
New Partnership Government for a Fairer Ireland

Excerpts from the new Programme for
Government

Community Work Ireland

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Introduction

The Government of the 32nd Dáil has published its [New Partnership Government for a Fairer Ireland](#). It states that the New Partnership Government is ready to embrace the opportunity presented by the Irish electorate on 26 February 2016. Our ambition, it states, is to combine all our different talents to build a strong economy and to deliver a fair society, so that communities thrive, throughout both urban and rural Ireland. We are committed to tackling the most pressing challenges Ireland faces, in areas such as housing and health, while continuing to focus on increasing employment across the country. We will work closely with the Oireachtas, in recognition of the new political reality, to deliver in the interests of all of our people. It goes on to say:

- We want a fair society based on a strong economy
- We want thriving communities in urban and rural Ireland
- We want an Ireland that looks after its people from the time they come into the world to the time they leave
- We want an Ireland where everybody is given the opportunity to succeed, where nobody is left behind
- We want people to have the peace of mind that comes from feeling safe and secure in their lives

What follows is a series of extracts from the Programme for Government that Community Work Ireland believes will be of interest to our members.

Section 3. Creating A Social Economy

The new Government commits to a more inclusive prosperity that uses economic growth to create a more just and fair society. Separate sections of this document commit to new actions to help the elderly, people with disabilities, children, people with mental illnesses, as well as to targeted additional investments in health, child development and care, education and other public services. In addition, the government commits to:

- A) Developing a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, to tackle inequality and Poverty. Our Integrated Framework will outline measures to help eliminate any persisting discrimination on grounds of gender, age, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion or membership of the Traveller Community. It will draw on existing as well as new strategies, in particular the (i) New National Women's Strategy, (ii) New National Disability Inclusion Strategy, (iii) Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, (iv) National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, and (v) New Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.

It also commits to

- Reducing poverty levels by improving the take-home pay of families on low-incomes
- Reducing poverty levels by supporting an increase in the minimum wage to €10.50 per hour over the next five years
- Reinforcing Labour Market Activation

Section 4 Jobs and Rural Development

The PfG states that as the economy recovers it is essential that the new Government, together with the Oireachtas, puts in place measures to revitalise all of Ireland so that the benefits are felt inside every doorstep and in every community.

A new Cabinet Minister and Department of [Regional Development and Rural Affairs] to provide greater political coordination and prioritisation of the work in other Departments in relevant areas that impact on rural Ireland, will be appointed.

LEADER

LEADER groups will continue to play a central role in the rejuvenation of communities throughout Ireland and the new Partnership Government is committed to increasing funding for the LEADER programme. We will work with local authorities, local action groups and local communities to ensure that LEADER funding delivers the maximum possible benefit for communities throughout the country. In addition, we will make available more competitive capital funding to allow LEADER groups bid for additional resources for projects that best support rural economic development.

Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA)

Building on the €3million provided to support CEDRA initiatives, we will implement the recommendations of the CEDRA report and the new Rural Charter as appropriate; in order to further support the long-term sustainable development of rural Ireland. The new Minister or [Regional Development and Rural Affairs] will take charge of implementing the CEDRA report.

Section 11. Crime Prevention, Justice and Equality

Ensuring a Balanced Migration Policy

We will pursue a balanced migration policy that supports our economy and meets our international and humanitarian obligations, whilst also taking a tough approach to tackling illegal migration. We are committed to supporting a humanitarian response to the current refugee crisis and providing a safe haven to those who come to Ireland under EU programmes.

Working with the relevant Oireachtas Committee, we will introduce a comprehensive Immigration and Residency Reform Bill, aimed at modernising Ireland's visa and residency systems.

We will offer safe haven for refugees under EU and UN resettlement and relocation programmes, while promoting the integration of refugees in our communities. Long durations in direct provision are acknowledged to have a negative impact on family life. We are therefore committed to reforming the Direct Provision system, with particular focus on families and children.

We will get tougher on abuses of our migration system by ensuring implementation of the new enforcement and deportation provisions in the recently enacted International Protection Act. In implementing EU regulations, we will ensure a stringent and effective approach to speedily refusing bogus applications and facilitating removal from the State. We will increase cooperation with the UK to crack down on the increasing numbers of bogus asylum seekers who are applying for unmerited asylum status in Ireland solely because their UK visa has expired.

Equality & Inclusiveness

The PfG states that action on equality is required by all groups in our society, but the new Government must play a role in mobilising the resources for change and enabling citizens to overcome the barriers they face. It states that:

- We will develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights.
- We will ensure the institutional arrangements are in place to support equality and gender proofing in the independent fiscal and budget office and within key government departments and to draw on the expertise of the IHREC to support the proofing process. For Budget 2017 the budget and finance committee will be tasked with looking at gender and equality proofing

budget submissions and proposals with independent expertise (including the IHREC) to assist where necessary

- In-work support for families on low incomes is vital in assisting families to remain in work, incentivise those moving from welfare to work and to prevent families from becoming at risk of poverty. The current Family Income Supplement creates major hurdles for unemployed parents transitioning from jobseeker's welfare payments into work, and also locks many parents into working fewer hours. In addressing this we will:
 - Introduce a new Working Family Payment that promotes work over welfare by supplementing, on a graduated basis, the income of a household, while at the same time incentivising more hours and full-time work
 - Publish an Action Plan for Jobless Households, containing targets aimed at supporting those in jobless households into employment and reducing child poverty
 - Increase the minimum wage and ensure that the interests of low-paid workers and people in precarious work situations are adequately protected
 - In recognition of the vital role of schemes such as the Rural Social Scheme, Community Employment Schemes, BTEA and Farm Assist in rural communities and in activating the unemployed, we will ask the Minister for Social Protection to make suitable recommendations to strengthen provision in this area.
- Empowering Women
 - Following the introduction of legislation encouraging increased female participation in politics, we will publish an updated National Women's Strategy by end 2016, further promoting women's participation in decision making. We will empower women to ensure that households headed by women are no longer at a higher risk of poverty. We will take measures to reduce the gender pay gap - inclusive of increasing investment in childcare, and reviewing the lower pay of women and gender inequality for senior appointments. We will also seek to promote:
 - Wage transparency by requiring companies of 50 and more to complete a wage survey
 - Locally delivered courses for women, comprising a series of training opportunities on self-development and work related skills, to assist a return to the labour market and promote entrepreneurship
 - An increased level of female participation in our Defence Forces, with the goal of doubling the rate of participation from the current 6% to 12% in the next 5 years
 - Increased female representation on state boards to 40%

- A strengthened role of the Low Pay Commission in relation to the gender pay gap and in-work poverty
- Protecting our Children and Young People
 - The PfG states that the new Partnership Government must ensure that no child is left behind in the economic recovery, and that every young person is enabled to reach their full potential. No child should have to live in poverty and no family should have to face homelessness. By targeting resources at a child's early years we can ensure that all children gain from a better start in life. We will deliver upon this commitment by extending the free preschool provision, and reducing class sizes, resulting in higher secondary school completion.
 - We will publish an updated Action Plan for Educational Inclusion to narrow the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, and examine how students outside of DEIS can be better supported.
- Fostering Greater Social Inclusion and Empowering the LGBT Community
 - We will develop an LGBT Youth Strategy that will encompass education, youth services, mental health and other issues. As part of this strategy, we will review implementation of the National Action Plan on Bullying in our schools.
- Travellers & Roma
 - We will publish a revised National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, aimed at improving the lives of members of the Traveller and Roma communities by the end of 2016.
 - We will establish a special working group to audit the current delivery and implementation of local authorities' Traveller Accommodation plans and consult with stakeholders on key areas of concern. The group should report a plan for the delivery of safe, culturally appropriate accommodation.

Section 13 Climate change

The PfG states that the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act requires the new Government to produce a National Low Carbon Transition and Mitigation Plan, Ireland's first statutory low carbon strategy for the period to 2050. The first National Mitigation Plan will be published within 6 months of the new Government forming. It is also important that there is community participation in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects as it is in both the national and local interest. In order to foster and support this we will:

- Develop a framework for how communities can share in the benefits of substantial new energy infrastructure which is located in their area

- Provide support for community-led projects in the initial stages of development, planning and construction
- Establish a register of community benefit payments, and examine shared-ownership opportunities for renewable energy projects in local communities supporting, in particular, the emerging energy cooperative movement as one means of facilitating community participation

Section 14 Investing in Society: Urban Regeneration

The PfG states that now is our opportunity to develop a compelling vision of how investing in society and in our communities becomes integral to the development of a strong, sustainable economy. Our economic recovery will be stronger and more equally shared as we develop policies, programmes and social spending priorities that address the deep-rooted disadvantage of those who rely on means-tested social assistance, and develop an approach to urban regeneration that empowers people to work together to improve their communities and the quality of life for all who live within them. We will pursue an integrated plan across Government Departments to reduce poverty, disadvantage and inequality, by enabling individuals in jobless households back into the workforce, by breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and by ensuring that our educational programmes at every level offer excellence in outcomes for all.

The PfG states that we want to affirm the contribution of the community and voluntary sector to building a more just and prosperous society, and its strong focus on urban and rural regeneration. Community and voluntary organisations provide the human, social and community services in all key areas of our national life. In this work they contribute to the economy as well as create value for Irish society. We will increase funding levels to support the sector, and develop a multi-annual funding model that focuses on quality, effectiveness and efficiency. We will produce a coherent policy framework and develop a strategy to support the community and voluntary sector and encourage a cooperative approach between public bodies and the community and voluntary sector.

We will also ensure that all commissioning for human, social and community services takes place in a societal value framework (targeted at maximising the value for society).

1. Investing in our Communities

A) Better Investment in Children - We will fund schemes which support disadvantaged communities. For example, we will support the RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) programme, designed to focus attention on tackling poverty and social exclusion in certain urban areas in towns and cities across the country by identifying the needs of disadvantaged communities and developing key projects.

We will fund and expand existing schemes such as the Area-Based Childhood Programme, which have been successfully developing innovative services and programmes for children in areas such as Ballymun, the north inner city and Tallaght West. We will ensure the sharing and implementation of learning from such programmes to other initiatives as they expand their reach.

- B) Tackling Educational Disadvantage
- C) Helping Adolescents and Young People into Employment
- D) Better Housing
- E) Better Public Transport

2. A Supportive Social Welfare System

3. Regeneration of our Urban Centres

We will strengthen the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and develop new Community Development Schemes for rural areas and reactivate and increase funding to RAPID areas through the local authorities.

Section 15 Ireland and the World

Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Humanitarian Aid

The PfG states that in the face of difficult economic challenges, we have remained strongly committed to our ODA programme, stabilising funding and recognising the crucial importance of Ireland's ODA and humanitarian response programmes. ODA was increased by 7% in Budget 2016.

NGO Partnerships

We will continue to closely partner with international and Irish NGOs to ensure that Irish aid funding effectively reaches those in need and has the flexibility to deal with emergencies whilst prioritising long-term outcomes from development programmes in line with the Government's 2013 international development policy, One World, One Future.

B) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Ireland, along with Kenya, co-facilitated agreement of the new SDGs at the UN. We will work to implement the SDGs and to promote their implementation around the world.

C) Funding

We will continue to make progress towards achieving the UN target of 0.7% of gross national product for ODA, as resources allow.

D) Oversight

We will ensure robust oversight of Ireland's ODA budget

Section 16. Political and Constitutional Reform

Local Government Reform

As part of the next wave of local government reform the relevant Minister, having consulted widely with all relevant stakeholders, will prepare a report for Government, and for the Oireachtas, by mid-2017 on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability. We will also encourage county councils to play a significant role in the Regional Action Plan for Jobs and ensure that economic recovery is felt inside every door of their county. We will also examine the possibility of extending the remit of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee to include expenditure by local authorities. We will ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy.

We will also consider:

- Directly elected mayors in cities
- Devolution of new powers to local authorities
- Reducing the size of local electoral areas
- Establishing town and borough councils subject to a local plebiscite and local funding

There will be a review, involving consultation with AILG and LAMA, of the supports provided to councillors to enable them to do their important work.

Public Consultations

Public consultations provide an important opportunity for the public to input directly into matters which affect them and their communities. Currently there is no single mechanism by which individuals can access information on consultations local, regional and national. We will establish an easily accessible portal to provide details of all such public consultations.