair return to the primary producer

WORKING WITH FARMERS TO SECURE THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE

It is important that farmers are seen and treated as key stakeholders in agricultural policy development and decision-making.

We have engaged extensively with women in farming, young farmers and representative organisations to examine what can be done to encourage more women and young people into farming. Sinn Féin believes that greater engagement is needed to tackle challenges around practical issues, such as a recognition of farm work, requirement around farm rules to access schemes and generational succession, to ensure that women farmers and young farmers can thrive in the farming community.

In government, we would promote the 'Make the Moove' initiative, proposed by Macra na Feirme to enable national roll-out of mental health services, and provide funding for the Land Mobility Service to support succession planning and enable young and old farmers to work collaboratively. We know that it is important for assistance to be available to support education in agriculture, which is why we have proposed the establishment of an Agricultural Student Hardship Fund.

Sinn Féin also wants to provide a solution for the group known as the 'Forgotten Farmers', an issue successive governments have failed to address for fifteen years. We have included a proposal in several of our Alternative Budgets and would seek to bring forward such a solution in government.

Family farmers are increasingly being asked to take action or adjust their practices in order to reach climate and biodiversity targets. To date, the government's approach towards meeting climate targets in agriculture has largely been an attitude of putting it on the farmer, rather than supporting farmers. Sinn Féin would change this approach by ensuring support and funding come first. In government, we would establish a dedicated €300m nature restoration fund.

The Climate Action Plan sets out targets for a range of agricultural sectors and practices. For these to be met, funding must be provided. Sinn Féin would therefore increase investment in tillage, horticulture and LESS.

The rollout of the delayed Forestry Programme 2023-2027 has already shown that many of the issues which plagued the previous programme seem set to be repeated. Confidence within the forestry sector has declined continuously because of government's mismanagement, their failure to meet annual targets year on year, and missed opportunities to realise the potential of forestry in Ireland. Sinn Féin believes that there are significant opportunities to be harnessed in the Irish forestry sector and commit to putting forestry back on track. We would review the forestry sector including in the context of our proposed Commission on the Future of the Family Farm to ensure that afforestation is stepped up and that the forestry sector offers family farmers opportunities rather than displacing them.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Effective engagement with family farmers and representative organisations on the development of agricultural policies and programmes
- ➔ Engaging with women farmers, young farmers and new entrants to farming to address practical barriers and support generational renewal
- ➔ Delivering a long-awaited solution to the 'Forgotten Farmers'
- ➔ Providing new funding for farmers outside of CAP for biodiversity and nature restoration measures, including a €300m dedicated nature restoration fund
- ➔ Ensuring that farmers are assisted with taking action to meet environment and biodiversity targets by investing in measures such as farm-by-farm carbon audits, tillage, horticulture, and the LESS, including the extension of grant aid to farm contractors
- ➔ Review and invest in forestry development

STANDING UP FOR IRISH FISHERMEN AND OUR SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

Ireland is surrounded by some of the richest fishing waters in the world, yet our native fishing and seafood industry has been in decline for too many years.

We need a government with the necessary ambition and passion for our coastal communities. A government that will unite the entire Irish fishing and seafood industry and join them in the fight for a fair share of the fish in our waters. Sinn Féin want to lead that government and that fight.

The sector has suffered quota cuts, fleet reductions, fuel price pressures and input cost increases in recent years that has left it facing crisis after crisis, following decades of neglect, mismanagement, and weak negotiating on their behalf by successive Fianna Fáil /Fine Gael-led governments.

Sinn Féin will fight for the rights of the Irish fishing community in Europe and we would also ensure that the government here has their back, come what may. Sinn Féin would allocate an increase of €10m to the annual current budget for fishing to ensure contingency funding is in place to quickly support the incomes of fishermen when needed and we also propose providing €10m of capital to supplement the existing pre-committed funding for harbour improvements.

REFORM

Sinn Féin is committed to departmental reform that ensures greater support, improved management and restoration of our fisheries and marine, recognising the importance of our marine resources for our coastal communities, our economy and our environment.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Ensuring that a dedicated Minister of State for Fisheries and the Marine oversees a reformed and refreshed Department, that is headquartered in Dublin
- ➔ Establishing a Fish Ireland office, based in Brussels, placing the Irish fishing and seafood industry front and centre in the European Union. This would operate in parallel with the Department of Marine's fisheries attaché and staff and would be a partnership between the Irish government and our Irish fishing and seafood industry
- ➔ Carrying out an urgent and time-limited review of the existing Department of Marine's operation, including all the state bodies that operate under its aegis; their record in implementing agreed Action Plans; and the relationship between the department, those State bodies and the coastal communities that they serve
- ➔ In parallel, initiating an independent root and branch review of the Irish fishing and seafood industry that supports the development of a long-term rebuilding and growth strategy for the industry
- ➔ Ensuring that the Department of Marine's permanent representative and attaché operation based in Brussels is fully resourced, staffed and skilled to deliver results that can rebuild and grow the Irish fishing industry into the future

- ➔ Engage with Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia and BIM, to establish a permanent office in Brussels that works in partnership with the Irish seafood and fishing industry, that places the promotion of the industry front and centre in Europe and that liaises with the European Commission, EU Parliament and the rest of the industry across the European Union
- ➔ Ensure that senior Department of Marine officials that are based in Brussels are available to appear before future Oireachtas Committees that have responsibility for overseeing fisheries and marine policy
- ➔ Undertake an audit of all state and local authority operated harbours to establish the financial resources required to meet the needs of the fishing and seafood industry
- ➔ Establishing an independent oversight and complaints body for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA)

OFFSHORE SECTOR

Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring our offshore sector is managed to better support our fishing industry and coastal communities while also protecting our marine environment. To do this, we would put in place the investment needed to support our fleet and the sustainable development of the sector.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Engaging with European Fisheries Ministers and Irish fishing industry representatives to identify, negotiate and secure new fishing and quota opportunities for our fleet
- ➔ Ensuring that the multi-annual European Maritime Fisheries Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) - co-funded by the EU and Ireland - is primarily utilised to support the Irish fishing industry and to sustainably maximise the potential wealth from Irish waters for our coastal communities
- ➔ Examining the current fisheries policing approach in Irish territorial waters and the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to ensure fairness and balance towards all fishing vessels operating in those waters
- ➔ Seeking a complete ban on huge factory vessels registering and fishing within the EU and waters under the jurisdiction of the Common Fisheries Policy, that undermine species sustainability, damage marine biodiversity, and provide little economic return to Ireland as a coastal state
- ➔ Making available a fuel support scheme based on turnover that can be put in place quickly at times of high fuel prices for the entire Irish fishing fleet and can be accessed quickly

INSHORE SECTOR

The inshore fleet is a vital part of our Irish fishing sector. With almost 2,000 vessels, they provide over half of the employment in our seafood industry, sustaining coastal communities across the island. We would continue the proud history and tradition of Irish inshore fishing by collaborating with the sector, and putting in place supports to ensure the sector's growth.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Revisiting, relaunching and implementing the Irish Inshore Fisheries Sector Strategy 2019-2023 in full theme by theme, objective by objective and action by action
- ➔ Adequately resourcing the recently established inshore and island's producer organisations the National Inshore Fishermen's Association (NIFA) and the Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation (IIMRO)
- ➔ Working with all sectors of the Irish fishing industry to ensure a fair and reasonable distribution of our mackerel and herring quota and the quota of other species as they arise
- ➔ Working with inshore fishermen and their representatives to identify new quota and non-quota fishing opportunities, build and grow new markets and identifying financial or other types of supports that can be availed of during turbulent times
- ➔ Developing a continuity grant that can be accessed by the Inshore and island's fishing sector to promote growth and revitalise their communities
- ➔ To enact and implement the Island Fisheries Heritage Licence Bill 2017

AQUACULTURE

Sinn Féin recognises the potential of aquaculture to contribute to job creation for our coastal communities and would support the sustainable expansion of this sector in government.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Seeking to develop and grow the aquaculture industry in Ireland, allow it to become comparable in productivity to other EU Member States and realise its full potential
- ➔ Implementing in full, the recommendations of the 2017 Report from the Independent Aquaculture Licensing Review Group to resolve the barriers to progress and allow the full potential of aquaculture and sustainable jobs for our coastal communities to be realised

MARINE BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

A Sinn Féin government would tackle the twin climate and biodiversity crises that threaten the sustainability of our marine and our fishing and coastal communities whose livelihoods depend on the sustainability of our marine. We would do this while protecting the livelihoods of our fishing and coastal communities.

We recognise that too often our small-scale, sustainable fishing fleet bears a disproportionate brunt of the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss, despite their limited contribution to the causes. We would invest in our small-scale sustainable fishing sector while phasing out large-scale destructive, fishing practices and investing in our Irish fishing fleet.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Seeking a complete ban on huge factory vessels registering and fishing within the EU and waters under the jurisdiction of the Common Fisheries Policy, that undermine species sustainability, damage marine biodiversity, and provide little economic return to Ireland
- ➔ Ensuring that fishermen and their representatives are party to co-creating marine spaces for designation as Marine Protected Areas or spaces for Offshore Renewable Energy development that will allow them to coexist, cohabit where possible, minimise disruption and/or displacement and maximise and protect as many fishing opportunities as possible in the marine waters that they know
- ➔ Actively encouraging increased and resourced science-based collaboration between academics, NGOs, fishermen and government officials to ensure we meet our MPA and ORE requirements and also making sure that fish stocks can be sustained into the future to allow our fishing industry thrive and grow

ANIMAL WELFARE

Sinn Féin is committed to achieving the highest standards in animal welfare and an end to animal cruelty.

Despite the state having relatively high animal welfare standards in law, animal welfare standards are chronically undermined by poor oversight and inadequate enforcement. We would enhance oversight of animal welfare laws and their implementation. In addition to enacting more robust penalties against those convicted of animal abuse and neglect, we would ensure that those culpable are held to account through new sentencing guidelines for the courts to affect.

Animal welfare charities are increasingly overwhelmed by rising numbers of animals needing to be rehomed, due in part to the enduring cost of living crisis and a worsening housing crisis. Sinn Féin would provide additional funding for these charities to allow them to continue their vital services. Sinn Féin would increase annual investment in animal welfare by €2m.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Increasing funding for animal welfare charities
- ➔ Strengthening the Animal Health and Welfare Act to ensure penalties for the abuse of animals are more robust and more firmly enforced, including mandatory lifelong animal disqualification orders
- ➔ Creating an Animal Welfare Commission to provide advice to government on animal welfare standards and policy, to analyse the implementation of animal welfare policy and investigate breaches of animal welfare laws
- ➔ Increasing funding for animal welfare inspections
- ➔ Enhancing oversight, enforcement and standards for breeding establishments and the sale of pets, including the establishment of a centralised national verification and traceability system.
- ➔ Removing the prohibition on all pets from AHB tenancies and aligning their pet policy with the relevant Local Authority
- ➔ Ensuring state funding for greyhound and horseracing industries is conditional on the elimination of animal cruelty
- ➔ Investing in ocean clean-up operations

HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND NON- DISCRIMINATION

CEARTA AN DUINE, COMHIONANNAS AGUS FRITH-IDIRDHEALÚ

Rights, inclusion and equality are core values of Sinn Féin and underpin our approach to all matters.

Our laws, policies and practices should safeguard inclusivity and human rights for everybody including rights to non-discrimination.

When the rights of different groups conflict, a careful balance must be achieved. Positive discrimination and protections for certain categories of people must be allowed where these are necessary and proportionate.

Sinn Féin advocates the right to full social, economic and cultural equality.

As equality legislation - namely the Equal Status Act and the Employment Equality Act - currently stands, there are nine grounds of discrimination including gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, membership of the Traveller community and race. While these grounds are welcomed, Sinn Féin are committed to adding the additional ground of socioeconomic discrimination to the Equality Acts.

Socioeconomic discrimination is widely felt in the everyday lives of many, such as when attempting to access public services or employment. One's socioeconomic background can inhibit them from receiving equal treatment, resulting in social exclusion and vastly unfair consequences. There is currently no form of legal redress or legal protection for those who are victims of discrimination based on their socioeconomic circumstances. A ground of socioeconomic status should be added to equality legislation to ensure the proper protection of human rights and equality for all.

Sinn Féin introduced the *Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2021* to this effect. Sinn Féin also commits to continuously supporting campaigns, such as the #Addthe10th Alliance. Adding this tenth ground would prohibit discrimination based on a person's social and/or economically disadvantaged background, and provide victims a form of legal redress and protection, as well as improving their everyday lives, such as in employment and when accessing services.

Women are the largest group of people excluded from a fair share of benefits in our economy. Households headed by lone parents and older women remain at high risk of poverty and structural inequalities continue to trap many women in low paid employment. For instance, the gender pay gap stood at almost 10% in 2022. On top of this, women are still not equally represented in either national or local government decision-making structures.

People with disabilities also do not enjoy equal opportunities. Many barriers to participation in the labour market and in society remain. In the 2022 Census, just 34% of the population aged 15 and over who experienced a long-lasting condition or disability were at work. They are the most likely cohort to be experiencing enforced deprivation. The proportion of person's living in households experiencing enforced deprivation went up from 16.6% in 2022 to 17.3% in 2023. Persons most likely to be living in enforced deprivation were those unable to work due to long-standing health problems i.e. disability (44.7%).

The government only brought a memo to cabinet on the 8th of October to seek approval to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – 17 years after the state signed up to the UNCRPD.

Ireland and the world's population is ageing. A new UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons would provide a global framework to help combat age discrimination and ageism, ensure access to healthcare, social care, and other essential services, protect older people from violence, abuse and neglect, safeguard the right to work and financial security in older age and promote the active participation of older people in society.

Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that Traveller culture and heritage is celebrated to counter the discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion many Travellers experience.

Travellers in Ireland have historically been ill-treated and ignored by the state. The cycle of discrimination over generations has led to extreme inequalities between the Travelling community and the settled population and measures are needed to address this.

We welcome the progress secured by the LGBTQI+ community in recent years. These rights were hard fought for over many decades by activists who refused to be deterred in their fight to be recognised as equal before the law.

Next year will mark 10 years since the passing of the marriage equality referendum and gender recognition.

Despite the clear progress we have seen in many areas, the struggle for full LGBTQI+ equality is far from over. Many areas of inequality remain, and more work is required to ensure that true equality is achieved.

Sinn Féin condemns the increasing attacks on LGBTQI+ people. We reject transphobia and homophobia in Ireland and overseas. Everyone has a right to live free from violence, persecution, discrimination and stigma. Sinn Féin is committed to seeing the fight for equality through.

Likewise, Ireland's black and ethnic minority population have been subjected to an increasing volume of overtly racist attacks. This is completely unacceptable.

As a result of decisions by successive Fine Gael- and Fianna Fáil-led governments to dismantle and water down obligations which aimed to ensure Irish speakers could engage with the justice system in Irish, we now have just one third of Gardaí stationed in Gaeltacht areas able to serve the community in their own language, and fewer than 2% of barristers and 1.6% of solicitors able to provide legal services to clients through Irish.

An investigation by the Language Commissioner found An Garda Síochána in breach of their own legal obligations, and Judge Úna Ní Raifeartaigh described the courts system as assisting in 'linguicide' through the 'surprising intolerance' with which it treats Irish speakers. Sinn Féin believes Irish speakers deserve equal treatment and access to justice, and that senior state officials charged with enforcing and interpreting the law and Constitution, whose first official language is Irish, should be able to understand it fully.

Sinn Féin values the right to freedom of speech. Republicans were victims of censorship for decades under all governments with Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour governments using directives under Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act 1961 to silence dissent and alternative voices from the airways from 1971 until 1994.

In the most recent Dáil term, they sought to introduce a new form of censorship with their Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Bill 2022. Sinn Féin voted against the government's hate crime and hate speech legislation.

Vulnerable people and groups must be protected from those who seek to incite violence against them, but the government went about doing that all wrong.

We called on the government to withdraw their bill because it set out to undermine the right to free speech and the right to protest and it is not legally sound. We submitted major amendments and supported amendments from others also in an effort to get the legislation right.

These amendments covered items such as providing for clear and simple definitions of hate and gender, and seeking to remove disproportionate and overreaching powers.

Other amendments we supported sought to remove highly controversial sections of the bill including one which would create a new criminal offence of possession of material which could be hateful regardless of the person's intention to distribute it or not and in the absence of a clear definition of hate. The government reluctantly removed that provision during the course of the bill becoming an act. However, they have stated that they will try again to introduce this aspect of the bill after the general election if they are re-elected to government.

Sinn Féin would not introduce hate speech laws and we would repeal the government's Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act because we believe that freedom of speech is a core component of democracy and that governments should not be allowed to censor the public in their own partisan interests.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Adding socioeconomic discrimination as a ground of discrimination into equality legislation.
- ➔ Closing the gender pay and pensions gap including through investing in affordable childcare, significantly raising the minimum wage and prioritise the transposing of the EU Pay Transparency Directive into Irish law requiring all public and private organisations to provide pay details from the outset of the recruitment process and to end the practice of asking candidates for details of current pay to determine salary offering
- ➔ Creating a Gender Pay Gap reporting system that would consist of a central portal where all public and private employer reports would be uploaded and accessed publicly
- ➔ Working with the Alliance for Local Quotas and the Electoral Commission to identify and legislate for appropriate mechanisms to match Dáil election gender quotas to local and Seanad elections, incrementally increase gender quota provisions for Dáil elections to 50%, at least 30% of Ministers and Ministers of State should be women and the entitlement of maternity leave must be extended to TDs and Senator.

- ➔ Working with relevant stakeholders and citizens organisations to develop mechanisms to increase the participation of disabled people, members of LGBTQI+, Traveller and Roma communities, working class and rural women's participation in politics and all levels of decision-making
- ➔ Making rights real for people with disabilities by making the built environment, infrastructure and facilities more accessible, recognising the additional costs of disability through increased social welfare, transport and mobility supports, greater supports to enter and sustain employment and meaningful participation in public decision making
- ➔ Championing the creation of a new UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons
- ➔ Celebrating Traveller culture and heritage and promoting greater inclusion, participation and representation in decision making and politics
- ➔ Assisting migrants, in accordance with their legal status, to participate in and contribute fully to Irish society
- ➔ Developing a new National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy
- ➔ Implementing a new and holistic model of care for gender identity services and extending and updating the national sexual health strategy to address long waiting lists for PrEP and reduce rates of STIs and HIV
- ➔ Implementing the Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools to make schools safer for all children, including LGBTQI+ young people
- ➔ Creating a scheme to disregard the pre-1993 convictions for consensual sex between men
- ➔ Supporting the National Library of Ireland to catalogue, preserve, digitise and share the Irish Queer Archive collection
- ➔ More proactive and visible policing so that everybody can feel safe in society
- ➔ Ensuring a sufficient number of Gardaí with B2+ level competency in Irish under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is available to serve Irish speakers nationwide, especially Gardaí stationed in a Gaeltacht area, providing training opportunities for Gardaí who wish to improve their Irish
- ➔ Working with the Law Society and the Kings Inns with a view to establishing progressive targets for the increased delivery of solicitors and barristers who can conduct business through Irish
- ➔ Requiring competence in Irish as a requirement for appointment to senior positions within the Judiciary, including to the Supreme Court
- ➔ Repealing the Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act



TACKLING DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

AGHAIDH A THABHAIRT AR
FHORÉIGEAN TEAGHLAIGH
AGUS AR FHORÉIGEAN AR
BHONN INSCNE

This year, a report by Women's Aid recorded a record number of reports of gender-based violence.

They received more than 40,000 disclosures of abuse against women and children in 2023. The highest in their 50-year history.

There is an epidemic of violence against women and a culture that facilitates this violence. As a society, we cannot accept anything other than zero tolerance.

This issue is compounded by a judicial system, a Defence Forces, a political system and a society that fails to confront this problem with a whole of community response.

We need nothing less than urgent action across several measures to address the epidemic of violence against women across society and support both male and female victims of domestic abuse.

Sinn Féin will support women and men by supporting Domestic Violence Services.

Sinn Féin would provide €20m of additional current expenditure to deliver the below priorities.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Ensuring a Dedicated Rape Crisis Centre (including SATU, helpline, court accompaniment and counselling services) is available for every 200,000 of population
- ➔ Providing additional funding required to enable the Children's Ombudsman to fulfil its remit in the new Violence Against Women Strategy
- ➔ Establishing a Statutory Flee Fund. Grants to range from €500 leave money and €2500 to set up new home depending on circumstances
- ➔ Ensuring the additional annual cost of funding business case plans submitted by Domestic Violence services to Cuan as part of a new National Service Development Plan over 2025-2028
- ➔ Raising the disposable income threshold for legal aid in Domestic Violence cases
- ➔ Ensuring each Domestic Violence Service which provides accommodation has access to a medical card for clients while they are staying there
- ➔ Ensuring multi-disciplinary domestic homicide reviews take place
- ➔ Providing €75 Capital funding beyond what has already been pre-committed for domestic violence shelters

PROTECTING CHILDREN PÁISTÍ A CHOSAINT

The state's care system is in crisis and urgently needs a national strategy to address the significant and alarming shortcomings in the delivery of appropriate alternative care placements for children and young people.

Sinn Féin will commit to increasing the number of beds, improving aftercare supports and services, and developing as part of the national strategy a plan to gradually reduce the number of private for-profit residential care providers.

Sinn Féin's national strategy would involve several government departments including Children, Justice, Health, Education and Social Protection. It is crucial, if we are to address the significant and distressing shortcomings in the delivery of appropriate alternative care placements for children, that departments are working collaboratively.

Services remain overstretched, and a situation where private companies are competing for lucrative government contracts does not serve the best interests of children and young people.

TUSLA figures show continued demand for their services in recent years, most acutely in aftercare services. There are approximately 3,000 young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare services. 'Fifty-five per cent of these young people and young adults are 18-20 years, 21% are 21-22 years, while the remaining 24% are under 18 years.'

FOSTER CARERS

Sinn Féin recognises the essential role that foster carers play. We know that the number of foster carers in the state is falling, yet the need for them has never been greater.

In government, we would commit to a full review of all services and supports, including state pensions, for foster carers and to engage with the Irish Foster Care Association in relation to the needs in the sector.

KINSHIP CARE

Kinship care is when a child or young person is living full-time with a relative or family friend. There are many reasons why the child or young person may not be able to live with their parents. Sinn Féin commits to recognising and supporting kinship care families.

Sinn Féin would implement a clear government policy on the rights of children living in kinship care and in private foster care arrangement. Kinship care is the full-time care provided by a relative or family friend of a child or young person who are not able to live with their parents when there is a crisis, or a breakdown of relationships or care. There are an estimated 10,000-12,000 children living in kinship care in Ireland. Kinship care allows children and young people to remain connected to their identity, family, culture and community.

Sinn Féin is proposing investing an additional €67.7m of current expenditure and €43m of capital funding over and above what has been pre-committed to better protect children.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Double the state's public residential care capacity
- ➔ Improve aftercare supports and services
- ➔ Establish a steering committee to consult on a National Children in Care Strategy to transform the current care system to one that focuses more on early intervention, reducing the need for crisis response at a later stage
- ➔ Recognise the essential role of foster carers, including through extension of coverage for the state pension, and engage with the Irish Foster Care Association
- ➔ Recognise and support kinship care families
- ➔ Increased funding for Family Resource Centres
- ➔ Review the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act to ensure children are better protected online, making any necessary amendments to it and supporting parents to make the best decisions for their own children
- ➔ Reinstate funding for the Child Law Project which provides vital transparency and oversight of child protection Court proceedings.



DISABILITY MÍCHUMAS

DELIVERING ON RIGHTS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

Sinn Féin is determined to make the rights of people with disabilities real.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) provides the international framework to promote, protect and ensure the rights of all people with disabilities and promotes equal rights in all areas of life. Ireland ratified the UNCRPD in March 2018. However, the rights contained are not being delivered or made real for people with disabilities.

Certain rights of disabled people were set out in the Disability Act 2005. This Act has provided some solid entitlements, such as the right to an assessment of need. However, several important pieces of legislation have been introduced since the passing of the Disability Act in 2005. Sinn Féin would review the Disability Act with a view to modernising and strengthening it, bringing it in line with the rights and protections incorporated within the UNCRPD.

While the international and domestic legislative framework are important – real delivery of rights requires investment in financial supports and services.

Over a government term we would increase annual current funding by €829m and provide €659m of additional capital beyond what has been pre-committed for existing levels of service and under the NDP for the disability services and supports outlined in this chapter.

We have detailed measures to enable equal participation by people with disabilities in every aspect of life throughout this document.

Sinn Féin would like to acknowledge the work carried out by the Committee on Autism which culminated in the publication of its Final Report in June 2023. The report contains 109 recommendations with the aim of improving services and supports for autistic people. A Sinn Féin government would commit to working towards the implementation of the recommendations contained within the report.

RESIDENTIAL PLACES AND DE-CONGREGATION

People with disabilities should have the right to live in accommodation that is appropriate to their needs. We have far too few residential places. This results in young people with disabilities living in nursing homes designed for the elderly and adults with disabilities in their childhood homes depending on their own, often elderly, parents to be their carers. People with disabilities, particularly intellectual disabilities, have also been residing in congregated settings for decades due to the application of the medical or charity model of disability.

The Disability Capacity Review – published in 2021 – forecasted that between 4,000 and 6,000 additional residential places would be needed by 2032 to both clear the backlog of need and respond to demographic change. This translated into approximately 330-500 additional places required per year.

Yet, the current government have delivered only an average of 175 additional places per annum, leaving a substantial shortfall. Sinn Féin would reverse the underfunding of residential places and deliver the services needed in line with need.

Sinn Féin would increase the availability of appropriate residential places, progress de-congregation to support independent living, and prioritise the transfer of younger people with disabilities who have been inappropriately placed in nursing homes.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Providing over 3,000 additional appropriate residential places

ADULT DAY SERVICES

Day Services offer support to people with disabilities on weekdays – the vast majority of service users have intellectual disabilities. These services are vital to them and to their families.

The 2021 Disability Capacity review had noted that 600 people were without a day service and likewise many more were in receipt of just a partial service. In addition, to meet rising demographic demand it was estimated that 2,500 to 10,200 additional day service places may be needed over the period 2020 to 2032. This would require 200 to 775 additional places per annum over the period 2025 to 2029 depending on the rate of exits. Children with additional needs should not reach the age of 18 and have nowhere to go. Sinn Féin would provide the necessary investment to meet the existing unmet need for adult day service places and future demographic need for these vital services.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Expanding the number of day services places by 4,000

RESPITE SERVICES

Respite plays a key role in supporting family carers and improving quality of life for a person with a disability. It can help prevent or at least delay full-time residential placements, preserving the family unit and supporting family stability.

However, many families get no respite at all. There is a significant level of unmet need. The Disability Capacity Review noted that in 2017, fewer than one in four people with an intellectual disability that live in the family home got access to any form of respite. For adults, one in three get respite.

The Action plan for Disability Services 2024-2026 forecasts that overall respite provision would need to increase by about one third including through daytime and overnight services by 2026.

In 2023, €106m was allocated for respite services.

Sinn Féin would double investment in respite services and capacity to address the substantial levels of unmet need and to meet rising need over a government term.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Doubling investment in respite services across to deliver a range of additional in-home, afterschool, day and overnight respite services

CARE IN THE HOME AND LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

Sinn Féin recognise the importance of home care for people with disabilities. We would substantially increase investment in home care alongside further investment in respite and adult day service places.

The 2021 Disability Capacity Review noted that the level of home support provision catered for just a fraction of the people with disabilities who experience difficulties with activities of everyday living and those who are provided with services often receive less hours than they need.

It recommended that by 2032 additional investment would be required to deliver the equivalent to over one million hours.

Yet, the government's Disability Action Plan 2024-2026 only commits to delivering an additional 110,000 hours for home support from 2024 to 2026, an average of just 37,000 additional hours per year. This is insufficient.

Sinn Féin would address the substantial levels of unmet need by delivering an additional 296,000 home care hours per annum. Over a government term, we would expand disability-supportive home care hours by 40% on 2023 levels.

We would further support care in the home by expanding the provision of intensive home support packages, which provide vital assistance for persons with complex disabilities and high support needs.

In 2023, 447 home support packages were issued by the HSE which is expected to reach 469 by end-2024. The Disability Action Plan 2024-2026 estimated that around 550 additional intensive support packages would need to be put in place by 2026 to cater to the existing unmet need for services.

Sinn Féin would expand the availability of home support packages to ensure there are adequate services in place for those in need.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Providing an additional 1.5 million disability home care hours including needs based access to intensive home support packages

CHILDREN'S DISABILITY SERVICES

Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) provide specialised support and services for children who have a disability and complex health needs associated with their disability. Children deserve timely assessment and intervention to give them the best chance at success. Early and ongoing assessment and intervention is key.

In August 2023, there were nearly 15,000 children on CDNT waiting lists waiting for an initial contact with their team, with around 10,000 of these children waiting over a year. At the end of Q1 2024, there were 9,924 children whose assessment of need was overdue, of whom 8,141 were overdue by more than three months, and possibly more than 12,000 overall outstanding assessments due to previous illegal assessments. Staff vacancy levels for CDNTs are extremely high, with over 800 vacancies reported in the October 2023 CDNT staffing census report.

Sinn Féin would develop a comprehensive workforce plan to fully staff CDNTs. We would streamline the recruitment process, double the number of undergraduate training places, and provide a job guarantee to health and social care graduates. In the absence of accessible public services, we would temporarily fund access to approved community and private psychology and therapy services until CDNTs are staffed appropriately to be able to carry these out.

CDNTs have been rolled out under the Progressing Disability Services model, which has been heavily criticised by professional organisations including the Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists, the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists, the Irish Association of Social Workers, the Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland, the Psychological Society, and the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute. These organisations have backed parents and disability rights campaigners in walking away from the government's policy steering group. The government has since reversed its policy to withdraw therapies from special schools, but neither decision was evidence-based.

Sinn Féin is committed to pursuing an evidence-based independent review of the service-delivery model, and to implementing a fit-for-purpose approach that works best for the children in need of services. It is essential that, under whichever model, services are properly staffed and that there are workforce plans in place to deliver safe services.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Developing a common, compliant, and efficient process for assessment of need under the Disability Act
- ➔ Conducting an evidence-based and independent review of the service delivery model for children's disability services.
- ➔ Developing and resourcing a comprehensive workforce plan to fully staff CDNTs, linked with community care and schools as appropriate
- ➔ Streamlining the recruitment process
- ➔ Providing a job guarantee to health and social care graduates

- ➔ Temporarily funding access to approved community and private psychology and therapy services, particularly for those waiting longest for assessments and intervention, with a view to phasing out reliance on private providers as we build public capacity
- ➔ Ending pay disparities between core service provider Section 39 organisations and the HSE*

*We provide funding for this measure and other workforce pay-related measures in an unallocated contingency fund totally more than €200m separate to the €829m allocated to this chapter on disability.

INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

Personal Assistance Services (PAS) provide people with the opportunity to exercise control and choice in their lives. In so doing, it enables people to be active participants within their families, communities, employment and society and therefore results in an overall improved quality of life.

According to the 2021 Disability Capacity Review, there is a 'substantial' unmet need for PAS. The review informed us that about 2,500 people get a PAS, averaging around 12 hours a week. Many people do not have any access to a PAS while many more who do have access have it only on a very limited basis.

The Disability Capacity Review recommended that by 2032, additional investment would be needed to provide for over 400,000 hours to accommodate demographic changes and begin tackling unmet need for PA services.

In 2023, there were 1.77 million PA hours provided. This represents an increase of just 70,000 hours from 2020, much lower than the modest targets under the Capacity Review and a far cry from the real levels of unmet need.

The Disability Action Plan provided a much more substantial target for additional PA hours after years of underinvestment in services by government. The Action Plan estimated that an additional 800,000 PA hours would be required from 2024 to 2026 – an average of 267,000 PA hours per year.

In government, Sinn Féin would double the number of PAS hours to better address the substantial unmet need for these services while accommodating demographic changes. This would see an additional 354,000 hours delivered per annum.

In addition, public transport systems must be made accessible and reliable for people with disabilities. Full inclusion in society hinges on this for many.

For others, private transport - whether as the driver or passenger in a car or taxi - is a necessity for participation in work, education and social activities. In 2013 the Motorised Transport Grant and Mobility Allowance were closed to new applicants and despite promises from the government parties have not been replaced. The remaining tax-relief based Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme is not fit for purpose.

Disabled Persons' Representative Organisations are led, run, directed, staffed, and mostly membered by disabled people and are distinct bodies separate from Disability Service Providers.

The UNCRPD states that DPROs are the bodies which should be consulted on matters relating to disability. However, these groups are mostly small with little or no resources.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Double PA hours over a term of government, increasing annually the number of PA hours by 354,000 hours.
- ➔ Delivering a capital programme to make all bus stations, train stations and platforms, and bus stops wheelchair accessible*
- ➔ Introducing tiered grant-based supports for the purchase, adaptation and operation of private cars and allowances for the use of taxis*
- ➔ Providing funding to DPROs for training and development
- ➔ Creating a Disability Inclusion Fund for all local authorities to support their specific disability inclusion requirements in line with the UNCRPD and Public Sector Duty*
- ➔ Implement the Autism Innovation Strategy and develop further policies that support neurodiversity.

*Measures marked with an * are separate from the funding totals outlined at the beginning of this Disability Chapter. Making transport accessible costs €102m capital, supports for private cars and taxis costs additional €19m and the Disability Inclusion Fund would be provided through a €7m increase to local government funding.

WIDER DISABILITY AND CARING PROPOSALS

Further to our additional provision for disability services, Sinn Féin has a wider package of measures to enable equal participation by people with disabilities across all aspects of life.

In the education chapter of this manifesto, we outline our proposals to increase special education provision to accommodate the projected increased demographic need. This includes increasing special education teachers by over 1,000 posts and Special Education Needs Assistants posts by over 1,300 each year over a government term. We also commit to extending the 'Fund for Students' with a Disability (FSD) so that it applies to all further education and training courses.

In our housing chapter, we highlight our proposals to expand investment in appropriate housing for persons with disabilities, by doubling grants for the adaptation of existing homes and delivering 9,000 new-build public housing units suitable for disabled people.

In our economic development chapter, we include proposals to support persons with disabilities to participate in employment, by expanding the Wage Subsidy Scheme and rolling-out career supports for young disabled people across the country based on the Walk PEER model.

In the social protection chapter of this manifesto, we outline our proposals to tackle the high rate of poverty and enforced deprivation faced by disabled people and to ensure carers are given the support and recognition they deserve. This includes our proposals to increase core disability-related social welfare supports by €70 per week over a government term, abolish the Carer's Allowance means test and various other measures.

ANEXE

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

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PROTECTING AND INVESTING IN COMMUNITIES

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POLICING AND JUSTICE

Ireland has seen 13 years of Fine Gael Justice Ministers, who despite paying lip service to law and order, have pursued policies of inaction. The legacy of Fine Gael in the Department of Justice has resulted in a crisis of morale and recruitment within An Garda Síochána, lengthy delays in the courts and dangerous overcrowding in prisons.

As a result, we have serious public order issues on our streets, with communities feeling unsafe and a Justice system which struggles to cope.

In government, Sinn Féin would ensure proper resourcing and planning across the entire Justice portfolio, allowing communities to reclaim a sense of safety. We would pursue evidence-based policies, reduce harm and restore public safety.

Gardaí would be returned to their proper roles, allowing them to focus on their duties and responsibility for combatting the causes of crime would be shared across the whole of government.

Sinn Féin's justice proposals focus on four main areas:

1. Effective Policing and Protecting Public Safety
2. Ensuring justice and rehabilitation
3. Supporting Human Rights and Law Reform
4. Tackling Domestic and Gender Based Violence

EFFECTIVE POLICING AND PROTECTING PUBLIC SAFETY

An Garda Síochána is facing an unprecedented crisis in recruitment and retention. A record 169 resignations took place in 2023 and the latest figures for 2024 show little improvement. The shortage of gardaí has left members stretched and at risk. Many gardaí have spoken of the negative cycle of stress and demoralisation. If these cycles continue, it will likely drive further resignations – up until 31st July this year, 88 people had already resigned.

While a total of 6,381 people applied for the 2024 Garda trainee competition, the number of trainee Gardaí recruited tends to fall far short of the numbers who apply. The reasons for this must be identified, examined and addressed.

The crisis in policing has seen attacks on Gardaí and unprecedeted scenes of rioting and criminality in Dublin, with other villages, towns and cities also seeing significant and high-profile attacks. Communities feel at risk and businesses, workers and tourists have all expressed concerns about safety.

The public deserve a policing service that they can have confidence in. People want to know when anti-social behaviour and crime do occur there would be a quick and effective Garda response. That requires a well-resourced and supported force.

In government, Sinn Féin would commence the largest garda recruitment drive in the history of the state, recruiting between 900-1,000 guards each year rising to 1,500. The existing Garda Training College at Templemore has an intake capacity of 1,000. Sinn Féin would establish a second college with a capacity of 500 recruits. We would build garda numbers beyond the current government target. Aiming for a 16,000-strong force.

To achieve this, we would introduce retention measures, including an increase in the garda trainee allowance to €397 per week and the creation of a Garda Retention Taskforce. Sinn Féin's increase in the trainee allowance would go further than the government's increase in Budget 2025, which has been criticised by the general secretary of the Garda Representative Association as inadequate.

Sinn Féin propose investing an additional €196m of annual current expenditure and an additional €19m capital beyond pre-committed funding over a term of government in order to shore up Garda numbers.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ The establishment of a second Garda Training College with an annual intake capacity of 500 recruits
- ➔ Recruiting 900-1,000 guards each year over the lifetime of government rising to 1,500 once the second Garda Training College has been opened and increase the garda trainee allowance to €397 per week
- ➔ Establishing a Garda Recruitment and Retention Taskforce to report back promptly on the underlying reasons for the recruitment and retention crisis
- ➔ Progressing Sinn Féin's National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) (Amendment) Bill 2022, to create a "Safe Pass" like system for Garda vetting processes

RURAL CRIME

Rural communities across the country have felt the impact of cutbacks in policing. Cuts in garda numbers, the number of garda stations and garda resources has had a negative effect on our rural areas.

We need a government that is serious about tackling rural crime.

According to figures released by the CSO, incidences of robbery were up 18% in the first quarter of 2024, compared with the same period last year. A further survey carried out by TU Dublin in 2023 found that 55% of farmers were victims of theft.

These statistics highlight the prevalence of crime, particularly in our rural communities.

We need a change of government to ensure that there are enough gardaí on the street and patrolling in rural communities and on country roads.

Sinn Féin's priorities include:

- ➔ Increasing Garda numbers in rural areas, as part of our overall investment in retention and recruitment.
- ➔ Investing in restorative justice to respond to crime in communities.
- ➔ Legislating in the area of Community CCTV schemes to clarify who is responsible for administration and data management.
- ➔ Legislating to reform Joint Policing Committees (JCPs) to ensure they have greater powers, functions and resources to reflect rural policing priorities.

ENSURING JUSTICE AND REHABILITATION

Crime does not take place in a vacuum. Sinn Féin believes strongly that public safety is a whole of government responsibility. The victims of crime must be assured that justice will be done and be seen to be done, and that penalties and rehabilitation operate in tandem. Accordingly, Sinn Féin would significantly invest in services and initiatives to improve the functioning of elements of the Justice system.

Sinn Féin proposes to increase funding for the administration of justice by €51.2m to deliver on our priorities.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Increasing new Youth Diversion Projects and expanding age eligibility
- ➔ Doubling investment in Restorative Justice Programmes and implementing Sinn Féin's Criminal Justice (Promotion of Restorative Justice) (Amendment) Bill 2023
- ➔ Increasing funding to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Courts Service and for Legal Aid
- ➔ Increasing funding to the prison service
- ➔ Reviewing the Community Safety Innovation Fund to ensure communities that are harmed most by criminality see proceeds of those crimes returned to them

CLAMPING DOWN ON FINANCIAL FRAUD AND SCAMS

In recent years we have seen an alarming increase in fraud and scams. Whether it is online, by text message or email, fraudsters are targeting citizens with fraudulent content to steal their money.

Citizens are being robbed of millions of euros each year by fraudsters. Despite this, there is no plan from the current government to tackle this growing threat.

Inaction is leaving citizens increasingly vulnerable. ComReg does not have the capacity to detect and stem the actions of fraudsters, banks are being prevented from sharing fraud data, social media giants continue to allow fraudulent content they host on their platforms, and An Garda Síochána are under-resourced to tackle this criminal activity.

Sinn Féin would get to grips with this growing threat and protect people from these forms of fraud.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Establishing a multi-annual strategy and taskforce to tackle financial fraud and scams
- ➔ Introducing legislation to establish a Shared Fraud Database to enable banks and An Garda Síochána to share real-time information to detect fraud and protect consumers
- ➔ Holding online platforms and social media companies that host fraudulent adverts to account by categorising fraudulent content as harmful online material and imposing financial penalties against online platforms that knowingly fail to remove this harmful content
- ➔ Introducing legislation to empower the Communications Regulator to prevent fraudsters from abusing the mobile and telephone network
- ➔ Requiring banks to introduce a name-checking system to ensure fraudsters cannot receive money under false identities and require banks to compensate victims of fraud where they fail to take this required action
- ➔ Increase resources and law enforcement agencies by recruiting more Gardaí to enhance their capabilities for investigating financial crimes

ADDRESSING HISTORIC INJUSTICE

As an internationalist and anti-imperialist party, Sinn Féin is committed to human rights and equality. A number of historical wrongs by the state must be corrected urgently, and outdated legislation on the statute books must be removed.

Almost 40 percent, or 24,000 survivors have been left behind by the government's Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme. It is estimated that 58,208 mothers and children passed through one of Ireland's Mother and Baby homes. This is the total number of people Sinn Féin would support in our proposed amendment to the government's redress scheme.

The current discriminatory payment structure and hierarchy of suffering does a great disservice to so many courageous women and men who have fought for so long to have their voices heard, and their egregious human rights abuses recognised and compensated.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Urgently introducing disregard legislation based on the recommendations of the Final Report of the Department of Justice Working Group on Disregard Legislation
- ➔ Drafting legislation to implement the findings of the Offences Against the State Act review
- ➔ Establishing judicial inquiries into cases such as Shane O'Farrell, Sallins and Terence Wheelock
- ➔ Issuing a state apology to the family of Captain James Kelly
- ➔ Legislate to allow for solicitors to assist with Enduring Powers of Attorney applications to the Decision Support Service.
- ➔ Include excluded 24,000 survivors (0-6 months babies) in Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

Fire and rescue services play a crucial role in ensuring community safety on a 24/7 basis.

These dedicated professionals are always on the front lines, ready to respond to emergencies immediately. Fire and rescue services are responsible for more than just putting out fires; Dublin Fire Brigade also provide critical medical assistance, assist, and conduct search and rescue operations, and all offer fire prevention and safety education to children and young people.

We acknowledge both full-time and retained fire and rescue services' unwavering commitment to protecting lives and keeping our communities safe.

While it is widely accepted that the Retained Fire Service (RFF) is a broken model, there has been a lack of political will within successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael governments to engage with the Retained Fire Fighters and their representative bodies to try and find a solution to the challenges that the service and its fire fighters face.

Furthermore, the top-heavy nature of current structures alongside the often overly bureaucratic processes imposed by the LGMA and Department of Local Government have led to a lowering of morale and indeed are counterproductive to creating an efficient and fit for purpose service that keeps our communities safe.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Establishing a cross-party Joint Oireachtas Committee in order to conduct a full and independent review of how the national fire service is delivered across the state which includes examination of a new single national fire authority
- ➔ Utilising the public sector pay agreement contingency fund to urgently intervene to increase the fixed incomes of retained firefighters and to help retain and recruit staff in order to build a fit for purpose service

- ➔ Maintaining capital funding ceilings to ensure these dedicated professionals have the necessary equipment and training facilities to respond to current and future risks
- ➔ Examine the impact of fast accrual pensions changes made by Fine Gael and Labour which are now acting as a disincentive to hiring new recruits
- ➔ Fully resource full-time services so that they can acquire and maintain fire appliances that are needed to deliver a fully functioning fire and rescue services in our cities and urban cores

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

Sinn Féin will stand up for working class and rural communities.

Our communities are the cornerstone of our society and for too long too many have been left behind.

Many of the core funding Budget lines on which the community and voluntary sector depend have yet to recover to their 2008 levels after which extremely deep austerity cuts were imposed. This is particularly so in the case of SICAP/local development, youth organisations and the community services programme.

Sinn Féin wants to grow community resources, including youth services. Overall investment in youth services has been at the same level as it was in 2008, which represents a significant lack of investment. Ireland's growing population and level of need have outstripped the degree of investment. In advance of Budget 2025, Foróige made a series of proposals for increasing youth investment, which Sinn Féin endorse and would fully provide for.

Young people should have more spaces to meet including youth cafés, as well as school and community facilities out of hours. We want all our young people to have high-quality youth services and would prioritise investment in this area.

Sinn Féin also recognises the lack of funding for programmes such as SICAP and LEADER, which are vital for communities. We would restore funding for such programmes, putting the needs of communities first. We would also increase funding for family resource centres.

Sinn Féin will stand up for communities and strengthen their resources in key areas such as sport, youth investment and integration. We would put €1bn of the Apple Tax money into a communities fund to invest in working class communities that have been left behind by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. This fund would be established in 2025 and would provide 100% funding that sports clubs, community organisations and others in working class communities can apply for. The Fund would come under the Department of Community and Rural Affairs and be administered by local authorities.

Aside from the €1bn of Apple Tax monies, over a term of government Sinn Féin proposes to increase annual funding across these priorities by €79.2m and providing €101m of capital funding beyond existing pre-commits.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Increasing funding for youth services including capital investment
- ➔ Increasing funding for programmes such as SICAP and LEADER
- ➔ Increasing funding for family resource centres, men's sheds, community centres, public participation networks and the community services programme
- ➔ Creation and delivery of a €1bn Apple Tax Community Investment Fund

SPORT

Sinn Féin would also significantly invest in sport, striving to increase participation and make our population healthier, stronger and more robust.

Ireland is increasingly a more difficult country for young people to grow up in. The provision of sporting activities faces mounting pressure for both providers and participants as the cost-of-living escalates.

Participation in sport is key to building a healthier population and in fostering a sense of community.

Sinn Féin also acknowledges the link between investment in sport and the reduction of child poverty. We believe that sport can play an important role in improving the lives of our young people and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

Given the many benefits of sport, it should be properly invested in. Eurostat figures showed that we had one of the worst ratios of GDP to sport and recreation. Sinn Féin would reverse this trend.

In government, we would introduce a new Activity Card scheme to improve the lives of young people. The card would set in place the measures required to increase Ireland's international standing in the areas of sport, arts and culture and it would have a positive effect on our children's quality of life and wellbeing.

The scheme would provide all children in primary and secondary school with an annual Activity Card to the value of €130, to be used on participating in sport or arts activities.

Successive governments have talked about a 'National Sports Facilities Strategy', but none have gone so far as to develop and deliver one. Sinn Féin would introduce this strategy.

With increased resources to the Large-Scale-Sports-Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF), we would also radically improve our sports facilities.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Providing every child aged four to 18 with an annual Activity Card worth €130 to spend on extra-curricular sports or arts activities costing €126.8m
- ➔ Developing a National Sports Facilities Strategy and increasing funding for the LSSIF with an additional capital injection of €55m

- Rolling out a Euro 2028 Advance Legacy Fund of €50m and supporting the development of the League of Ireland with additional annual funding of €10m for grassroots football
- Modernising outdated local sports facilities across the state
- Increasing core funding for sport's national governing bodies and local sports partnerships by €1.5m
- Increasing the Betting Tax Levy by 1%, raising €49m





ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE AND ENERGY TIMPEALLAHT, AN AERÁID AGUS FUINNEAMH

Sinn Féin has a plan to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss while delivering a better quality of life for workers and families. With a Sinn Féin government, Ireland's green revolution will deliver lasting change for the betterment of Irish society.

Ireland must play its part. However, decades of inaction, bad planning and mismanagement by successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael governments have resulted in Ireland's status as a climate laggard and has squandered our incredible renewables potential.

The EPA have indicated that Ireland is on course to overshoot its 2030 climate targets.

The Green Party, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's punitive approach is not only failing to deliver, but is also producing deeply inequitable outcomes. Regressive measures that prioritise eco-austerity over just transition produce growing resentment and fear amongst ordinary people and fail to leverage climate action.

There is a better, fairer way.

FUNDING THE TRANSITION: FROM ECO-AUSTERITY TO CLIMATE JUSTICE

Sinn Féin would transform the state's approach to climate action, from where public investment is directed to how the transition is funded.

The causes and effects of climate change are not equally shared. The richest 10% account for some 50% of emissions.

The causes of climate change are not shared equally, and the financing of climate action should take account of that.

However, the government's climate action approach has become synonymous with reduced standards of living, hitting the lowest income households hardest. Indiscriminate carbon taxes not only place a disproportionate burden on those for whom alternatives are either unaffordable or unattainable, but fundamentally fail in deterring the greatest emitters.

The PSO levy is another regressive climate action financing lever. The PSO supports the roll-out of renewables by subsidising the generation of electricity from sustainable sources, charged to end consumers. Despite large energy users disproportionately driving up energy demand, the distribution of the levy means that their PSO contribution is relatively low and households shoulder a heavier burden. Sinn Féin would reverse this.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Targeting environmental taxes on excessive consumption through a pollution tax on private jets
- ➔ Reforming the PSO levy to one levied on total demand rather than peak demand, changing the flat-rate levy to a progressive charge.
- ➔ Resourcing the National Just Transition Fund

ACCELERATING THE GREEN TRANSITION: FROM IMPORT DEPENDENCE TO ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

Sinn Féin would accelerate the transition to renewable energy, transforming the state from import dependence to energy independence.

Ireland imports 81.6% of our energy, 85.8% of which is composed of fossil fuels making us one of the most fossil fuel dependent economies in Europe. This leaves us excessively exposed to the vagaries of the international energy market.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine sparked a fossil fuel crisis which sent gas prices soaring. The dependence of Ireland's power system on natural gas, coupled with a dysfunctional energy market, resulted in electricity bills doubling.

To protect our economy against volatility while reducing emissions and household bills, we must produce more renewables here.

Successive governments - including the most recent coalition - have failed to develop our renewables at the pace and scale required. From fundamental flaws in planning to infrastructural deficits including in our grid and ports, Ireland lags behind while other EU states forge ahead. Sinn Féin would change this.

REFORMING IRELAND'S BROKEN PLANNING SYSTEM

Ireland's planning system is slow, adversarial and full of uncertainty.

On average, renewables projects are stuck in the planning system for 92 weeks. Last year, there was a period of 14 months where no new projects were approved.

The government failed to resource the planning system properly, resulting in repeated delays in the assessment of planning applications.

The government's Planning and Development Act 2024 will make matters worse and must be amended. They rushed through this important piece of legislation, leaving insufficient time for debate and amendment. This costly mistake will exacerbate delays.

The delays in planning are echoed in Ireland's renewable energy auctions. The failure to stick to timelines mean most offshore wind projects will not be active until after 2030. This jeopardises our energy security and will almost certainly mean missing our climate targets.

The uncertainty of Ireland's market has meant that, even when auctions are held, they deliver far less than the government's procurement targets and have a cost far outstripping our EU peers.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- A review of workforce planning and increased resourcing to our state bodies involved in environmental planning including MARA, ABP, Local Authorities and the NWPS
- Developing and adhering to clear auction timelines
- Improving spatial planning by implementing the EU's Renewable Energy Directive III
- Publication of Wind Energy Guidelines and the adoption of a 'plan led' approach to energy development
- Reviewing lifetime planning permissions for any new onshore wind farm to assess alignment with the operational lifetime of the grid connection as set by the CRU
- A policy for the repowering of existing wind projects, under the Contracts for Difference model
- Resourcing existing renewable energy task forces and establishing a new task force to reduce the cost of renewable energy

TACKLING GRID CONSTRAINTS

Ireland's existing electricity grid is not fit for purpose. It is barely managing to cope with its current load and it is certainly not equipped to facilitate renewable energy at the scale needed to achieve Ireland's energy security.

Grid constraints prevent the full use of our existing renewable energy, and also prevent more renewables from being connected.

There are approximately 1,000 MW of onshore wind projects – with full planning permission – that will likely never be built because the nearest grid connection is not strong enough.

Through our €2.5bn Renewable Energy Fund, Sinn Féin would substantially increase investment in our energy grid to facilitate our renewable energy potential.

We also must address Ireland's ballooning data centre demand. While data centres are crucial for modern digital life, the rate at which they are driving up electricity demand is unsustainable. They consumed 21% of Ireland's electricity in 2023, up a fifth from 2022. By rolling out the red carpet for data centres, without adequate safeguards in place, the government parties have again proven their prioritisation of corporate interests over Ireland's energy security and affordability.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Increased investment in grid expansion and upgrade
- ➔ Enhancing off-grid connectivity including the development of a national energy storage strategy, investment in energy storage and establishing peer to peer 'Energy Sharing' initiatives
- ➔ Development of a coherent industrial strategy for all renewable technologies
- ➔ Introduce planning conditions that require prospective very high energy users to produce or contribute financially to the production of additional renewable electricity at least equal to their needs at any given time, ending tax relief to data centres
- ➔ Expediting the delivery of a framework for hybrid connections which could let multiple renewable projects join to the grid via one connection aiding the pace of delivery and lowering costs.

INVESTING IN IRELAND'S PORT INFRASTRUCTURE

As it stands, there is only one port on this island - Belfast Port - with the capacity to deliver offshore wind infrastructure. However, its capacity is dominated by British projects. No other port on the island is ready for offshore wind.

Ireland needs at least two ports to come anywhere close to our 5GW ambition for 2030.

Through our Renewable Energy Investment Fund, Sinn Féin would invest in our ports enabling them to facilitate the delivery of our offshore energy goals.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Investing in Strategic port development to facilitate the construction and maintenance of offshore wind farms at scale
- ➔ Working with the executive in the North to increase the use of Belfast port for offshore energy projects on this island

TRANSFORMING OUR NATURAL RESOURCES: FROM PRIVATE GAIN TO NATIONAL WEALTH

The transition to renewable energy does not, in itself, result in gains being passed on to Irish society - only with wholesale reform can we ensure that our renewable resources are used for the benefit of all. We would reorient the energy market away from excessive private profiteering and rising bills and towards increased democratic ownership, affordable energy and an energy market that serves the common good.

EXPANDING PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF RENEWABLES

The vast majority of renewable energy procured under RESS contracts is privately owned or publicly owned by other states. Norway's state-owned Statkraft and France's EDF own more of our offshore resources than we do. Even more of our renewable resources are owned by private corporations.

Sinn Féin would change this by leveraging the public investment needed for decarbonisation to expand the role of state ownership in our renewable energy system.

Sinn Féin's new €2.5bn Renewable Energy Investment Fund would allow the state to take equity investments in joint-venture renewable energy projects with state-owned enterprises and private companies. State-owned funds investing in renewable energy have expanded rapidly in recent years, with Norway's sovereign wealth fund alone acquiring equity stakes in over 3.5 GW of renewable projects across Europe.

We would also expand the role of our state-owned bodies already involved in renewable generation, including ESB, Bord na Móna and Coillte. We would revise their governance mechanisms and financial capacity to invest directly and in joint ventures via our Renewable Energy Fund.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Establishing a Renewable Energy Investment scheme to expand state-owned equity in renewables
- ➔ Revising the existing legislative mandates, governance mechanisms and dividend policy of our state bodies to increase their contribution to renewable energy targets

EXPANDING DOMESTIC AND COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

The drive towards renewables offers individual households opportunities to own and benefit from energy generation. Solar PV enables households to generate electricity for self-consumption and helps reduce household bills significantly. The excess energy that is provided back to the grid should be leveraged to reduce household energy bills.

The current government has failed to harness the full potential of domestic solar PV. Their policy locks out ordinary workers and families, offering the same grants to a millionaire as those on the minimum wage. Sinn Féin would overhaul the Solar PVs funding model so that grant supports are tiered by household income to ensure equitable access.

We would ensure that the roll-out of household renewable energy is scaled up, sped up and distributed equitably. We would increase capital investment in domestic solar PV. This could see 360,000 homes installed with Solar PV by 2030.

Sinn Féin would scale up local and community-owned renewables to at least 10% of new renewable capacity by 2030. Community projects ensure that the wealth generated is retained, recirculated and reinvested locally and tend to generate levels of social acceptance for energy projects. We would offset the additional costs of community owned renewables to protect affordability by increasing direct exchequer funding.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Significantly expanding domestically owned renewables and reforming how domestic solar is funded, targeted and delivered
- ➔ Increasing investment in community energy and targeting of 10% of new renewables capacity to be community / locally owned by 2030

REFORMING THE ENERGY MARKET AND CHARGES - MAXIMISING AFFORDABILITY

Ireland's electricity prices are the most expensive in the EU, with households paying 55% more than the European average. These extortionate costs expose fundamental flaws in our energy system. As people are being asked to move more to electricity, we need to have confidence that they are not being ripped off. Sinn Féin are committed to a reform of the electricity system to make it more affordable and equitable.

While the indigenous generation of renewable energy will be a prerequisite of reducing the cost of electricity here, this will not, in isolation, fix a system that is ultimately broken. As long as energy is treated as a commodity for private gain rather than as a basic necessity and public good, the price will remain unreasonably high here.

Sinn Féin would deliver the wholesale change necessary to make energy affordable in a system that prioritises fairness over the corporate balance sheet. Our plan includes measures to reform the various market defects that drive up the cost of energy here - from the regressive way taxes and levies are currently distributed to the excessive commercialisation of energy. Sinn Féin would reorient Ireland's energy system towards fairness, transparency, and affordability, ensuring energy companies are held to account and that ordinary workers and families feel the benefit of the renewables transition in their pockets.

Wholesale fuel prices are the biggest contributor to the cost of Ireland's high electricity, comprising 55-60% of total costs. Significantly, Ireland's wholesale electricity price is particularly sensitive to the price of gas due to the EU's merit order system.

Under this system the most expensive power source determines the price received by all generators. Following the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, the price of gas sky-rocketed prompting price rises in all fuels - including in renewables. Energy generators were therefore facilitated in making off into the sunset with windfall profits while households were crippled with sky high bills. This must change. A just transition requires that ordinary workers and families feel the benefits of moving toward lower cost renewable generation.

The decision to sell off Ireland's electricity system has also put upward pressure on prices. 96% of Ireland's generation capacity used to be publicly owned. At that time, every household was provided electricity on a not-for-profit basis and, as a result, Irish prices were some of the lowest in Europe. Now, when state-ownership has reduced to a third and is operated on a for profit basis, prices are at some of their highest. Sinn Féin would tackle the excessive commercialisation of this basic necessity,

by ending the unnecessary separation of generation and supply in publicly owned facilities and re-introducing affordable energy supply, ensuring that electricity prices come down.

Beyond these broad structural reforms, Sinn Féin would distribute the costs of maintaining the grid and the renewables transition equitably. We would reverse Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's regressive approach which places a disproportionate burden on ordinary workers and families. Large energy users such as data centres must be required to pay their fair share and move away from fixed charges under the PSO levy and network costs.

Finally, we would also level the playing field in the energy market. Sinn Féin would ensure energy companies are held to account, preventing them from making windfall profits by engaging in anti-competitive behaviour and price gouging through enhanced regulatory powers.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Reforming the energy system to deliver energy as a public good
- Legislating to remove the mandated separation of ESB's generation and supply arms.
- Introducing a public-led facility to procure more stable and affordable electricity prices from generators for supply to households and communities
- Expanding the role of funding from the Exchequer to finance renewable energy generation and grid development while alleviating household bills
- Reforming the PSO levy, Network Charges and other taxes to ensure costs are shared equitably
- Enhancing the power of the regulator to monitor and regulate hedging practices, to sanction anti-competitive behaviour and prioritise energy affordability

A FAIRER RETROFIT PLAN

Sinn Féin would radically transform the National Retrofit plan to ensure it delivers our climate targets while alleviating energy poverty.

Sinn Féin would invest €7bn in government to expand retrofitting and target it where it is most needed.

The government's approach is deeply inefficient and regressive, constituting little more than a wealth transfer.

Sinn Féin would radically reform how retrofitting is funded, targeted and delivered. 75% of the funding would be directed at those on low and modest incomes so that achieving our climate targets goes hand in hand with alleviating energy poverty and social deprivation.

Our tiered grants approach would provide different levels of public funding depending on households income, so the more help you need, the more help you get. Our greater use of area-based roll-out would deliver cost-efficiencies and expedite delivery.

We propose a specific scheme for households relying on solid fuels - often the coldest homes with the highest emissions.

In addition, Sinn Féin would prioritise and resource greater investment by local authorities in the retrofitting of their housing stock.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Overhauling the national retrofit programme so that more ordinary householders can afford to access retrofitting
- ➔ Establishing a new tiered grants-based retro-fit scheme for low and middle income households in place of the Warmer Home Scheme and providing a substantial increase in Capital investment of 1.5 billion for the deep retrofit of over 100,000 homes
- ➔ Expanding the retrofitting of local authority homes with an additional capital investment of €850 million over a government term for the deep retrofit of over 44,000 social homes
- ➔ Establishing a dedicated scheme for the retrofitting of solid fuel homes with capital investment of €750 million over a government term to provide deep retrofits for over 30,000 homes.
- ➔ Establishing a dedicated scheme for heat pumps to shift the fuel source of deep retrofitted homes.

ADDRESSING THE CRISIS IN BIODIVERSITY: PROTECTING AND RESTORING NATURE

Sinn Féin value Ireland's unique biodiversity and we know that the vibrant greens of Ireland's landscape mask the loss we are experiencing.

The recent Citizens Assembly on biodiversity argued that successive governments failed to adequately fund, implement and enforce existing national and EU legislation and policy. An urgent change of government is needed.

Sinn Féin will treat the crisis in biodiversity with the urgency and gravity required.

As with our broader climate policy, we believe that the state should lead by example in driving the necessary reforms. Our public bodies should be at the forefront of biodiversity restoration, furthering our environmental aims while expanding public access to our natural amenities.

While the government has offered very little to no support to those farmers and rural communities who are being asked to make changes, Sinn Féin would ensure that support comes first by establishing a dedicated nature restoration fund.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Establishing a dedicated €300m nature restoration fund
- ➔ Expansion and restoration of our national parks and native woodlands through €2m additional current expenditure and €60m of capital beyond what has been pre-committed
- ➔ Expedited delivery of a Marine Protected Areas Bill

CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

The collective effort to ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’ is key to achieving a circular economy and to reducing waste. However, the government is failing to make the right progress.

When it comes to waste collection, Ireland is an outlier in a European context. Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party’s reliance on excessive privatisation in a highly unregulated sector has produced a system which punishes people for doing the right thing and prioritises private profit over ordinary householders and the environment.

Sinn Féin would bring the bins back under public control via a franchise model following the example of many of our European neighbours.

We would also introduce measures to hold corporations to account when it comes to their waste management practices. It should not be one rule for us, another for them.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Putting waste collection under the control of local authorities starting with a pilot scheme of the franchise model with Dublin City Council
- ➔ New measures to ban the practice of corporations dumping new and unused goods
- ➔ Legislating for larger retailers to be compelled to donate unsold food rather than dumping it
- ➔ Establishing a task force to minimise construction and demolition waste and an accompanying inspection scheme





SOCIAL WELFARE AND PENSIONS

LEAS SÓISIALTA AGUS PIN SIN

At different stages in our lives, we all face financial worries whether we have a baby on the way, have been affected by illness or disability, are facing a stint without employment or are en route to retirement; we all need the social protection system to be there for us at some point.

Sinn Féin want to make sure that, if and when these days come, our social welfare system is robust enough and that payment rates are adequate in order to offer real protection and peace of mind.

We would remove the political football from welfare rates and ensure all rates are adequate. In 2020, Sinn Féin proposed legislation in the Dáil to establish a Social Welfare Adequacy Commission.

A principal function of this commission would be to examine the minimum income required by different types of households in receipt of social welfare to secure a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL). The commission would make associated annual recommendations to the Minister on the adjustments to social welfare rates of payment that should be made. The commission would use evidence like the annual reports from the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) in order to ensure that all social welfare rates are adequate, and its membership would include representation from those impacted by budgetary decisions.

In government, Sinn Féin would target increases at those deepest in poverty. We would be guided by the objective of ensuring that payments ultimately reach a MESL while also ensuring higher payment rates beyond a MESL for persons on certain schemes to recognise the lifetime contribution of pensioners, the unpaid work of caring and the additional cost of disability.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Establishing a Social Welfare Adequacy Commission to provide objective, evidence based annual recommendations on adjustments to payment rates
- ➔ Retaining the Department of the Taoiseach's Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office to help tackle child poverty

SOCIAL WELFARE

Sinn Féin proposes to increase the Department of Social Protection's budget by €6bn over the term of government.

Child poverty is one of the greatest challenges facing Ireland. It is an issue that the government have failed to grapple with. Figures from the 2023 CSO SILC survey indicate that by age group, persons aged under 18 years had the highest risk of poverty, with one in seven people aged under 18 years at risk.

Children in households whose income is dependent on social welfare experience the highest gap in income relative to meeting a MESL. However, not all children in poverty are in social welfare dependent households. Sinn Féin would therefore use a range of policy levers to assist us in tackling child poverty, including a combination of increases to the Qualified Child Payment and Child Benefit. In addition, our wider investment in public services would reduce costs and improve living standards for families across the state.

Year after year, the CSO's Survey on Income and Living Conditions demonstrates that poverty rates are disproportionately high amongst lone parents and their children. To meet a MESL, an additional €50 would be needed for the One Parent Family Payment.

Households headed by a person with a disability face the highest rates of enforced deprivation in the state. Having a disability gives rise to extra costs and therefore a higher income is required to achieve the same standard of living as a person without a disability. To begin to recognise some of this additional cost we propose increasing disability related payment rates by €20 beyond what is required to achieve a MESL.

We also recognise the urgent need to eliminate barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Sinn Féin's proposed reforms to our health system include a full and secure medical card for disabled people that cannot be lost where a person takes up employment. We would also expand the Wage Subsidy Scheme to support those with disabilities to participate in employment.

The government has proposed a new Pay-Related Jobseeker's Benefit System to be introduced in late March 2025. This decision from government comes after long term calls from Sinn Féin to reform the social welfare system to ensure that it is a fairer system for all.

In 2022, Sinn Féin published a policy document on *Reforming Ireland's Social Welfare System* which proposed to transition social insurance payments from a flat rate to a percentage of previous earnings; this would ensure that workers who have paid into the system are treated fairly and protected from a sudden push towards poverty. The government was forced to listen and forced into action by Sinn Féin here, but they must do far more in this respect.

Sinn Féin proposes linking the rate of Carers Benefit to a percentage of previous earnings, as is the norm in many other countries. This would ensure that those who leave work to care for a loved one also do not experience a sudden collapse in income.

Evidence tells us children do better when they spend their first year of life with a parent. Maternity Benefit is currently available for just 26 weeks, Paternity Benefit for two weeks and Parent's Benefit for nine weeks per parent. Sinn Féin would invest over €100m to ensure that 52 weeks of leave is covered so that children can be with a parent for the first year of their life, including one-parent families.

There are many working families struggling to cover their heating bills and to keep the lights on, yet they do not qualify for Fuel Allowance. This scheme must be expanded.

Sinn Féin priorities include*:

- ➔ Increasing One-parent Family Payment by €50
- ➔ Increasing the QCI for children under 12 years by €12.50 and for over 12s by €25 respectively
- ➔ Increasing the rate of Child Benefit by €25.
- ➔ Increasing the age limit for the One-Parent Family Payment to 12 years and increasing the age-limit of the Jobseeker's Transitional payment to 15
- ➔ Increasing Disability Allowance, the Blind Pension and Invalidity Pension by €70
- ➔ Securing medical cards for people with disabilities that are not impacted by employment status and expanding the Wage Subsidy Scheme

- ➔ Increasing the annual Carer's Support Grant by €50 each year
- ➔ Introducing pay-related Carers Benefit
- ➔ Increasing the Domiciliary Care Allowance by €50
- ➔ Extending parents benefit so that a child can be minded by their parent for the first year of their life
- ➔ Expanding Fuel Allowance eligibility to include recipients of Working Family Payment

* All increases are on top of rates scheduled for 2025 unless specified otherwise

ABOLISHING THE MEANS-TEST FOR CARERS

Carers are the backbone of our society. Every day they look after and care for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

The Carers Allowance means test needs to be abolished and, in government, Sinn Féin would get rid of the means test over a term of government.

In Budget 2025, we saw tokenistic measures for carers from government. Carers show extraordinary dedication but under this government they feel that they are not seen, not heard and the vital work they do is not recognised by the state. Caring is work, done with love, saving the state billions annually and for many a life beneath the poverty line is the thanks they get.

Abolishing the means-test is also a strategic intervention. In Ireland, we are fortunate to have large numbers of family carers. We cannot take that for granted. Across the developed world, more and more governments and societies are facing up to pressures on their social care systems, including nursing home care. Most people wish to be cared for at home, and that is what their families want for them at home.

Sinn Féin will listen to carers and give carers the support and recognition that they deserve.

In their latest budget the government pushed carers to the back of the queue by making them wait six months longer than everyone else for very modest improvements to the system.

It's unfair that Carers Allowance is means tested, it excludes thousands of carers, and the means test should be abolished. Sinn Féin would deliver an end to the means test and would deliver that over the course of a term in government.

The cost of this commitment will vary depending on the number of new recipients who become eligible, their age and family profile when the means-test is abolished. We are providing €1.038bn to abolish the means-test and increase the payment rate.

Sinn Féin priorities include*:

- ➔ Abolishing the means test for Carers Allowance and increasing the weekly rate by €60

* All increases are on top of rates scheduled for 2025 unless specified otherwise

PENSIONS

Sinn Féin believes that everyone has the right to grow old in Ireland with dignity, security, and equality. The reality for many of our older citizens under Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is that they now face additional taxes and charges, they cannot rely on the health service, and they have to struggle daily to heat their homes and meet their bills.

In 2011, the Labour Party and Fine Gael government, with the support of Fianna Fáil, introduced the legislation to increase the pension age to 66 in 2014, which was then due to rise to 67 in 2021 and 68 by 2028. Sinn Féin opposed the legislation then and continue to oppose it now. The government has since partly repealed the legislation that had provided for the age increases beyond the age of 66, but it remains at too high an age. Sinn Féin will continue to campaign for the right to retire at 65 on a pension for those who wish to do so.

In 2021, Sinn Féin brought forward a Dáil motion calling for the immediate reinstatement of the State Pension Transition for those who retire at 65. However, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael voted against it.

We now have the farcical situation where a person who retires at 65 years, when they are typically contractually obliged to retire, cannot access their State Pension. Instead, they are forced onto the 'Benefit Payment for 65-Year-Olds' at a loss of €45.30 a week for a single person.

In government, Sinn Féin would restore the right to retire at 65 by re-introducing the state pension (transition) payment.

Sinn Féin also brought forward a bill to end mandatory retirement where workers wish to remain at work beyond 65 years. In government, we would progress this bill and make it law.

Sinn Féin supports the principle of auto-enrolment and have been consistent in advocating for the introduction of an auto-enrolment scheme.

With more older people relying on the State Pension in retirement, it is essential that we get Auto Enrolment right to ensure the State Pension is supplemented and to offer greater financial security in retirement.

We have two primary objections to the government's proposed auto-enrolment scheme.

First, we oppose any attempts for contributions to be collected and handed over to the private pension industry. We believe that the management and investment of funds collected must have the dual purpose of appreciating citizen's contributions and be directed towards the state's long term economic, social and environmental development.

In our submission back in 2018, we proposed that the state should play a lead role at the heart of the auto enrolment scheme, and we had proposed that the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) would be central to this in managing these funds and investing them to the benefit of Citizens over the long term.

We would mandate the NTMA to prioritise the financial security of citizens' contributions while ensuring the funds are put to work for Ireland by investing in green energy and housing projects. Public oriented funds have been successfully developed in various European states, including Italy's CDP.

Secondly, we oppose the government provision that low-paid workers, currently struggling under the high cost of living, will not be allowed to opt-out and reclaim part of their wages for a whole six months.

A worker earning €20,000 a year would be down roughly €5.76 per week and over €300 annually. At a time of a cost-of-living crisis we do not believe that the mandatory engagement of the scheme for people for a full six months is the correct approach, in particular for low-paid workers. People should have the autonomy to leave if they wish and should be trusted to be able to make the decision that is best for themselves and their families. This is another example of poor judgement by the government.

Sinn Féin priorities include*:

- Increasing the state pension rates by €50
- Reintroducing the State Pension (Transition) for 65-year-olds who choose to retire at an upper end cost of €171.6m
- Ending mandatory retirement to allow workers who are able to, and wish to, remain at work beyond 65 years to do so if they so choose

* All increases are on top of rates scheduled for 2025 unless specified otherwise





ARTS, HERITAGE, GAEILGE AND MEDIA

NA HEALAÍONA, OIDHREACHT, AGUS NA MEÁIN

ARTS

Sinn Féin is committed to building a Poblacht na hÉireann which is also a Poblacht na n-Ealaíon, a Republic of the Arts, reflecting the vision of the poets' revolution of 1916.

The arts create jobs, draw tourists, spark innovation, develop critical-thinking capacity, garner soft power clout for Ireland around the world, generate cognitive benefits, support physical and mental health, help to reduce substance use and anti-social behaviour among young people, empower citizens, engage communities, expose truth, and challenge the status quo as a uniquely powerful tool for progressive change.

Sinn Féin has engaged with artists, arts workers, audiences, communities, and businesses to hear what they most need to thrive, through an online survey in which over 1,100 participated, and with a roundtable assembly bringing together over 100 representatives from across the sector.

Our survey found that money is a key barrier to creating, performing or enjoying art for four of every five participants, while almost three quarters of respondents are not satisfied with the arts facilities and spaces in their area, and a substantial majority say they or artists and arts workers they know are considering emigrating, rising to 70% in Dublin.

We have responded by outlining an ambitious and comprehensive 50-point plan for the arts, rooted in the 4D Republican principles of defending, democratising, demystifying, and decolonising the arts – encompassing the performing arts, literary arts, film and audiovisual arts, and visual arts, crafts and design, and support for Irish artists across artforms – which a Sinn Féin Arts Minister would implement.

An Chomhairle Ealaíon (the Arts Council) is key to delivering these priorities, and Sinn Féin promised €20m extra for the Council in 2025 alone in our alternative budget. We are keen to build on the Council's 70 years of achievements to transform the current framework for arts funding into a democracy for the arts, rooted in every community and relevant to the needs of artists nationwide, at arms-length from government but not from the people.

The Basic Income for the Arts pilot has been a welcome attempt at empowering artists to create and has proved a lifeline for many. It will be up to the next government to develop a long-term scheme based on the research and how it compares to other supports for artists both here and overseas, and it is important that the final scheme that emerges is fair and inclusive, tackles barriers artists face in terms of income, time and access, and empowers the disenfranchised to create and perform, including disabled artists who were effectively discouraged from the pilot.

Irish writers, actors, composers, and musicians are not receiving fair remuneration and royalties compared with counterparts from other jurisdictions as highlighted by Irish Equity, and art workers face challenges in the form of blacklisting, a lack of workspace, artificial intelligence, and in the case of certain artforms, exclusion from Arts Council support. Sinn Féin is committed to taking the best from both North and South to harmonise upwards for cultural workers' rights on an all-Ireland basis.

The decline, dereliction, closure, and destruction of Ireland's community cultural spaces ranges from traditional music venues and bookshops to studio spaces and theatres and is exacerbated by the

crisis in accommodation and cost of living, making it harder for artists to create and perform. Our communities need accessible and fit-for-purpose cultural infrastructure, including nightlife venues, which have collapsed from 500 in 2000 to fewer than 90 today.

Including our afterschool Activity Card Scheme, increasing the Arts Council funding to €200m and a host of other measures, Sinn Féin's plans would see an increase of investment in the Arts totalling an additional €197.6m for annual current expenditure and €26.5m for capital expenditure beyond what has been pre-committed.

Sinn Féin's priorities include:

- ➔ Implementing our 50-point "Poblacht na hÉireann, Poblacht na n-Ealaíon" plan for the arts.
- ➔ Increasing funding to An Chomhairle Ealaíon (The Arts Council) by €60m providing multi-annual funding, and building on its work to create a more representative, decentralised, inclusive and democratic framework for the arts that serves communities nationwide
- ➔ Increasing funding for Culture Ireland over a term in government
- ➔ Continuing the three-year Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme to completion and using the vital research to develop a sustainable and equitable long-term scheme
- ➔ Expanding Catherine's Law to exempt Disabled Artists from having arts bursaries and awards count against their social protection entitlements
- ➔ Delivering an Arts Spaces Capital Programme based on the Sports Capital Grants, creating legal protection for existing cultural spaces, ensuring space for culture and nightlife is included in development planning, and developing a Cultural Workers Housing and Studio Space Pilot project
- ➔ Developing a comprehensive policy for the Arts in Education from pre-school to third level and adult learning, expanding Creative Schools, restoring the School Libraries Fund, and delivering our Activity Card of €130 per child to support participation in arts and sports activities
- ➔ Making space for visual art by examining the introduction of minimum art requirements for the public realm, championing architecture, designating one or more National Sculpture Gardens, expanding access to the state's art collection, and enacting Eoin Ó Broin's Public Art Mural Bill to exempt public art murals from planning permission
- ➔ Building on the Strategy for Irish Language-based Arts to put Irish language and Gaelic traditional arts at the heart of policymaking and funding for each sector of the arts.
- ➔ Recognising the artforms of comedy, musical theatre, storytelling, and fashion design, granting them access to Arts Council supports
- ➔ Incorporating arts bulletins within the news service of public service broadcasters.
- ➔ Examining ways to better enforce existing anti-tout legislation, bring dynamic pricing under control, and develop a platform to distribute tickets so that no seat is left empty
- ➔ Reviewing what defines "Irish music" or "Irish cultural works" in terms of tax incentives, royalties, airtime, content requirements, and supports to ensure artists based in Ireland benefit most from such classification and achieve more Irish music on radio and in film

- Increasing capital and current funding for Screen Ireland
- Developing a long-term replacement for the Section 481 Regional Uplift, and make the Cultural Certificate required for the film tax relief conditional on compliance with Irish and EU copyright law and workers' rights, ending the practice of 'buy-out' contracts, and equal treatment for Irish workers compared to colleagues on the same project
- Exploring options for a dedicated tax relief for live theatre productions
- Introducing a designated 'night venue' classification in licensing and planning law and update and modernise licensing laws and costs, considering the extension of trading hours in line with other European countries, expanding license access for cultural institutions and non-profits, and supporting late night entertainment in cafés and more options for alcohol-free events
- Examining the impact of Artificial Intelligence on Culture and the Arts with a view to developing a policy at national level, and a coordinated response at European Union and international level, to safeguard the intellectual property rights and livelihoods of Irish artists, creators and performers, while strengthening the artists' right to resale.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Sinn Féin believes that the historic, archaeological, and cultural heritage of Ireland, as the product of the labour, craftsmanship and talent of their forebearers, belongs equally to all the people of the Irish nation. This heritage must be protected for the people as the inheritance to which future generations are entitled as a right.

The heritage of Ireland, which we hold in trust for future generations, requires checks and balances, and a government that takes its protection seriously.

Sinn Féin tabled amendments to address concerns raised with the Historic and Archaeological Heritage Act 2023, and while Minister of State for Heritage Malcolm Noonan accepted our arguments on a number of matters – the need to protect battlefields, the amenity value of a monument's setting, linguistic heritage, and archaeological objects associated with historic periods or subjects rather than events and individuals alone, and to give elected councillors a greater role in decisions affecting local monuments – many substantial issues remain unresolved.

From outcry over the restriction of public access to Castletown House in Co. Kildare, to the closure of one of the largest tombs at Loughcrew Cairn in Co. Meath since 2018, communities are calling for public access to their heritage to be recognised and respected, and this principle should apply also to access to historic and genealogical records, whether in person or through digital means. When Sinn Féin attempted to enshrine this principle in the 2023 Act, the Green Party Minister, supported by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, blocked the move.

This denial of public access to heritage is compounded by the wanton destruction of our heritage that has been permitted under successive governments, which had already seen a third of Ireland's ancient ringforts destroyed by the year 2001. From the destruction of Woodquay and Frascati House in the 1970s through to the dead-of-night demolition of the O'Rahilly's home at 40 Herbert Park as recently as 2020 and the ongoing threat to the 1916 battle-site at Moore Street, it is clear that the preservation

of our rich history requires a new government willing to put the people's inheritance above the private profit of developers.

One aspect not addressed by the act is the need for repatriation of historic, archaeological and cultural heritage which was taken from Ireland, or has come to Ireland, as a result of theft, plunder, deception, colonial practices, or other unethical methods, to its rightful owners, whether it's the Inishkeel Bell Shrine in the British Museum or the Xhosa Chief Maqoma's stick in our own National Museum. As anti-imperialists, we stand for decolonisation at home and in solidarity with other victims of colonialism seeking restitution overseas.

As Irish Republicans, Sinn Féin is committed to recognising the contribution made by those who gave their lives and liberty to pursue the freedom of the Irish nation and raising awareness and understanding of the ideals of our revolutionary period.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Expanding the OPW power to initiate a compulsory purchase of lands and buildings to cover heritage at risk and the defence of public access to sites
- ➔ Amending heritage legislation to recognise the principle that the people have a right to appreciate, view and learn from their heritage, including built, archaeological, cultural and genealogical heritage, both physically and through digital means, and exploring ways to vindicate that right
- ➔ Vindicating and expanding, where possible, rights of way to heritage monuments
- ➔ Declaring the Moore Street terrace, its yards and laneways, a National Monument and developing a 1916 Culture Quarter by enacting Aengus Ó Snodaigh's Ceathrú Cultúir 1916 Bill
- ➔ Increasing the current budget of the Heritage Council by €5m and empowering it to take a case and seek repossession through the courts where they believe important heritage is at risk as a result of intentional damage, wanton neglect or intent to destroy
- ➔ Conducting a comprehensive review of the state's current structures and laws for heritage policy, protection, and management in government, with a view to delivering a more efficient and effective framework to safeguard and present our treasures for generations to come
- ➔ Delivering the overdue capital projects promised for our national cultural institutions
- ➔ Place a duty on state-funded museums and galleries to cooperate with requests from other states for the repatriation of heritage, and a duty on our Minister for Culture to demand a return of heritage unjustly removed from Ireland, with a commitment to audit and digitise collections for wider access
- ➔ Expanding the role of the heritage officer in local authorities to engage in public consultation to develop local heritage plans with a statutory basis to be implemented by the local authority, and to conduct an audit of all vacant historic properties in town and village centres owned by state bodies, to ensure those that can be used for housing or community cultural hubs are used for same
- ➔ Employing a county or city archaeologist for each local authority at a cost of €1.29m

- ➔ Ringfencing specific funding of €1m current and €5m capital to support Traveller culture, heritage and language, and examining the feasibility of establishing a specific body for conserving, developing and promoting Mincéir cultural heritage based on the Foras na Gaeilge model
- ➔ Amending the National Archives Act, 1986, to address gaps with regard the acquisition of, and public access to, records of state-funded bodies not currently covered, and to include whatever provisions are necessary to fully capture the digital publication environment and to ensure that such electronic publications are preserved as part of our national collections
- ➔ Enacting Aengus Ó Snodaigh's Bill to establish a public holiday marking Lá na Poblachta
- ➔ Building on the achievements of the Decade of Centenaries at engaging communities with their history by establishing an Annual Programme of Commemorations
- ➔ Introducing a National Day of Reconciliation to remember all victims of conflict in Ireland
- ➔ Fixing an annual regular date for both national and international commemoration of An Gorta Mór, announcing the following year's chosen location during each commemoration
- ➔ Supporting efforts to make our civic spaces more representative and inclusive in terms of the historical figures they celebrate in street names and public art, continuing the state's tradition of honouring Ireland's heroes when naming new housing developments and infrastructure, including naming the new national children's hospital after Dr. Kathleen Lynn

GAEILGE

The restoration of the Irish language to use nationwide, and as the spoken language of Gaeltacht communities in particular, is the number one priority of Sinn Féin's cultural policy.

A Sinn Féin government would mean having a senior Minister with responsibility for the Irish language and Gaeltacht, rather than it being lost behind other priorities or left to a Junior Minister who can't fight their case in Budget negotiations. Rather than repeat the farce of recent years by appointing a Minister for Irish who has to learn Irish on the job, a Sinn Féin Minister would be rooted in the language community, understand the scale of the problems on day one and be equipped with a plan to address them.

Sinn Féin would reverse the drastic cuts in the budget for our national language, and deliver on our promise to go even further than the 'Growth Plan' set out by Conradh na Gaeilge and 130 Irish community groups for 2024-2029 by implementing the policies set out in this manifesto.

Budget 2025 made clear the lack of ambition from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, who provided just €6m for the Irish language and Gaeltacht Budget, whereas a Sinn Féin government would have provided more than €50m in additional targeted measures.

Sinn Féin intends to adopt a truly all-of-government approach to revitalising our national and first official language and we propose investing an additional cumulative total of more than €50m current funding over five years and €75m of capital for this specific purpose.

You will find further proposals to protect the rights of Irish speakers and to promote our teanga across different sections of this manifesto, from Education and Justice to Culture and Foreign Affairs. Ní neart go cur le chéile.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Appointing a senior minister with responsibility for the Irish language and the Gaeltacht
- ➔ Delivering the 20% recruitment target for bilingual public servants from 2030 enshrined in the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021, and progressively increasing the target for the years thereafter, and set B2+ under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as the minimum competency in Irish
- ➔ Finally recognising a person's legal right to their name and address in the Irish language, including the síneadh fada, both when using state services and in commercial transactions, including with banks and airlines
- ➔ Implementing Sinn Féin's *Ár Seacht nDícheall don Ghaeilge* - seven policies to normalise and increase use of Irish in the public sphere, including (aside from limited grounds for exemption):
 - ▶ Protecting the right to use Irish
 - ▶ Bilingual packaging
 - ▶ Bilingual information in shops
 - ▶ Making public ad spaces bilingual
 - ▶ Irish as the default home option on self-service machines, and accepting fadas
 - ▶ Only using Irish for official purposes in place-names on road signs
 - ▶ Irish-only state branding
- ➔ Establishing a specific Irish Language Capital Programme to deliver Irish language cultural centres (Cultúrlann) and dedicated Gaelic Quarters in towns and cities
- ➔ Delivering a substantial increase in funding to Foras na Gaeilge to enable the Irish Language Network Development Schemes to grow and strengthen the 6 Lead Organisations
- ➔ Providing extra funding for language planning in each Irish Language Network, and through Foras na Gaeilge for each local authority to develop authority-wide language plans
- ➔ Ensuring Irish language arts are at the heart of any arts funding by the State, and working towards delivering the recommendations of the comprehensive 2023 Irish Language Committee Report on the Irish Language Writing, Publishing and Reading Sector, launched at Oireachtas na Samhna in Killarney, in particular:
 - ▶ Restoring the Irish Language Books Scheme to pre-2008 levels
 - ▶ Restoring the Commissioning Scheme
 - ▶ Increasing funding for Irish language journalism and channelling required Irish language ad spending by public bodies towards a dedicated weekly Irish language print and electronic newspaper
 - ▶ Providing a free Irish language book to every child and teenager, tailored to their level of Irish, once during primary school and again during secondary school

MEDIA

There have been significant changes in the media landscape in recent years. Digital media has overtaken many traditional media and regulation is struggling to keep up. In terms of regulation, Ireland has a significant responsibility due to several of the world's biggest tech platforms having European HQs in Dublin.

Coimisiún na Meán has been established in recognition of changes in how media is consumed and Ireland's important regulatory role, while also taking on the functions of the BAI in regulating and supporting the development of traditional media.

A vibrant, diverse, financially sustainable and independent media sector is critical to any well-functioning democracy.

We need a healthy and broad range of actors from RTÉ, TG4 and Virgin Media Television, to more local radio and press, to produce high quality content of public value across a wide range of mediums including TV, radio, newspapers and online.

Sinn Féin recognises the unique roles of our two national public service broadcasters RTÉ and TG4, and believes both deserve a parity of esteem and must endeavour to serve the whole nation.

Given its role, RTÉ must be held accountable for the delivery of its responsibilities, and it must also be sufficiently funded to deliver on those responsibilities. For this, RTÉ relies on the licence fee but that funding model is not fit for purpose.

For years now, and long before the excessive, wasteful expenditure and absence of governance or accountability at RTÉ came to light, the proportion of households paying for a TV licence has been falling off. This is a result of changing patterns of media consumption – more people using devices and online sources rather than traditional television – and a consequence of population ageing – more households getting a free TV licence funded by the Exchequer via the Households Benefits Package.

As was recognised by the Future of Media Commission “reliance on Exchequer-based contributions to support public funding of Public Service Media has steadily increased over time.” The trend was hastened very significantly when the public lost trust and confidence in RTÉ in the summer of 2023. The rate of households deciding not to pay for a TV licence in 2023 was double that rate in 2022. That’s more than one in four households making the decision last year to not purchase a TV licence.

The licence fee itself is a flat payment. It takes no account of a person’s income level, it is experienced as a greater burden the smaller your income is, making it a regressive method of funding a public good.

The decision by Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Greens to adopt a hybrid funding model described by Minister Catherine Martin as the ‘worst of both worlds’ acted to reward poor financial management with a blank cheque from the taxpayer, while retaining a regressive and unsustainable licence fee.

They are determined to continue seeing people prosecuted for non-payment in the courts – 13,000 people were summoned before the courts in 2023.

Meanwhile, local and independent radio and press are struggling to survive, putting a vital source of journalism and community media at risk. The Irish language media sector has already seen an end to a standalone weekly newspaper, and the long-awaited national youth radio station to build on the success of Raidió Rí-Rá has failed to materialise.

Sinn Féin proposes to invest an additional €154m of public funding in public service media.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Abolishing the unfair licence fee with immediate effect in line with Sinn Féin's policy on Delivering Sustainable Public Sector Broadcasting and an Independent Media Sector, which would:
 - ▶ Invest Exchequer funding in a platform-neutral Media Fund which would support RTÉ and TG4 and also public service content production and activities of commercial, local and community providers in sync with the recommendation of the Report of the Future of Media Commission on how public service media should be funded published in 2022
 - ▶ End prosecutions for non-payment of the tv license fee by extinguishing the liability
 - ▶ Ringfence Exchequer funding for An Post to deliver public goods and offset the loss from TV licence fee administration because an Post and the post office network are critical infrastructure serving important economic and social functions, connecting communities in rural Ireland in particular
- ➔ Substantially increasing funding to TG4 to bring it in line long-term with funding levels for other minority language broadcasters including Welsh S4C and Basque EITB
- ➔ Ending the geo-blocking and exclusion of Six County audiences in public service broadcasting
- ➔ Exploring options and pursuing the development of a global Irish audiovisual network
- ➔ Making use of the powers afforded under the Audiovisual Media Services Directive to support Irish audiovisual content production by delivering much-needed investment
- ➔ Ensuring Coimisiún na Meán is equipped to fulfil its regulatory and media development roles
- ➔ Strengthening Coimisiún na Meán's obligation to promote and safeguard pluralism of media service providers and ownership
- ➔ Enacting Aengus Ó Snodaigh's bill to place RTÉ under the Comptroller and Auditor General,
- ➔ Commissioning an independent human rights and journalistic expert review into the objectivity of coverage by RTÉ of the Israeli genocide in Gaza and other international conflicts
- ➔ Immediate establishment of an individual complaints mechanism for large social media platforms to protect users from bullying and abuse in cases where the company is not taking action or removing content
- ➔ Working to achieve a coordinated response at European Union level to the impact of artificial intelligence

- ➔ Exploring ways to incorporate media literacy into the school curriculum, based on international best practice
- ➔ Investing in journalism by funding local bursaries and ensuring the news and current affairs services of local radio and press can avail of the platform-neutral media fund
- ➔ Supporting Irish language media by establishing the long-awaited national youth radio station and implementing the Oireachtas Committee on the Irish Language report recommendations on the Irish Language Writing, Publishing and Reading sector, including by channelling required public bodies ad spending towards a dedicated weekly Irish language print and electronic newspaper and delivering third level courses in journalism in the Irish language





FOREIGN AFFAIRS

GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA

Sinn Féin would uphold Ireland's reputation on the international stage working with our partners in the European Union and building stronger relationships with countries across the globe. We would ensure Ireland, as a neutral state with an independent foreign policy, confidently uses its voice for diplomacy, humanitarianism and conflict resolution.

Ireland has a proud history on the international stage of working for nuclear non-proliferation and conflict-resolution. We are renowned for our humanitarianism, for our contributions to the drafting of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and for the proud record of our UN peacekeepers.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Protecting Ireland's right to pursue an independent foreign policy, including military neutrality
- Building stronger relationships with our European partners and ensuring Ireland plays a strong role in setting the future direction of the European Union
- Developing stronger relationships and diplomatic ties with countries outside of Europe
- Using Ireland's position, and the global institutions that we are a part of, to ensure international law is upheld and to be an advocate for conflict resolution, humanitarianism and tackling global challenges
- Supporting the increased democratisation of global financial, economic and political institutions in particular the United Nations, to ensure these institutions are fit for purpose and can play a meaningful role
- Building support for Irish reunification

AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY AND MILITARY NEUTRALITY

Ireland is a small country, economically and demographically. However, we have a strong record of peacekeeping and important achievements including the work done in the late 1950s and 1960s to deliver a nuclear non-proliferation treaty at a time when the world was at the brink of nuclear war.

Recent developments at the European Union show why it is crucial that Ireland continues to pursue an independent foreign policy.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Opposing any attempts to transfer decision making powers on Foreign Affairs and Defence to the European Union and to remove unanimity on these matters
- Ensuring Ireland remains neutral
- Bringing forward a referendum to enshrine neutrality in the Irish constitution

BUILDING STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR EUROPEAN PARTNERS

Ireland's place is within the European Union.

Ireland will assume the Presidency of the European Council between July and December 2026. This will be an opportunity for Ireland to play an important role in the future direction of the European Union. In advance of this, a Sinn Féin government would work to strengthen relationships with our European partners so that we can work together to ensure the European Union gets back to basics including tackling common challenges such as the cost of living and climate change.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Opposing the removal of the Irish veto on matters of Foreign Policy at the European Council
- ➔ Ensuring that the European Union budget benefits Ireland and the citizens of Europe; demanding greater transparency around all EU expenditure and striving to secure a rebalance of the budget from military spending to programmes that benefit citizens and communities

DEVELOPING STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS WITH COUNTRIES OUTSIDE EUROPE

The world is changing. As members of the European Union, we have strong historical links with the United States and strengthening bonds with countries such as Australia and Canada, which have become home to a growing Irish diaspora.

Promoting Irish culture abroad can form a core tenet of our positive neutral foreign policy. Our music, literature, dance, film, poetry, food, drink, and sporting prowess all help Ireland punch above our weight on the global stage and serve as powerful elements of Ireland's soft power diplomacy, and tapping into the sincere interest in An Ghaeilge among our diaspora overseas could also help to secure the survival of our national language.

Our history as a former colony and then an independent state means that we have credibility in other parts of the world. This credibility stems from our neutrality and independent foreign policy. A Sinn Féin government would ensure that Ireland is a link across the globe for all those pursuing peace, conflict resolution and an end to inequality.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Opening additional consulates in states with growing Irish diaspora, including Australia
- ➔ Expanding upon Ireland's diplomatic presence, including reviewing the network of Irish embassies in the southern hemisphere with a view to expanding this network

- Increasing annual funding for Culture Ireland by €2m
- Supporting Irish language after-school clubs for diaspora communities, and efforts to create Irish Medium schools abroad using the Emigrant Support Programme, as part of our wider priorities for Irish in Education beyond our shores

AN ACTIVE VOICE FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Ireland has the potential to be a strong respected voice for peace and conflict resolution across the globe. Ireland led the way when the Dáil became the first parliament to call for a ceasefire in Gaza. Ireland has been consistent in condemning breaches of international law.

The Irish people have supported the Ukrainian people in the wake of the Russian invasion. Sinn Féin condemns Russia's war in Ukraine and calls for a coordinated and concerted effort by the international community to secure an end to the hostilities and build peace. Ukraine, Russia, the United States and the EU should play a role in bringing this conflict to an end by putting the interest of the people of the region above other geopolitical interests. All sides must cease the current unlimited supply of weapons into Ukraine which has cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

On issues such as the persecution of the Palestinian people, we can do so much more to use our influence both at EU level and internationally.

The last-minute decision of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to lift the block on the Occupied Territories Bill was a cynical ploy to deflect from the fact that those parties in government failed to progress a single sanction against Israel for its repeated gross violations of international law or its ongoing Genocide in Gaza.

In government, Sinn Féin would ensure our Defence Forces are equipped and have the capacity to continue to participate in UN Peacekeeping Missions. In pursuit of being an active voice for peace and conflict resolution, Sinn Féin will seek another term on the Security Council for Ireland. We would ensure that Ireland continues to contribute to development aid worldwide and work towards meeting its international commitment to reach 0.7% GNI target for official development aid.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Working to achieve an end to the conflict in Ukraine, using our neutral position to aid these efforts
- Building on the recognition of the state of Palestine by Ireland, developing closer diplomatic ties with Palestine, and using every diplomatic lever available to build support for an end to the occupation and an independent Palestinian state
- Enacting the Illegal Israeli Settlements Divestment Bill and the Occupied Territories Bill and taking other meaningful actions to sanction Israel for so long as it maintains its illegal occupation and brutal apartheid regime against the Palestinian people
- Working with European partners to suspend the EU-Israel Association agreement and other preferential arrangements with Israel for so long as that state continues to breach International law

- ➔ Increasing Ireland's contributions to Official Development Aid to 0.7% of GNI over the lifetime of the next government

GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS THAT WORK BETTER

Our primary global institutions were developed at a time when it was a largely bipolar world dominated by two superpowers. These institutions need to be reformed and need to work better to meet the challenges ahead.

Sinn Féin wants an Irish government to be part of the discussion about how we make global financial, economic and political institutions fairer, more democratic and fit for purpose. We need these institutions to be reformed so that they can play a meaningful role in ensuring we have a peaceful, fair and prosperous world.

Ireland's history, our independent foreign policy and our neutrality means that we are well placed to be advocates for reformed international institutions. Sinn Féin in government would harness our independent foreign policy and neutrality to play a positive and constructive role.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Working with others to bring about positive reforms of our global institutions aimed at making them fairer, more democratic and fit for purpose.

BUILDING SUPPORT FOR IRISH REUNIFICATION

Ireland's place within the European Union and our relationship with countries outside of Europe means we are well placed as a country on the international stage. Through diplomacy and engagement with other members states, Sinn Féin in government would work to ensure that the European Union and countries outside of the European Union, actively and economically support Irish reunification.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Building support for Irish reunification in the European Union and elsewhere



MANAGING IMMIGRATION

INIMIRCE A BHAINISTIÚ

Sinn Féin's approach to migration is informed by our Republican values and principles - equality, economic and social justice, sovereignty, anti-racism and anti-colonialism.

Implementing the proposals contained in our policy document on International Protection *A Fair System That Works*, would deliver a system that safeguards the cohesion of society for all who call Ireland home, ensures fairness for local communities, decency, common sense, the protection of human rights and that also commands public support. It also recognises both the needs of those seeking international protection and the pressures that many communities are under.

Sinn Féin believes that immigration must be managed having regard to the needs of the economy, public services and our capacity to accommodate and integrate additional people.

Every state must be able to control its borders. Therefore, co-operation and robust bi-lateral arrangements with Britain are necessary in order to protect free movement of citizens across the land border on our island while simultaneously managing immigration.

Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Green Party have overseen a chaotic mismanagement of international protection and their lack of engagement with local communities has failed, undermining cohesion and public confidence.

Sinn Féin's plan involves a system that works well, works quickly, where rules are applied, where fairness is paramount, and where people are treated with dignity and local communities are treated with respect.

ESTABLISH A NEW IMMIGRATION MANAGEMENT AGENCY

For too long, the different bodies and government departments involved in our migration system have been acting independently of one another. This causes fragmented decision making, which along with a significantly under resourced and under pressure system leads to significant delays and bad planning and outcomes.

Sinn Féin would set up a new Immigration Management Agency, under the Department of Justice and Home Affairs, which would have responsibility for processing of applicants, enforcement of rules, registration of individuals and accommodation. This would bring together personnel from the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), Border Management Unit (BMU), Immigration Service Delivery (ISD), International Protection Office (IPO), International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) and those involved in relevant functions at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) under one department rather than multiple departments. This would ensure cohesion in planning, sharing of information and speedy decision making. We would increase staff and properly resource the new agency to ensure it positively improves our migration system.

The agency's responsibilities would include:

- Proper planning of our migration system
- Processing of IP applicants in a fair and efficient manner
- Accommodating IP applicants in decent accommodation
- Engaging with communities being considered as locations for IPAS centres
- Returning immigrants who are not entitled to be here to their countries of origin including enforcement of deportation and other orders and investigating illegal immigration

The Department of Integration would continue to have responsibility for supporting IP applicants who receive asylum status so that they can integrate fully into society and working closely with communities to ensure services and resources are provided. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment would continue to process employment permits as normal for the many workers who are playing a valuable role in our economy, including in our health services and in our Tech sector.

Various EU member states require all EU, EEA and Swiss citizens (or their tourist accommodation provider on their behalf) to register their presence within a reasonable time period of arrival. Ireland does not. In government, Sinn Féin would examine the registration requirements and models in operation in other EU countries and how a system of registration could enable the authorities to be more fully aware of population movements in the state for the purposes of service planning and law enforcement.

A PLANNED END TO TEMPORARY PROTECTION DIRECTIVE

The special status of Ukrainians under the Temporary Protection Directive should come to an end no later than March 2026. We believe that continually extending temporary measures is not a sustainable solution and is problematic for everyone.

The government failure to produce a roadmap, leaves many Ukrainians with huge uncertainty about their future in Ireland and the longer this goes on, the more likely a chaotic, crisis-driven unwinding of Temporary Protection, something nobody wants to see.

Sinn Féin has signalled clearly that the temporary short-term approach must conclude and after that a return to ordinary, permanent immigration rules which apply to all other states. If a beneficiary of Temporary Protection is from a part of Ukraine that is safe then, save for exceptional cases, return should be assisted. Beneficiaries who are from unsafe parts of the Ukraine can apply for International Protection and others who wish to continue to stay here can also apply for work-based permits to reside here.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Setting up a new Immigration Management Agency with responsibility for processing enforcement, registration and accommodation at an additional cost of €5.5m
- Ensuring new IPAS centres are not placed in working class communities already under severe pressure. Criteria such as the availability of services and levels of economic and social disadvantage should be used to determine the selection of locations. This means that new IPAS centres would only be put in more affluent areas which have the capacity and services exist to support them
- Transitioning our IP accommodation system to greater use of purpose-built state-owned beds while reducing reliance on profit-driven commercial providers which are often of poor quality and in unsuitable locations and have allowed a small number of individuals to become multi-millionaires
- Creating a standard, transparent and consistent approach to community consultation, including opportunities for submissions
- Trebling staffing across the system at a cost of €82m to allow fast and fair decisions to be made and ensuring greater follow-up on to ensure that those found not to be eligible for international protection actually leave and those who are eligible receive asylum status quickly and be supported to fully integrate
- Greater implementation of legal provisions for fines on airlines and other carriers transporting passengers with no documents and for prosecutions of individuals
- Agreeing revised bilateral arrangements with Britain, including management of immigration at airports and ports, to ensure those IP applicants who should be processed in Britain are returned there
- Ending the two-tier system so that all those seeking international protection are treated equally irrespective of where they come from
- Ending the Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party's Accommodation Recognition Payment scheme for Ukrainian Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection, so that new applicants cannot join the scheme, as it places other families and people seeking to rent private accommodation at a severe disadvantage
- Inviting the Children's Ombudsman and HIQA to periodically report on the standards of all International Protection accommodation. It is unacceptable that so many migrants are in poor quality and in many instances tented accommodation
- Exploring the introduction of registration requirements for EU/EEA Swiss citizens
- An orderly conclusion to the status of Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive

DEFENCE COSAINT

PROTECTING IRISH NEUTRALITY

Sinn Féin is committed to protecting Irish neutrality.

The Irish people are rightly proud of those who have served this country in our Defence Forces, and we are proud of Ireland's role in conflict resolution rather than conflict exacerbation. It must be acknowledged that military neutrality has served us well.

Over the past number of governments, however, this legacy has been under attack from those who would like to see Ireland become involved in military alliances and who have sought to undermine our independent foreign policy.

The Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Green Party proposal to abandon the triple-lock neutrality protection breaches multiple commitments given to the Irish people, particularly during the Nice and Lisbon EU referenda. Sinn Féin in government would maintain the triple-lock neutrality protection and ensure that our neutrality is protected so that Ireland can continue to play an important and progressive role in international affairs.

As existing operations and exercises conclude, we would take a different approach to the government in respect of future proposals for deployments. Our approach would have the unequivocal starting point that we are a neutral state, would prioritise participation in UN peacekeeping missions and would be subject to comprehensive Oireachtas scrutiny.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Maintaining the triple-lock neutrality protection
- ➔ Ensuring comprehensive Oireachtas oversight and scrutiny of all proposals for Irish participation in international military missions and exercises, including ensuring that proposals are evaluated by the Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
- ➔ Opposing the removal of the Irish veto on matters of Foreign Policy at the European Council through opposition to Qualified Majority Voting on such matters
- ➔ Opposing further militarisation within the European Union, including any prospects for the formation of an EU army
- ➔ Establishing a Citizens Assembly to agree the wording of a constitutional amendment enshrining the principles of Military Neutrality and non-alignment in the Irish constitution; and should this be carried, engaging with EU institutions and Member States with a view to recognising the integrity of neutral states in the EU treaties

INVESTING IN OUR DEFENCE FORCES

The Defence Forces play a crucial role in protecting Irish national interests and upholding International Law.

The bravery of the men and women of the Defence Forces has been evident in recent weeks in their determination to remain part of the UNFIL peace keeping mission in Lebanon, despite attacks on this mission following the Israeli invasion.

However, the Defence Forces are at a critical juncture. More people have left the services during this term of government than joined.

Our Defence Forces require the strength and the capacity to carry out the range of duties for which it has responsibility.

We need strong, adequately equipped Defence Forces to uphold our status as a neutral state. As we face future challenges, we will also need our Defence Forces to have the capacity to assist in additional civil duties such as dealing with the impacts of natural disasters.

It is time to plan for the future of our Defence Forces and to make the investment that is needed to ensure they are fit for purpose. Years of underfunding, issues in terms of pay and conditions, revelations such as those exposed by the Women of Honour and other groups, as well as falling numbers, have impacted on capacity and morale.

The report on the Commission on the Defence Forces laid bare the failures of successive governments to invest in our Defence Forces. Since its publication, progress towards the implementation of the actions necessary has been far too slow.

As of 31st August 2024, the strength of the Defence Forces stood at 7,426 down from 8,568 when the outgoing government came to office in 2020 and well short of the 11,500 Level of 2 Ambition requirement.

In addition, our Defence Forces lack much of the equipment and infrastructure needed to adequately monitor, never mind protect, our skies, air and land. The failures of successive Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil governments have meant that Ireland is reliant on other states to address gaps.

Sinn Féin wants to make the Defence Forces an attractive career with good pay and conditions as well as ensuring that the issues courageously brought to light by the Women of Honour are dealt with. We also want to ensure that members of the Defence Forces are properly supported as they transition from service to retirement.

We are committed to resolving the recruitment and retention crisis. This requires the urgent implementation of the Working Time Directive.

Sinn Féin propose increasing annual current funding for the defence forces by €206.9m and providing an additional €295m of capital by 2030 over and above existing pre-committed funding.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Improving conditions of Defence Forces members through the implementation of the Working Time Directive
- Delivering the Commission on the Defence Forces requirement for additional Capital Investment to meet LOA 2 capital spending targets by 2032, prioritising acquisition of primary radar and subsea capabilities
- Increasing Defence Force member numbers to rebuild the Defence Forces to a baseline figure of 11,500 members and delivering equivalent LOA2 funding
- Allocating funding to healthcare and medical supports for those whose health was unduly negatively impacted through their service in the Defence Force
- Increasing dependable annual funding for Veterans Associations to deliver an increased level of service to their members
- Prioritising the deployment of Irish troops to UN-mandated peacekeeping missions around the world and seeking to reverse the government's decision to withdraw from the United Nations Disengagement Observe Force (UNDOF) mission to the Golan Heights

IRELAND





FUNDING CHANGE

ATHRÚ A MHAOINIÚ

Sinn Féin will build a strong economy that delivers for every worker, family and community. Despite economic growth and record tax receipts, the outgoing government have squandered public money, deepened the housing crisis and put the interests of those at the top above the needs of ordinary people. There is a better way.

Sinn Féin will stop the waste and drive reform of our public services. Sinn Féin will tax and spend in a fair way that reduces the cost of living, strengthens our public services, and protects our public finances.

It's widely accepted that there is a need for very significant investment in critical infrastructure, not least in housing.

Sinn Féin would invest a portion of windfall corporation tax receipts to deliver a catch-up infrastructure programme and build housing at scale. Investing today is an investment in tomorrow.

We have to think big and act boldly to make our society a better and fairer place to live.

If elected to government, in early 2025 Sinn Féin will introduce a Mini-Budget.

The Mini-Budget will supplement Budget 2025 with the funding allocations necessary to immediately commence the transformational change that Sinn Féin have outlined in this manifesto across key priorities including Housing, Health, Childcare and the Cost of Living.

These are all areas in which a Sinn Féin government would make financial provisions significantly beyond what the current government parties intend providing in 2025.

In housing it will commence our house building programme and scaling up the skills needed to deliver our plan. In Health it will begin the roll-out of free prescription medicines, advance our recruitment drive and the delivery of our bed plan. The mini-budget will also provide immediate relief to households with the cost of living. Introduce our fair tax package which includes the first step of our commitment to abolish USC on the first €45,000 of every workers income. And support struggling businesses in the non-accommodation hospitality sector with a permanent reduced 9% rate of VAT.

The remainder of our manifesto focuses primarily on delivery across the 5 main Budgets of a Sinn Féin government covering the financial years of 2026 to 2030.

BUDGETARY PACKAGE: 2025-2030

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	
Existing Budget Package*	-	8.2	6.8	7.1	7.4	7.7	37.2
Sinn Féin Budget Package (a + b)	1.6	7.3	6.4	7.1	7.5	7.3	37.2
(a) Pre-Committed**	-	4.5	3.3	3.9	4.1	4.2	20
(b) To be allocated	1.6	2.8	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.1	17.2
- Current Expenditure	0.5	3.8	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.4	14.3
- Net Tax Measures	1.1	(1.0)	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.7	2.9
Of which tax expenditure	1.1	2.1	0.8	0.7	0.9	0.8	6.4
Of which tax revenue	-	(3.1)	(0.2)	-	(0.1)	(0.1)	(3.5)
2. Windfall Capital Expenditure	3.8	6.7	6.4	7.8	8.2	8.9	41.8
- Voted Capital	2.7	5.4	5.0	6.1	6.1	6.6	31.9
Of which escrow and AIB	0.8	2.1	2.4	3.2	3.9	4.7	17.1
- Non-voted GGE	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.7	2.1	2.3	9.9
Second Round Effects	0.4	0.7	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.9	4.2
General Government Balance	4.7	1.5	1.0	2.8	2.6	2.2	14.8

* based on the Summer Economic Statement adjusted for the Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2025 published by the Department of Finance on Budget Day.

** reserve which includes provision for Existing Levels of Service, demographics, public sector pay and the NDP.

EXPENDITURE STRATEGY

In a Sinn Féin government public spending will be based on four principles:

1. Increased investment in public services
2. A tax system that is fair and benefits low and middle-income workers.
3. Reduce the national debt as a proportion of the economy.
4. Invest a portion of windfall corporate tax revenues in housing and infrastructure.

It is important that annual current public expenditure does not grow in excess of what the real economy and associated tax receipts can sustain. The real economy GNI* measurement strips out the distorting effect of multinationals. Therefore to ensure that public spending plans can be sustained into the future it is important to measure annual current expenditure as a share of GNI*.

The most recent budget sets current expenditure at a lower level as a share of the size of the real economy (GNI*) than it was before this government came into office. That is why our public services are in crisis.

Under Sinn Féin's expenditure plan, current expenditure will be comparable to the public spending as a share of the real economy prior to 2020. This level of spending is sustainable and will place our public services on a strong and stable footing.

Sinn Féin will substantially increase capital investment. Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Greens failed to meet the level of ambition outlined in the National Development Plan of investing 5% of GNI* in capital projects each year. The underinvestment is approximately 8.2 billion over 4 years (2021 – 2024).

To address infrastructure deficits, deliver housing and undo the underinvestment by the out-going government. The capital expenditure of a Sinn Féin government will average 6% over the years (2025 – 2030).

Sinn Féin will:

- Provide an additional €14.3 billion in current spending and €41.8 billion in capital investment over and above pre-committed expenditure for Existing levels of service, demographics and the NDP.
- Run a budgetary surplus every year, with an accumulated surplus of €14.8 billion by 2030.
- Surpluses after our investment plan will be invested in state funds.
- Sinn Féin will make sure that our public finances are in a strong position and reduce our public debt level as a proportion of national income.

USING APPLE TAX MONIES FOR CAPITAL INVESTMENT

Justice prevailed when the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) gave their final verdict on the apple tax case. Thankfully, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, Labour and Independents were prevented from giving away €14.1 billion that was owed to the Irish state.

This case never infringed on our tax sovereignty. It was always about state aid.

Providing preferential treatment to one company was reckless and damaging. Multinationals that locate in Ireland want to know that they are operating on a level playing field.

Most importantly it was damaging to the Irish people to go without this the money at a time when austerity was being imposed on the public. We can never fully undo the harm done to people during austerity, but this verdict gives us a chance to move on and use the €14.1 billion to repair some of the damage

A Sinn Féin government will use the Apple tax money for capital investment in the areas that matter. We are in a unique position in relation to this money, and as such we must ensure that we spend it correctly in the areas that need it most, such as communities, healthcare, climate, housing, transport, critical infrastructure and defecits.

Sinn Féin will invest €1 billion to create a new Community Investment Fund to improve the lives of working-class people that have been left behind by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Many of these communities bore the brunt of austerity cuts at a time when this tax should have been collected, and they continue to live with the impact of austerity today. It is time to repair that damage and invest ambitiously in community development.

The Community Investment Fund will contain targeted capital investment for sports facilities, play facilities, community facilities, youth facilities, arts facilities, childcare and public spaces. Such investment will transform our communities, which are the beating heart of Irish life.

Sinn Féin will also invest in healthcare. We will invest €2 billion of the Apple tax money to increase capacity in our health system. Our health service needs real reform. The Government have normalised failure in healthcare for far too long. They accept that patients on trolleys, children waiting for treatment in pain or long health waiting lists are now the standard. Their failures leave us with a health service in perpetual crisis. The €2 billion Apple funding will go towards building 5,000 acute hospital beds. Such funding will help put an end to hospital trolleys and overcrowding and will be vital to improving our health service.

We will also allocate money towards energy transition. Sinn Féin will use €2.5 billion of the Apple tax money to increase investment in the area and establish a new Renewable Energy Fund. This Fund will increase investment in our energy grid and facilitate our renewable energy potential. With our vast natural resources, Ireland has the potential to become a world leader in renewable energy production and export. Investing properly in the area will reinforce the state's security of energy supply and facilitate our renewable energy potential.

Sinn Féin is committed to solving the housing crisis and we have a plan to make housing affordable and to bring homeownership within reach of working people. We will put €7.6 billion of the Apple tax money towards our public housing programme.

Tens of thousands of homeowners are living with the devastating legacy of the Celtic Tiger era including defective blocks, fire and other safety defects. They must be supported with 100% redress.

Sinn Féin would allocate €1 billion of the apple monies to supplement the existing €100m capital that will be available annually to pay for redress. This will result in a guaranteed tripling of funding available. In addition, we recognise that defects redress is a demand led scheme and as such the exact financial requirements cannot be known at this time. It is our ambition to ensure the largest number of homes are remediated as quickly as possible therefore if annual demand exceeds the amount of funding allocated we will make further available from the surpluses that will be accumulating under our expenditure plan.

By investing in these areas, Sinn Féin will allocate the Apple tax money where it matters and enact the change that people want to see.

All figures in the following expenditure tables are in addition to precommitted expenditure including Existing Levels of Service and the NDP.

CURRENT EXPENDITURE

Department	Current (€m)
Agriculture Food and Marine	279
Children, Equality, Disability, integration and Youth	1,333
Defence	210
Education	644
Enterprise, Trade and Employment	43
Environment, Climate and Energy	13
Foreign Affairs	56
Further and Higher Education	767
Health	3,580
Housing, Local Government and Heritage	64
Justice	361
Public Expenditure and Reform	10
Rural and Community Development	37
Social Protection	5,975
Tourism, Culture, Arts Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	417
Transport and Communications	147
Unallocated	413
Total	14,349

CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

Department	Capital (€m)
Agriculture, Food and Marine	105
Children, Equality, Disability, integration and Youth	702
Defence	295
Education	99
Enterprise, Trade and Employment	58
Environment, Climate and Energy	2,815
Foreign Affairs	1
Further and Higher Education	340
Health	6,000
Housing, Local Government and Heritage	18,697*
Justice	19
Public Expenditure and Reform	350
Rural and Community Development	1,145
Tourism, Culture, Arts Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	252
Transport and Communications	631
Unallocated	380
Total	31,889
	41,837

* This does not include a further €9,948 million of non-Voted capital expenditure which is AHB Expenditure classified as general government expenditure for the purposes of calculating the General Government Balance.

TAXATION STRATEGY

Alongside our expenditure plan we will have a fair taxation policy for all workers. Like current expenditure, overall taxation as a share of the economy will remain stable. This will allow us to deliver a fair tax package for workers that puts money back into their pockets.

In the first year of government, we will cut the USC on the first €45,000 you earn. This will benefit all workers and will ensure that the average worker will not have to pay USC on any of their income.

We will stop the regressive consumption-based tax increases such as Carbon Tax. We will abolish the property tax on your home over 5 years.

Sinn Féin will ensure our tax system is designed to support renters and first time buyers. We will stand up to vulture funds and end the bulk purchasing of homes. We will tackle the decay of our towns and cities by ending dereliction and vacancy.

Our tax system should be fair and benefit those on low and middle incomes.

Our commitment to those individuals who earn less than €100,000 is that you will see your tax reduce.

Those individuals who earn more than €100,000 and can afford to contribute more will be asked to do so on the portion of their income above €100,000.

These reforms will allow us to build deliver strong public services, put money back in the pockets of workers and families while at the same time delivering sustainable public finances.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- ➔ Abolishing the USC on the first €45,000 you earn – benefitting all workers.
- ➔ Abolish the Local Property Tax and replacing it with direct funding for Local Authorities.
- ➔ Stop all planned increase to the Carbon tax from 2025 – 2030.
- ➔ Reverse the two most recent hikes to Excise Duty for petrol & diesel for 12 months.
- ➔ Introduce a 3% solidarity tax on individual incomes above €140,000 and reform tax credits for individual incomes above €100,000.
- ➔ Increase stamp duty to end the bulk purchasing of residential property by institutional investors.
- ➔ Phase out the Help to Buy Scheme as we deliver genuinely affordable homes.
- ➔ Scrap the Budget 2024 landlord tax relief and tax the ownership of multiple residential properties.
- ➔ Reduce tax subsidies on gold-plated pensions.
- ➔ Abolish stamp duty for first time buyers on properties up to €450,000 and scrap the concrete block levy.
- ➔ Establish a Wealth Tax Commission to advise on the most effective means of implementing a net wealth tax.

- ➔ Reviewing the Research and Development Tax Credit to ensure it support innovative SMEs and promotes research and development in Ireland.

TAX SOVEREIGNTY AND TRANSPARENCY

Sinn Féin support the OECD international tax agreement for those companies in scope and will maintain a corporation tax rate of 12.5%. We will defend our tax sovereignty and resist any attempts to cede any element of that sovereignty to the European Commission. Taxation must remain the sole competency of member states. Sinn Féin will maintain our corporation tax at its current rate.

We will begin the process of repairing the damage done by the Apple Tax case. We will ensure that all international partners are confident that our tax code will be applied in a fair and transparent manner.

We will protect our tax sovereignty while also ensuring that Ireland is both a reliable international actor and champion of progressive international change. We will engage on the international stage to cooperate and promote effective reforms of the international taxation system and tackle financial secrecy.

Our economy must succeed on the basis of stability and certainty. To that end, Sinn Féin will ensure a stable tax environment in which both multinational and domestic businesses can innovate and thrive.

FINANCE

TAX EXPENDITURE	€m
Income Tax Credits, Standard Rate Bands and USC	4,131
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase Tax Credits by €200 - Increase Standard Rate Band by €4000 - Abolish USC for First €45,000 of Income 	
Housing Cost Supports:	759
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Abolish Local Property Tax - Rent Relief - a month's rent back in your pocket - Abolish concrete products levy - Remove stamp duty for first time buyers (property values below €450K) - Temporary and targeted mortgage interest relief 	
Cheaper fuel prices	814
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not proceed with carbon tax increases - Reverse the two most recent hikes to Excise Duty for petrol & diesel for 12 months 	
Business supports	648
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce VAT rate to 9% for hospitality sector - R&D Tax Credits for SMEs 	
Reform of Disabled Drivers and Passenger Scheme	19
Unallocated Tax Expenditure	60
Total	6,431

TAX REVENUE	€m
Solidarity Taxation of High-Income Earners	1,007
- Removal of Tax Credits for High Earners - Solidarity Tax (3% >140,000) - Removal of SARP	
Stamp Duty Measures	346
- Stamp Duty on Share Buybacks - Residential Stamp Duty - Commercial Stamp Duty	
Taxing Wealth	509
- Reform to Capital Acquisitions Tax - Introduce Second Home Charge of €400 - Reduce Pension Relief Earnings Limit - Pollution Tax on Private Jet Departures - Reduce Standard Fund Threshold	
Banking Sector and Corporations	776
- Restrict Employer PRSI Exemption - Increase Banking Levy - Restrict CT Relief for Banking Sector	
Phase out of Help-to-Buy	162
Taxation of Cigarettes & Increase to Betting Levy	225
Compliance	500
Total	3,525

**Time to Change
the Government!**

VOTE Sinn Féin



